The encouragement of “reasonableness” through the practice of philosophy with high school students at risk

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The Encouragement of “Reasonableness” through the Practice of Philosophy with High School Students at Risk

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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B.A, MA, Grad. Dip. R.E, MEd.

Faculty of Education
2001
Abstract

The aim of this research project has been to critically assess the potential of philosophic discussion to elicit reasonableness in a group of high school students at risk of being excluded from their school. The group of students comprised ten boys and two girls from Years Nine and Ten, in a multicultural school situated in a socio-economically deprived area of Sydney. The general behaviour and participation of these twelve students had been judged unacceptable by a panel of staff. The latter, called the Student Support Group, was made up of the school principal, the assistant principal, the school counsellor, the four school house coordinators and other interested teachers. The significance of this study lies in its effort to report on the specific use of philosophic discussion as a means of encouraging behavioural change.

The first concern of this study has sought to move away from the application of Philosophy for Children as a promoter of higher order thinking within a mainstream classroom. Primarily, it has attempted to test the use of philosophy as a promoter of cooperative behaviour among 12 adolescents perceived as being generally uncooperative and at risk from their own behaviour. Given the significance of context in each and every educational setting, that is the context of culture, structure and situation, the second area of study has sought to identify what useful adaptations of Matthew Lipman's paradigm for practising Philosophy for Children were beneficial in the context of the study. It has also been concerned to record educational events and insights that emerged during the time of the research. The study reports on 28 one-hour sessions, held with the 12 students and the researcher each week, over four terms in one school year.

The study is a multiple case study in a single naturalistic context within a Years 7 to 10 high school. Reasonableness within the confines of this study is judged to have five criteria which are located in the intellectual, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. Data are qualitatively based using a variety of instruments including: pre- and post-study questionnaires issued to the Student Support Group which were based on the set criteria for reasonable behaviour; researcher analysis of the data of the 28 sessions; student participant self analysis and statements issuing from administrators, teachers and auxiliary staff. The students at the centre of this study came from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Throughout the course of the study, the student participants did become more adept at forming logical thoughts and bringing them to articulation, or modifying them as a result of the ideas and contributions of their fellow group members. At the conclusion of the project, nine of the student participants were retained at the school site. Improved reasonable behaviour of the nine remaining participants in the project was attested to via comparison of the results of the pre- and post-study questionnaires and also by administrator, teacher and auxiliary staff statements of demonstrable changes. The student participants through their own evaluation process, progressively articulated higher standards of discursive and ethical behaviour.
DECLARATION

I, Maureen M. McDermott, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Education, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Maureen M. McDermott

24 January 2001
In honour and memory of
Margaret Wilhelmina Vinson
(1908 - 1984)
&
William Jack Patrick Vinson
(1908 - 1976)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the many people who gave me their support and understanding during the course of this study.

Special thanks go to my supervisor, Dr. Christine Fox, for her expertise, constant patience and wisdom. Christine has run by my side during this marathon race, sharing as coach and friend, the exhaustion of the steep hills but also the exhilaration of the downhill grades.

I would also like to thank the Education Faculty of the University of Wollongong for the nurture and support that it has given to me, and indeed; that it gives to all its students.

Loving thanks go to my immediate family, Gordon, Noel, Annette and Philip, and also to my wider family for their patience, support and interest.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my brother Tony for his recommendations, help and friendship.

While they may never read this word of thanks, I acknowledge the fine young people who were the participants of this study; and I extend to them my sincere thanks along with the wish that they live happy, long and fulfilling lives.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 states the aim of the research project and focuses on the researcher's own interest in the processes of the practice of teaching Philosophy for Children in a high school setting. It provides a brief introduction to Philosophy for Children and its aims. The significance of the project is described by outlining prospective application of Philosophy for Children in encouraging reasonableness in young people perceived by their school community as being at risk through their unreasonable behaviour. This chapter defines the terms "reasonableness" and "at risk" for purposes of the study and sets forth the areas that were investigated.

Aim of the research project

The aim of this qualitative research project has been to critically assess the potential of philosophic discussion to elicit reasonableness in a group of high school students at risk of being excluded from their school.

The school site for this study was situated in a socio-economically deprived area of Western Sydney. The group of students comprised ten boys and two girls from Years Nine and Ten. Their general behaviour and their participation in the school had been judged unacceptable by the Student Support Group, a panel of staff. The research took place over four terms of the academic year of 1998.

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1 Philosophy for Children emerged as a distinct program through the work of Mathew Lipman and others in the 1970's as discussed in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.
Background to the researcher’s interest in Philosophy for Children

My initial interest in the relationship between the discipline of philosophy and children stemmed from my experience as a parent. Like the strong proponent of Philosophy for Children, Professor Gareth Matthews (1994), I received great pleasure from the insightful questions and comments that my own children made. I was constantly surprised and awed by the way my children returned time after time to concepts and phenomena that puzzled them. One particular occasion stands out in my memory. I was saying good night to my eldest child who was seven years old at the time. ‘Mum,’ he said, ‘we had a blind man visit our school today to talk to us about what it is like being blind. I was wondering, if he has never seen how things look, what pictures does he have on his pillow at night?’

Piaget, in his text *The Child’s Conception of the World* (1929), is among other things, concerned to locate stages of children’s conceptual understanding of dreams. My son’s notion of dreams as being externally located on a pillow, directly in front of his eyes, is in keeping with Stage 2 of Piaget’s scheme of things. At this stage the child perceives the source of the dream to be in his head but the dream itself to be in the room in which he is sleeping. Piaget posits that at Stage 2 the child understands dreaming as being with the eyes, looking at a picture outside (Piaget 1929).

To leave my son Noel and his predicament with the blind man tidily located in ‘conceptual dream Stage 2’ is to somehow miss the epistemological bus. Such a categorisation would negate the time that he had spent wondering about such abstract ideas as the difficulties involved in describing objects and scenes to the blind man, for he realised that we have a tendency to describe by referring to similar things. Even the possibility of quizzing a person born blind who subsequently gained sight, about
their pre-sight conceptual imaging, was seen by the seven-year-old to be problematic on the basis that they would be influenced by what they currently saw.

Matthews (1994) acknowledges that childhood growth as Piaget proposes does take place in recognisable stages both on biological and intellectual levels. Baby teeth are in time replaced by a second set of adult teeth; and baby talk and behaviour is replaced by oral communications and actions that are more complex and involved. However, this model of child development that is bound up in stages has, according to Matthews, inherent value bias in that it perceives the child of ten as having progressed physically, intellectually and socially beyond what she or he was at an earlier age. Throughout his text The Philosophy of Childhood Matthews argues that the concept of age correlation and development is not appropriate when it comes to investigating philosophical questions. Indeed he postulates that the questions and comments of young children can often have an inventiveness and freshness just because their reasoning has not been socialised into conformity (Matthews 1994).

In further denial of a stage development theory, David Kennedy (1998) and Lloyd deMause (1974) would have us recognise adult ontological unity with the child. They posit that the adult/child continuum is present in each epoch of the life cycle, and that through egalitarian dialogue with children, it is possible for adults to offer the benefits of wisdom accrued in their own lives, while also positively revisiting their childhood experiences.

Philosophy for Children in my own teaching practice

My first formal exposure to the practice of doing philosophy with children occurred in 1990 when I attended a workshop on the subject. I subsequently found the principles
and practices underlying Philosophy for Children to be in sympathy and harmony with my own educational values. Since that initial contact, I have studied the principles and concepts surrounding this sub-discipline of philosophy, and have endeavoured to formulate communities of inquiry\(^2\) whenever it was appropriate to do so. These communities of inquiry have been both in primary and secondary mainstream educational settings and conducted according to Matthew Lipman's paradigm.

**How Philosophy for Children functions**

The workings of the discipline of philosophy itself have been described by Gareth Matthews as being 'an adult attempt to deal with the genuinely baffling questions of childhood' (1994, p.13). He further states that the major problem with the adult practice of philosophy involves throwing off assumptions that build up over the years in order that 'the naive question' can once more be examined (1994, p.36). Carl Sagan, in his introduction to Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1988), touches upon the same topic - the naive question - when he states:

> We go about our daily lives understanding almost nothing of the world. We give little thought to the machinery that generates the sunlight that makes life possible, to the gravity that glues us to an Earth that would otherwise send us spinning off into space ... except for children (who don't know enough not to ask the important questions) few of us spend much time wondering why nature is the way it is (Carl Sagan in introduction to Hawking, 1988).

The underlying goal in teaching philosophy to children, as Nina Julina (1995) points out, is not to teach them philosophy, but to teach them how to philosophise (1995, p.16). The process of the community of inquiry, which forms the basis for Matthew

\(^2\) A community of inquiry occurs when a group of people explore problematic issues via the use of philosophic thinking tools in a tolerant open atmosphere. It allows for both opposition to, and the development of contributions, but is concerned to avoid attacking personalities.
Lipman’s paradigm for practising Philosophy for Children, emphasises a creative intellectual response to problems that are located in the child’s own life experience. The overlap into history of philosophy occurs when children unknowingly and in their own language restate the arguments of Hume, Descartes, Locke or other “great” philosophers, and use them to confront each other, thus discovering the strong and weak points of their arguments. Along with Julina (1995), proponents of Lipman’s paradigm see a non-historical approach via a community of inquiry as representing a liberation from the pressure of authority inherent in philosophical heritage. Julina describes the results of this approach as enabling a space to be created for free speech (1995, p.16).

Matthew Lipman’s paradigm for practising Philosophy for Children operates through the discussion of narrative material in a community of inquiry. The young people listening to the story identify problematic issues within the text and then, based on these identified problems, set their own agenda for discussion. Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) base their choice of narratives as stimulus for philosophic discussion on the following: they believe that children are naturally inclined to wonder about the phenomena that surround them, phenomena that are accepted as commonplace by the majority of adults. They posit that there are three ways whereby children cope with their wonderment about the ‘extraordinary’ things that they find around them:

The first is through a scientific explanation. The second is through a fairy tale or story that offers a helpful interpretation on a symbolic level. The third is by formulating the matter philosophically in the form of a question (Lipman et al., 1980 p.3).

Narratives, according to this second tenet, not only provide a vehicle for the exploration of the ‘extraordinary’ things that are apparent to the child’s perspective, but discussion of them allows for entry into the formulation of the philosophic
question. Narratives also provide a vehicle for the exploration and analysis of interpersonal difficulties.

Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) reason that children experiencing interpersonal difficulties may be reluctant to talk through their problem with an adult or peer. When they encounter similar or parallel problems within the context of a story (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) give sibling rivalry as an example of such a problem), children are detached and are able to give a more considered opinion. Likewise, I surmised prior to the study that children with behavioural problems were likely to gain more insight into their own behaviour where they would be able to examine via a narrative, similar or parallel behaviour to their own. Such a circumstance allows for detachment from the emotionally charged environment of adult recriminations and consequences. Narratives can be a means of presenting problems at a distance: they supply what Ira Shor and Paulo Freire (1987) enunciate as ‘concreteness’; they allow behaviour, values and perennially difficult moral and ethical questions to be examined through the parallel lives of fictional persona.

Narratives in whatever form they take (various ideas surrounding narratives will be examined in the literature review in chapter 2) provide concrete examples of the process of reflective thinking and how such thinking can alter our perceptions, actions and what we say. Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) maintain that exposure to philosophic narratives encourages considered and rational thinking. Lipman (1996) in Natasha Vygotskian Dialogues, uses a phrase of the Russian psychologist and educator, Davydov, to describe the text of a narrative as being ‘a peculiar object of perception that carries mental reflection already within itself’ (p.33). Narratives are
seen by Lipman as ‘being objects which are not only the result of thoughtful design, but which also carry within themselves, thought itself’ (1996, p.33).

Over a period of four years, Matthew Lipman published a series of narratives with assistance from staff members of The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) in New Jersey, in particular Ann Margaret Sharp. The material comprised six student novels and six accompanying teacher manuals: *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery* (1974); *Lisa* (1976); *Suki* (1978); *Mark* (1980); *Pixie* (1981); *Kino and Gus* (1982); and *Elfie* (1988). As Nancy Rider (1986) points out, each character in the novels represents a particular philosophic perspective. For example, Lisa is concerned with ethics; Harry is concerned with achieving understanding through the use of logic; and Mark is preoccupied with the necessity of rules and regulations.

The philosophic questions emerging from the processes of a community of inquiry are often ‘universal’ in nature in that they deal with questions that all young people might in the context of their own cultural values ask; for example, What are my origins? What is good behaviour? Why should we be good? What is honour? What makes something beautiful? What is really important in life? Why do we need rules?

A community of inquiry as Philip Cam (1994) points out is very self-conscious. It is always aware of itself in that it constantly monitors not only the substance of its discussion, but also the procedures of the discussion. It self consciously uses such philosophic tools as: challenging assumptions; making distinctions; exploring conceptual boundaries; drawing deductive inferences; identifying logical relations and
discovering criteria. Both the substance of the discussion and the processes that are followed, are concerned with ‘good thinking’ (Cam 1994).

The nature of the workings of a community of inquiry and my own informal observations over the years that philosophy encouraged reasoned argument in young people within a mainstream setting, led me to conjecture the following. Might not there be some value in facilitating a community of inquiry among a group of young people regarded by caring adults as being at risk from their unreasonable behaviour?

**Prospective participants for a study**

Informal questioning of colleagues and closer observation of my school community revealed that some young people, particularly in Years 9 and 10, were indeed regarded as being unreasonable in all aspects of school life and as such, at imminent risk of being asked to leave the school.

While “unreasonableness” was a term that teachers, administrators and auxiliary colleagues were prepared to apply to this group of young people, it was necessary before embarking on a study of whether the practice of philosophy could encourage reasonableness, to explore the concept of reasonableness itself. My establishment of criteria for “reasonableness” then allowed me to approach the counselling arm with an outline of a prospective study and also with a request that they select students at risk from their own behaviour. This counselling group was called ‘Students’ Support Group’ and was made up of the school principal, the assistant principal, the school counsellor, the four school house co-ordinators and other interested teachers. The researcher was not a member of this committee. The establishment of criteria surrounding reasonableness also allowed the formation of a questionnaire to be filled
out by the Students’ Support Group in reference to the students they had selected to participate in the study.

An important factor in the choice of the participants was that their disruptive and “unreasonable” behaviour was not a result of reactions to any one teaching style or school staff member. Their unreasonable behaviour was to be exhibited across all subject areas, in the school playground and also with administrative and auxiliary staff.

**Concerning the term “reasonableness”**

In explanation of attitudes of rebellion that exists in many schools today, Shor and Freire (1987) assert that students often refuse to co-operate because they reject the current conditions of school and society. Shor and Freire see students as being ‘ingeniously negative’ in their endeavour to ‘sabotage the curriculum’, but ineffectual in instigating positive changes which would render them more in charge of their own learning, and indeed lives. Students often manifest dissatisfaction at their lack of control by retreating into silence or by being overtly rebellious. While there are many students who function successfully within the system, some students choose to register discontent by being disruptive in the classroom through such actions as calling out, throwing objects, leaving their place and generally disturbing the work and thought of others. Shor and Freire acknowledge the difficulties of teaching under such conditions: ‘This alienation cannot be solved by more passive pedagogy or by tougher authority. It requires a counter-alienation pedagogy, one creative, critical, and on the side of student subjectivity’ (1987, p.125). This research project has been concerned to explore the possibility that Philosophy for Children as manifested in the community of inquiry model, supplies such a ‘counter alienation pedagogy’ so that
students manifesting behavioural problems may creatively and critically take reasonable control of their own learning and lives.

Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) at the outset of their text *Philosophy in the Classroom* are also concerned to endorse the empowerment of students to think through effective strategies in order to make their lives more meaningful. They state: ‘The interest of the individual in the improved management of his (sic) own life must be acknowledged to have first priority, for we can have no better incentive than to see our lives improve upon our thinking them through’ (p.xiv). They realistically recognise, however, that the environment in which a child grows up should be one of nurture by adults and as such demands adult intervention. ‘What is important is that the environment in which the child grows up should be such as to screen out those forms of conduct that do not contribute to growth while encouraging those that do ... a teacher has a responsibility for screening out those forms of behaviour in pupils that are obviously self-destructive, and for screening in those forms that are self-constructive’ (p.185).

**What constitutes a reasonable person?**

If the concept of a reasonable person lies at the heart of Philosophy for Children, and arguably, of education and democracy (Splitter and Sharp 1998), how should ‘reasonableness’ be understood?

Sibley (1953 in Pritchard 1995), argues that within a nonmoral context, rationality and reasonableness may often be equated with each other. It is in a moral context that he sees a significant difference:
To be reasonable here is to see the matter as we commonly put it, from the other person’s point of view, to discover how each will be affected by possible alternate actions; and, moreover, not merely to ‘see’ this (for any merely prudent person would do as much) but also to be prepared to be disinterestedly influenced in reaching a decision, by the estimate of these possible results (p.62).

Sibley (in Pritchard, 1995), would see reasonableness as arising from the justification of behaviour according to principles that have been arrived at in common and as such are capable of being referred to by all concerned.

Matthew Lipman also does not perceive the term as just a process driven concept that strives for logical thought, but as being socially related and bound up with knowledge and understanding (1996, p.92). Splitter and Sharp speak about the notion of ‘the skilful reasoner’. They too, would not lock reasonableness into a rigid deductive framework that would deny its all important social dimension.

Lipman et al. (1980) point out that the learning which follows the discussion - reflection - internalisation - process of Philosophy for Children is bound up with interpersonal dynamics that encourage sensitivity and insight into the differing perspectives of other persons. They maintain that the perception gained from this process enables sound judgements to be made regarding others: ‘Unless interpersonal sensitivity is fostered and encouraged as a prerequisite for the child’s social development, that social development will be thwarted’, they maintain (Lipman et al. 1980, p.65). They further argue that the practice of Philosophy for Children encourages understanding of what is socially appropriate and inappropriate:

In encouraging children to develop an ethical understanding we must help them see the relationship between what they propose to do and the situation in which they propose to do it...Thus children must be sensitised to the ethical aspects of
situations in such a way that they begin to sense that what they are doing is appropriate or inappropriate as they prepare to act on them (ibid., p.81).

The democratic process of a community of inquiry permits a tension that emerges when different perspectives on problematic issues are presented, and then possibly harnessed creatively. The open-ended nature of philosophic discussion encourages children to examine the reasons underlying their own position and to weigh up their argument in relation to the ‘oppositional’ ideas and reasoning of others. In an atmosphere where respect and consideration for others is strongly encouraged and where all participants have the right to express their opinion with confidence, there is not a pressure to maintain an intransigent position as face saving is not an issue. Such an atmosphere allows a child in the light of the good thinking of others, to modify their own position or indeed build on their own ideas or on the reasoning of others.

The knowledge gained in a community of inquiry is internalised, therefore, when students manifest through their interactions with others practices of reasonable behaviour. Indeed Splitter and Sharp (1995) maintain that ‘reasonableness, as both a goal and a form of ongoing behaviour, is the cornerstone of the community of inquiry’ (p.7). They see reasonableness as being related to good thinking practices; as being related to the establishment of meaning, sound judgments, care of the personhood of others, and development of the individual thinker’s own personhood. Reasonableness in its relationship with good thinking, meaning, care, judgement and personhood serves ‘to bridge the cognitive and affective domains of education to focus on relationships among reasoners as well as relationships among reasons’ (p.7). This interrelatedness, Splitter and Sharp propose, presents a holistic educational reality.
The five criteria which constitute reasonableness in the context of this study

In reference to the above considerations and ideas, reasonableness within the confines of this study has been determined by the researcher to have three dimensions - the intellectual, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal.

A questionnaire composed of 10 questions was formulated by the researcher incorporating these three dimensions (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire involved the five following criteria developed by the researcher in the context of this study:

- The appreciation and pursuit of logical thought resting on knowledge.
- Sensitivity to, and the valuing of, the opinions of others.
- A willingness to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others.
- An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics.
- An awareness and appreciation of, social appropriateness.

The selection of participants for this study was made by the participating school’s counselling arm (The Students’ Support Group). The original 12 participants were students whom they perceived as lacking in most or all of the above criteria. The three-layered nature of this definition of reasonableness and its encompassing five criteria correlates to the questions on the pre- and post-study questionnaire filled out by the school’s Students’ Support Group in relation to each student participant (see ch. 3).
Concerning the term “at risk”.

The term “at risk” in the context of this dissertation means that the twelve students invited to take part in this research project were ones that the Students’ Support Group (see p. 9) identified as being at risk of being asked to leave the school because of their disruptive and uncooperative behaviour.

Significance of the research

The use of Philosophy for Children, as the review of the literature will show, has passed the establishment stage and is now generally recognised as a valid and sound means of encouraging higher order thinking in children. The literature shows, however, that Philosophy for Children has to this stage been limited in its application. It has been used primarily as a means of providing intellectual extension for more able children. It has also been used for the most part in mainstream classrooms; notably with more socio-economically privileged children - although there are some exceptions as Clive Lindop’s work demonstrates, where he has worked with Aboriginal children in Central Australia (Lindop 1995). Lipman’s initial Newart project in New Jersey was in a socio-economically deprived area but Lipman’s intention was not to use philosophy as a means of modifying unreasonable behaviour but rather to extend cognitive ability. Lipman’s Newart project was also in the area of primary education, as indeed has been the majority of research in Philosophy for Children. Philosophy has also been used as a strategy for the teaching of English as a Second Language as discussed by Sharp (1995).

The literature indicates that Philosophy for Children via the community of inquiry method is almost exclusively located in the pre-school and primary sectors of education. Some exception to the pre-school and primary location would be:
Imbosciano (1997) who tested the use of Philosophy with high school students as a means of promoting higher tertiary entrance scores; Splitter and Sharp (1995) who promoted Philosophy for Children as a means of encouraging reasonable behaviour across all ages and school grades; and Field (1995) who noted during her research with second grade children practising Philosophy, that there were positive behavioural changes over the space of three terms - however this observation was incidental to her research.

There is apparently no research that specifically aims to use philosophy as a means of encouraging behavioural change in the interpersonal and intrapersonal areas in addition to the intellectual, or cognitive, areas. This study has sought to engender reasonableness in high school students who were perceived by their school community as demonstrating disruptive and uncooperative behaviour. It reports on an attempt to employ the processes of Philosophy for Children to encourage young secondary school students attending a multi-cultural school in a socio-economically deprived area of Sydney, to think through their lives in the expectation that their intellectual, interpersonal and intrapersonal prospects will be enhanced.

The research areas

The first concern of this study has sought to swerve away from the mainstream application of Philosophy for Children as a promoter of higher order thinking within a mainstream classroom. It has attempted to test, within a particular school context, the use of philosophy as a promoter of cooperative behaviour among 12 adolescents perceived as being generally uncooperative and at risk from their own behaviour. It has sought to investigate:
The encouragement of “reasonableness” through the practice of philosophy with high school students at risk.

Given the significance of context in each and every educational setting, that is the context of culture, structure and situation (Fox 1992), the second area of this study has sought to identify useful adaptations of Lipman’s model. It has investigated:

What adaptations of the Matthew Lipman paradigm for practising Philosophy with Children were beneficial in the context of this study?

Summary of content of chapters

Chapter 1 has first focused on the researcher’s own interest and use of Philosophy for Children. It has sought to briefly introduce how Philosophy for Children functions with the intention of expanding on its conceptual framework in chapter 2. Chapter 1 has then gone on to discuss the prospective application of Philosophy for Children to that of encouraging reasonableness in young people perceived by their school community as being at risk through their unreasonable behaviour. It defined the terms “reasonableness” and “at risk” for purposes of this study; discussed the significance of such a study and specifically stated the areas to be investigated.

Chapter 2 is concerned to locate the philosophical, psychological and educational underpinnings of the Philosophy for Children methodology. It particularly examines the theories of Vygotsky in regard to the child’s acquisition of language and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. It attempts to link these theories with the ideas and procedures inherent in Philosophy for Children.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that cites early and recent research dealing with Philosophy for Children. It identifies support for egalitarian dialogue
between students and teachers in and outside the area of Philosophy for Children and identifies problematic areas associated with Philosophy for Children. The literature review cites existing paradigms for encouraging co-operative behaviour in children while revealing that Philosophy for Children may also have potential to alter children’s behaviour positively.

Chapter 3 is concerned to locate the research site in a socio-economic area of Sydney, and outlines the research methodology within a qualitative research paradigm. It describes the selection process of the participants and discusses the benefits of the chosen methodology, data collection and data analysis procedures in the context of this particular research study.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 contain profiles of the participants via the responses of the Students’ Support Group to the questionnaire and also set out the data from the study. These three chapters report on the 28 philosophic sessions in the following way: Session number and date, how data were recorded and the number of participants present. They cite the stimulus material used and record the self-assessment of the participants in regard to their involvement in the sessions. They contain transcription extracts from the dialogue and include the reflection/analysis of the researcher.

Chapter 7 engages in critical evaluation of the research. This evaluation looks at the relationship between the researcher/participant and the student participants, and it involves a qualitative analysis of the post-study questionnaire. Chapter 7 seeks to establish whether the participants were involved in philosophic discourse; whether community developed and whether a community of inquiry emerged. Following the above considerations, focus is placed on the two research areas seeking to evaluate
participant progress in reasonableness and variations from Lipman's paradigm of doing Philosophy for Children, used in the study.

Chapter 8 seeks to draw conclusions from the research findings and to formulate appropriate recommendations.

**Statement of direction**

The above described structure of reviewing the literature of the field, data collection and analysis, represents a conventional scholarly apparatus for illuminating the elemental philosophical musings of children and young people which first prompted my own interest in the field. I embarked on this course secure in the knowledge that the academic tools at my disposal would assist the achievement of my purposes, but with equal readiness to receive with respect the insights of the young people themselves.
CHAPTER 2

PHILOSOPHICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL UNDERPINNINGS AND A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter deals with the philosophical, psychological and educational concepts inherent in the Philosophy for Children methodology, with particular emphasis on establishing links with the ideas of Vygotsky.

Chapter 2 also presents a literature review that shows an historical development of Philosophy for Children and its problematic areas. It shows its use so far in the educational field while identifying its potential as a means of encouraging behavioural modification through cognitive and ethical growth.

The philosophical underpinnings

Lipman's program - Philosophy for Children - was formulated over a period of 25 years, with contributions coming from philosophers, psychologists and educators. It has been incorporated into school curricula in over 45 countries (Sharp 1997). Lipman's program has evolved within a philosophic European framework of traditions stemming from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Mill, Russell and Wittgenstein (Julina 1995, p.15).

The philosophical theory underlying Lipman's program has been particularly influenced by the writings of the United States philosopher John Dewey. Dewey emphasised the child as an active participant in the construction of her/his own learning, interacting with the reality of her/his own life and environment in the pursuit of meaning.

In analysing the nature of democracy and education, Dewey (1916) stated that each generation has to achieve democracy for itself as it cannot be passed on from one generation to another, but its nature has to be worked out and claimed by each
succeeding generation. He contended that each generation has its own needs, social challenges and problems. Dewey stressed the importance of learning by engaging in intelligent inquiry rather than the storing up of accumulated information. The process of genuine education, for Dewey, involved individuals contributing from the accumulation of their individual experience. He saw individual and community enlightenment as coming from the give and take, the cut and thrust, involved in the exchange of ideas and experience.

Dewey saw modern western civilisation, particularly its expression through the education system, as being innately flawed. This flaw derived from its didactic nature and its reliance on the thinking of ‘others’. The need as he saw it was to create educational settings which allowed students opportunities to test and investigate their own ideas and concepts. This experiential drive, he contended, was necessary if schools were to regain democratic force (Dewey 1934).

Nancy Ryder (1985) sees Philosophy for Children as a vehicle for nurturing democratic principles in education. She believes that to teach for content mastery, particularly in the late 20th Century, denies the reality of the volume of new information that is constantly presented to us. The greatest preparation for the lifelong learning that is necessary for our modern reality, she posits, is an education that encourages thinking skills.

Ann Margaret Sharp in her opening address at the Eighth International Conference on teaching Philosophy to Children in Akureyri, Iceland in June 1997, spoke on the same topic when she discussed Philosophy for Children’s relationship with the preservation of democracy. ‘Communities of inquiry foster a democratic spirit’, she maintained,
‘in that they provide children with the concepts and tools that they need to protect themselves from the negative aspects of socialisation’ (Sharp 1997).

**Psychological and educational underpinnings**

The basic principles of the Philosophy for Children program demonstrate strong similarities to the social constructivist theories of Davydov and Vygotsky. It is probably true to say, however, that Lipman and his colleagues may not have acknowledged this at the outset. Indeed, Lipman states that his first Philosophy for Children text, *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery* (1974), was written for 11 and 12 year olds because at that time he subscribed to Piaget’s thinking which placed 11 and 12 year olds at Piaget’s “formal” stage of understanding (1996, p.41). Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) however, took considerable pains to distance their Philosophy for Children program from Piaget’s notions of stage development. Piaget’s statements that at his ‘concrete’ stage, ‘childish thought is lacking in any logical necessity and genuine implication’; and that children’s thoughts ‘consist simply of mentally pictured manual operations, which, like the vagaries of movement, follow each other without any necessary connection’ (1928, pp.145-146), were rejected by them. This rejection was made on the basis that such thinking made the child incapable of any form of principled and moral behaviour, a claim that they felt was demonstrably not so.

In both *Natasha: Vygotskian Dialogues* (1996), and in his 1989 visit to the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in Moscow, Lipman expressed a need to clarify his understanding of the educational psychology of Davydov and of Vygotsky. He was concerned to demonstrate that the practice of Philosophy for Children was consistent with Russian theory as projected by the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and its
social constructivist vice-president, Dr. Davydov. In *Natasha* (p.91) he states that Davydov's major educational focus is the need children have to ascend from the abstract to the concrete, and he argues: 'it is this concept that I see providing a theoretical haven or enclosure for Philosophy for Children. Not the whole of that enclosure but a vital part of it.'

The procedural processes of a community of inquiry are compatible with the cognitive developmental pattern of a child as outlined in Vygotsky's *Internalisation of Higher Psychological Functions* (translated 1978). According to Vygotsky, every function of the child's cultural development appears twice, firstly on the social level and then on an individual level (1978, p.57). Vygotsky refers to this first development which occurs between people as the interpsychological stage; the second development moves through an egocentric level and then into internal speech. Vygotsky refers to this process as the intrapsychological stage.

**Vygotskian theory of speech development and its link with Philosophy for Children**

Vygotsky maintained that all higher thought functions, including concept formation, logical memory and voluntary attention, have their origin in social relations. In discussion of Vygotsky's theories, Kozulin (1990) contends that Vygotsky was particularly influenced by Hegel: 'Vygotsky explicitly acknowledged his dependence upon the Hegelian system of reasoning at least twice ... he mentioned that mediation is considered by Hegel as a central characteristic of human reason' (Kozulin 1990, p.118). Kozulin further maintains that Hegel and his theory of the 'dialectic of becoming' influenced Vygotsky's preference for studying the development and
formation of mental processes in children in a social context rather than the studying of their performance in isolation from others.

Vygotsky in his research with children noted that speech/thought developed in the following way. Initially, on encountering a problem too difficult to solve, a child vocally appeals to an adult for assistance. Over time, this use of language as a social tool to elicit help from adults changes to where a child, wrestling with a problem, audibly addresses her/himself. This egocentric speech is the forerunner of inner self-conscious speech or thought. Inner speech itself was perceived by Vygotsky as different from the flow of audible speech, rather a process of ‘thinking in pure meanings’ (Vygotsky 1934 trans. Kozulin 1986, p.250).

Humboldt was another influence on Vygotsky’s ideas concerning the inner form of language. Humboldt maintained that an individual in order to clarify meaning for himself first tested his words out on another person. In Humboldt’s thinking, the chasm of understanding between one person and another is bridged not because a message is able to be given an exact transferable image, but because a resonance occurs through a linking of primordial inner concepts or chain of images (Kozulin 1990, p.20).

Vygotsky was also interested in the pedagogical value of ‘Formal discipline’- a theory that had been around for centuries but which had, because of excesses, become unpopular in the early part of the Twentieth Century. Formal discipline carried the idea that subjects requiring higher order thinking such as Philosophy, Mathematics and Latin, led to thinking skills that were transferable to the solving of problems in other areas. Vygotsky in defence of the likelihood of the transferability of thinking
skills, responded to Edward Thorndike’s 1913 research which discounted such a possibility. Thorndike asserted that he had not been able empirically to establish data that allowed that such transfers occurred; Vygotsky however, concluded that Thorndike’s own experiments had been flawed in that he had not made the necessary distinction between elementary thinking skills and higher mental processes.

It has been a major concern of the research surrounding Philosophy for Children, to test whether the higher order thinking skills involved in the rigours of philosophical dialogue are transferable to solving problems in other areas. Lipman (1976), Karras (1979), Higa (1980), Shipman (1978, 1982), Sternberg (1985), and more recently, Field (1995), Splitter and Sharp (1995), and Imbrosciano (1997), have investigated the possibilities of the transfer of thinking skills. The findings of the above researchers are included in this chapter. In essence, however, they have demonstrated that Philosophy for Children as practised in a community of inquiry model has enhanced higher order thinking skills that are transferable from the context of a philosophic discussion group to other academic, social and life skill contexts.

The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky was concerned to examine the development and formation of mental processes in children rather than studying their performance. He was not interested in fixing a child at a particular stage of development; rather he contended that the only valuable learning was that which preceded development (1978). According to Vygotsky, a child’s cognitive development is not dependent on reaching developmental stages, but is rather dependent on the people in the child’s world. This social constructivist perspective allows for the probability of cognitive development being open to acceleration by an adult or more able peer, who extends the child
beyond an immediate independent area of achievement through a process of modelling, co-construction, and scaffolding. This process of extension with its accompanying concepts and skills is internalised by the child and this in turn allows for further extension of the child through the same process. This area of potential was referred to by Vygotsky as ‘The Zone of Proximal Development’ or ‘Zo-ped’.

A community of inquiry within a school setting would seem to furnish an excellent vehicle for mirroring, or engaging, children’s cognitive language/thought development. Children engaged in a philosophical group discussion with its self-conscious logical discipline, are first involved in social discourse and then in the process of internalisation. ‘Since children develop intellectually by internalising social practices, the best way of fostering good thinking in the classroom is through the social and intellectual practice of thinking together’ (Cam 1995, p.11). Given its special focus with good thinking practices and its capacity to make us think about a wide array of subject matter, Cam maintains that ‘philosophy can play a special developmental role in that philosophical inquiry can be a very effective means of promoting good thinking in the classroom’ (Cam 1995, p.11).

Children in a community of inquiry are forced to be conscious of the lack of logic of their arguments; they are in effect drawn onwards beyond their independent area of thinking ability. They are ideally situated to be extended via the thinking of adults and peers, beyond what they can achieve in thinking at that time by themselves.

**Early research**

There has been a great deal of research since Lipman’s Philosophy for Children’s program was first implemented, to investigate the effectiveness of this program in
developing cognitive growth in children (Lipman 1976, Karras 1979, Shipman 1978 and 1981). There have been efforts to prove its legitimacy as a promoter in children of curiosity, motivation, commitment, concentration and general reasoning skills (Higa 1980; Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan 1980). It has also been claimed by some researchers that there is significant evidence to suggest that the practice of philosophy with children leads to increased clarity in oral discursive skills, and improvements in general reading and writing abilities (Hope and Hass 1976, Karras 1979). A critical examination of Philosophy for Children, however, is to be found in this review under the heading: Problematic issues.

Early studies were primarily concerned with validating Philosophy for Children as practised through the examination of narratives in a community of inquiry, as a dynamic and age appropriate means of gaining thinking skills. The implementation of Lipman’s program with its cultural variation across 45 countries (Sharp 1997), along with its national validation in the United States, would seem to indicate that Philosophy for Children has passed from an “establishment stage” (Ryder 1986). It would seem to have achieved credibility within the profession of education as being one means of promoting cognitive and ethical growth in children.

**New Directions**

With some measure of academic and practical security, Philosophy for Children is manifesting signs that it is now concerned to explore its potential to operate outside the conventional parameters of a mainstream classroom. One such example of Philosophy for Children being used in a non-mainstream classroom is that of the work of Clive Lindop in teaching English (1995). Lindop reflects on his use of Philosophy with Children with traditionally orientated Australian Aboriginal children (arguably
the most disadvantaged group within Australia) whose mother tongue was not English. Teachers warned Lindop that practices inherent in a community of inquiry such as direct questioning, and eye contact, would be considered offensive to these children. Lindop found, however, that these children did in fact: ‘participate, did respond to questions, formulate and ask questions of their own, did get excited and on occasions all speak at once, did volunteer to sketch out a visual idea on the chalkboard, and so on’ (Lindop 1995, p.56). Lindop argues that the contextualised nature of a community of inquiry models the informal and socialised experience of ‘children growing up in traditionally based communities’, in contrast to the highly decontextualised nature of western classrooms. He goes on to speculate on the educational and social advantage of more egalitarian student/teacher relationships ‘where children themselves are encouraged to take collective responsibility not only for the agenda for discussion but also the conduct of the inquiry’ (ibid.1995, p.57).

Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) in discussion of the many flaws inherent in Western Educational systems call on educators everywhere to cease applying remedial measures to these faulty systems. They call instead for reconstruction of the processes themselves. Like Lindop, they see Philosophy for Children as having a potential to play a part in the reconstruction of processes and the establishment of more egalitarian relationships between teachers and students. Intregal to new educative processes, maintain these educators, should be a particular care for the disadvantaged.

**Educational support for dialogical principles outside Philosophy for Children.**

Shor and Freire (1987) are also concerned to promote a transformation of educational processes. They argue in common with proponents of Philosophy for Children that
this transformation is possible through dialogue (p.97). They maintain that current teaching within universities and schools is often carried on through a process of monologue, with the teachers only concerned with the transfer of knowledge to students. They are keen to point out that dialogue is not just a technique or ‘a tactic to make students our friends but an educational necessity’ (p.98). To use it as a tactic would make dialogue or the pretence of dialogue, into a manipulatory strategy. Rather, the process of dialogue is inherent to the historical process of being true to our human identity: ‘dialogue is a kind of necessary posture to the extent that humans have become more and more critically communicative beings. Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it’ (p.98). Dialogue is seen by Shor and Freire as the means by which students can overcome their accustomed compliancy in education and the processes of mass culture which they state have socialised ‘people to police themselves against their own freedom’ (p.25). According to Shor and Freire, dialogue between teachers and students promotes subjective interest in the procedures of thinking; it allows for the relevant exercise of the remaking of knowledge within the classroom and as such, the remaking of society.

Large class sizes and “low” socio-economic environments hamper the possibility of dialogue within education, Shor and Freire assert. The more socio-economically privileged the student, the more likely it is that the student has access to small class sizes and opportunities for discussion. Shor and Freire reject this lack of access and would open up the possibility of dialogue to all teachers and students. They, in common with the advocates of Philosophy for Children, endorse wholeheartedly the tensions which arise out of dialogical liberty, perceiving opportunities for all participants to think through the realities of their own lives and envision alternative
values and actions, as do most critical theorists in education (Miller 1986, Smyth 1987, Young 1992) and many language education theorists.

Nathan Scott (1988) in discussion of the diverse doctrines to be found in the writings of the literary theorists, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Wayne Booth, identifies a commonality in their perspectives. This commonality is perceived by Scott to be a ‘unanimity in their principled hospitality to difference and variety in the cultural forums of the modern world’ (Scott 1988, p.61). Their acceptance of difference and variety is underscored, according to Scott, by recognition of the necessity of a morality of mutual respect. ‘And it is towards the end of promoting such a morality that they urge that cultural discourse be obedient to the dialogical principle’ (ibid.).

In order to more fruitfully harvest the benefits of living in a pluralistic culture, Scott proposes that literary pedagogy, both in the classroom as well as in the university forum, should not only be based in literary discipline but should also be aligned with the discipline of philosophy. He calls upon the literature faculties within universities to value and incorporate hermeneutical theory in their programs so that future teachers of literature may establish in their classrooms the kind of ‘atmosphere that will encourage a truly dialogical relationship’ (Scott 1988, p.63). In an era of postmodern thought, the move towards critical hermeneutics allows for greater expression of multiple perspectives, while at the same time arguing for philosophical discourse of ethics (Habermas 1984,1987).

Splitter and Sharp at the outset of their text Teaching for Better Thinking, echo the same plea for dialogical access for all students when they state:
We cannot emphasise enough that the thinking imperative, as we might call it, demands a response which involves all children, not just those from privileged socio-economic or intellectual groupings. Sound thinking can no longer be seen as the prerogative of an intellectual minority. Indeed, the imperative may be even more pressing when it comes to providing for disadvantaged and under-privileged groups (1995, p.12).

Robert Young, in his analysis of the critical theory of Juegen Habermas and its application in education, asserts that classrooms fall into two categories. The first he defines as ‘method classrooms’ in which the student is perceived as an object. The method classroom does not recognise ‘the dynamic character of context’ nor is there consideration given to the knowledge and experience that students bring to the classroom. In such a classroom students are perceived as objects, or as recipients of established knowledge. Students are manipulated through language into patterns of response and compliancy. The main focus of this manipulation of language - particularly teacher questioning and evaluation of answers - is to elicit responses that support teacher perception of what constitutes correctness’ (Young 1992, pp. 21 and 106).

Young refers to a second type of classroom as a ‘discourse classroom’, and within this educational setting he demonstrates the possibilities of dialogue. The condition which allows dialogue he argues, is a recognition that both teacher and students are fellow inquirers or pedagogical partners, so that students are not coerced but rather have equality of respect with the teacher. The relationship between the teacher as inquirer and the students as ‘apprentice co-inquirers’ is marked by exchanges that demonstrate teacher recognition of students as ‘thinking, feeling beings ... rather than voice-activated robots’ (Young 1992, p.29). Young here has used Habermas’ Communicative Action Theory as the basis for his argument.
Indications that Philosophy for Children can alter children’s behaviour positively

While Field (1995) in her two year empirical study was primarily concerned to investigate whether children as young as Grade 2, could be emergent philosophers, she also noted interesting behavioural changes that appeared to come about as a result of the practice of philosophy. The subjects were ‘average’ Grade 2 students in that they were not perceived, either by their teachers or the researcher, as having high profiles for unreasonable or abrasive behaviours. The children were selected from two schools which encompassed a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds. Intelligence quotients were fairly evenly ranged over high-medium-low levels.

Changes in playground behaviour were not apparent over the first two terms of the research project, but behavioural changes did emerge in term three. An independent observer responsible for recording on proformas, incidents of physical and verbal behaviours noted that there were no discernible differences between verbal and physical behaviours of either the control or experimental group over the first two terms. In term three, however, it was noted that there was a significant reduction in the level of sarcastic comments and name calling on the part of the experimental subjects. The observer noted that at one school, terms one and two saw a total of 57 playground incidents of undesirable verbal and physical behaviour, whereas term three witnessed only 13 such incidents.

While Field was primarily concerned to measure academic development (and she does point out the likelihood that positive changes in behaviour were influenced by a school policy of the reinforcement of respect and politeness, which ran concurrently with her research) she nevertheless acknowledges behavioural changes. She...
concludes: 'The empirical data results of this study suggests that there is significant
evidence that using teaching materials specifically designed for philosophical inquiry
has an effect on specific areas of learning and behaviour' (p.21).

A private school in West Vancouver, Canada, is the setting for a current study carried
out by Susan Gardner into the encouragement of a 'moral sense' in primary age
children through the practice of philosophy. In a paper presented at the Eighth ICPIC
Conference in Iceland, June 1997, and subsequently printed in the March journal of
*Critical and Creative Thinking* (1998), Gardner reported on the first two years of this
ongoing project.

The study is concerned to compare the 'moral sense' of fifth grade students (before
the school introduced philosophy for children into all their primary grades), with
'students in each subsequent (5th) year for the next several years so as to measure the
cumulative impact of participating in the Philosophy for Children program'. Gardner
theorised that prolonged participation in a community of inquiry should lead to: 'a
decrease in attitudes characteristic of low moral development; an increase in
principled thought; an increased tolerance for ambiguity; a decrease in external
orientation (due to an increase in internal representations) and an increase in self-
esteem' (p.1).

Using a nine-point scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement,
students were asked to respond to a questionnaire made up of '50 randomly
interspersed statements taken from other questionnaires already checked for validity
and reliability'. There was one exception to the pre-validated nature of the statements
however, and this concerned those dealing with external orientation. This exception
was made on the basis of age appropriateness and consisted in adaptations of the
Nowicki, Strickland Test for Locus of Control (Gardner 1998).

While recognising the inherent nature of structured questions to 'impose constructs
upon respondents' Gardner was interested to note that the difference in mean scores
between the control group and the experimental group were as predicted with one
exception which was the lack of significant difference in external orientation towards
parents. This latter factor may be due, she contends, to the instrument, as statements
relating to external orientation were constructed for purposes of her study, and as such
had no prior validation.

For purposes of this dissertation, however, it is important to note the location of
Gardner's study which proposes that participation over a sustained period of time in a
community of inquiry nourishes principled and moral behaviour in children. Gardner's ongoing study is quantitative in nature and situated in the primary sector of
education. It is concerned with an existing whole class situation and with students
who have not been highlighted for troublesome and inconsiderate behaviour. And of
further significance, the study deals with students attending school in a privileged
socio-economic setting. In this dissertation however, the research site, a Years 7 to 10
high school, is situated in a recognised socio-economically deprived area of Sydney.
The participants have been identified as being uncooperative across the whole school
spectrum and the mode of data gathering is qualitative.

Other Methods of Encouraging Reasonableness

It would seem appropriate at this point to acknowledge that dialogical strategies as
proposed by Shor and Freire (1987) and the practice of doing Philosophy with
Children as proposed by Lipman and his colleagues are not alone in their endeavour to influence children towards more rational and self-fulfilling lives. Much of what has been determined as reasonable behaviour for purposes of this dissertation is perceived by many educationalists as constituting basic social competence.

Westwood (1993) includes among basic social skills such attributes as:

* Complying with, and appreciating the need for rules.
* Having the ability to compromise.
* Demonstrating willingness to endorse others by helping them; offering realistic compliments where appropriate and by apologising when in the wrong.
* Coping with conflict; controlling aggression and dealing with anger in ourselves and in others.
* Accepting criticism.
* Showing interest in the well being of others; listening to others; greeting others appropriately and responding to the social interactions of others appropriately.
* Gaining attention and asking for help in an acceptable way. (Westwood 1993, p.65).

Peter Cole and Lorna Chan (1990) maintain there are many and varied methods for addressing unreasonable behaviour in children both in and out of their field of Special Education. They recommend that teachers critically examine the range of methods available from the more abstract and theoretical models to those based in practical applications. They further recommend that teachers be prepared to adapt the methods available to the special needs and circumstances of their students.

Encompassed within the Behavioural Model to changing “unreasonable” behaviour in children are psychological and cognitive approaches. The Behavioural Model which initially had its origins in Thorndike (1904) and made educationally famous with Skinner (1953) focuses on the analysis of the student’s behaviour and then their
responses to intervention strategies. Current recognition that knowledge is constructed within social realities, rather than externally imposed, has seen a swerve away from behaviourist psychological approaches. Peter Westwood (1993) and Lovitt (1991) constitute examples of current educational theory that emphasises cognitive approaches to behaviour modification by focusing on activating thinking processes in the child.

Westwood and Lovitt see value in metacognitive instruction which encourages the child to pick up on such areas as social cues, anticipation of outcomes stemming from certain actions, and the nurture of empathy with the feelings of others. The processes involved in changing undesirable behaviour for Westwood and Lovitt involve an analysis of the behaviour of the student by the teacher, followed by an explanation to the student as to why his or her behaviour is undesirable. The process then involves explanation of the skill to be taught; modelling by the teacher or a selected peer; rehearsal of the skill on the part of the student; feedback by teacher; provision of real situations in which the child can practise the skill, and finally reinforcement of the child when the skill is practised.

Approaches that seek to change behaviour through ecological modification are based on sociological principles which concentrate not only on the individual child but also on the interacting systems of school, family and the community in which the child is located. (See for example Apter & Conoley 1984, and Walberg & Wang 1987). The goals of intervention in these models therefore, are concerned to encourage harmony and balance in a young person’s life by adapting the environment or social and educational expectations to the particular abilities of the child. Conversely, efforts of modification may seek to adapt the child to her or his environment.
Approaches based on a humanist model advocate more responsibility for independent and self-directed learning of social skills. Humanist models are more concerned with social-emotional aims rather than academic achievements, maintaining that academic progress is likely to proceed from a balanced emotional environment. These models, the best known being that of Carl Rogers (1969), seek to nurture behavioural change through environments where children encounter meaningful events. He states that:

Significant learning combines the logical and the intuitive, the intellect and the feelings, the concept and the experience, the idea and the meaning. When we learn in that way, we are whole, utilizing all our masculine and feminine capacities (Rogers 1983, p.20).

In addition to these commonly used educative processes that are practised in schools to encourage the development of reasonableness in young people, there are “less conventional” approaches.

Gobey (1991), for example, advocates the discipline of performing arts as a means of engendering in adolescents an appreciation that ‘behaviour is to a certain extent a matter of choice and personal responsibility’ (1991, p.71). He contends that participation in drama workshops allows the young person to act out, examine and reflect upon different types of behaviour and the ensuing situations and consequences that can arise as a result of that behaviour.

Dalley (1984) quotes Naumberg (1958) to support her advocacy of visual art forms as a medium for instigating behavioural change when she says:

The techniques of art therapy are based on the knowledge that every individual, whether trained or untrained in art, has a latent capacity to project his (sic) inner conflicts into visual form (Dalley 1984, p.3).

Dalley (1984) acknowledges she was influenced by Kramer (1958) and further contends that in the creative art act, conflict is resolved and integrated through a process of re-experience. As Dalley argues, the course of creating something puts in place a dialogue within the creator, which is concerned to evaluate and analyse past experience.

Linesch (1988) reports on ten clinical studies of adolescents who were given opportunities to address their personal and behavioural problems through the medium of art. Linesch's case material demonstrates the effectiveness of art to assist, to varying degrees, these young people towards behaviour modification, self expression and personal confidence.

Social Tolerance/Group Processes

The above examples are not exhaustive but they still serve to illustrate some of the many and varied approaches to engendering reasonable behaviour with accompanying internalisation of ethical values in young people. Recognition is also given, however, to the reality that adoption of a group-based method of philosophic intervention – a community of inquiry – inevitably entails social process as well as those of a more cognitive, reflective kind. The teacher/facilitator should be attuned to the mood and dynamics of the group if the educational and developmental purposes of the program are not to be subverted. More specifically, the entitlement of the participants to respect as persons should be nourished, so that their defences may diminish and
openness to other members of the group may grow. A community of inquiry requires tolerance and respect in order to function; these same qualities are of course desirable in any group seeking social cooperativeness and cohesion.

Even more didactic styles of moral and value education recognise the importance of open discourse and respect for divergent points of view (Battistich et al. 1999; Brooks and Kann 1993; Grier and Firestone 1998). The above sociologists and educationalists place particular stress on the motivating effect of active learning and recommend the expression of personally held views in a socially tolerant climate. In many ways such approaches resemble generic group work as it is practised in a variety of fields which promote personal growth and development (Compton and Galaway 1984).

What then are the distinctive properties of the community of inquiry approach which forms the basis of the present project? First, the creation of a climate of tolerance is a priority but not at the expense of maintaining the highest practicable standards of philosophic inquiry given the age and background of the participants. In other words, emotional support is given due recognition but does not override the emphasis placed on learning and analysis. Second, the degree of student responsibility for the learning process is elevated to a degree where students share in the choice of appropriate stimulus material and form the agenda for discussion. The participants in a philosophic community of inquiry also bear a substantial burden for assessing the philosophic value of the sessions as well as identifying future lines of enquiry. Third, the learning acquired is not only stored for future use in other settings but is expected to be applied in situ and integrated into group functioning. Fourth, to an extent
commensurate with basic selected responsibilities, the authority structure of the group
is levelled to facilitate the mutuality of learning.

Problematic issues

The connections which proponents of Philosophy for Children make between
language, thought and discussion, are greatly influenced by the social psychology of
George H. Mead who saw the socialisation of thought as being instigated through
speech. In discussion of Mead’s theories, Lipman says in Natasha: Vygotskian
Dialogues, that firstly we have gesture-response behaviour which has a shared
meaning between two or more parties. This shared meaning, this thinking together, is
followed by an ‘emergence of the self’ which takes place strictly on a cognitive level.
He then draws the parallel between Vygotsky and Meads’ thinking in this regard by
discussing Vygotsky’s theory that ‘generalization and systematization lead to
consciousness’ which in turn ‘leads the child to awareness of his (sic) own mental
processes’ (Lipman 1996, p.101). Several pages later, Lipman has the persona of
Natasha draw the inferences together by saying: ‘If utterance is the matrix of thinking
and if thinking is what we want to flourish then we must find ways of stimulating
critical and inventive discourse’ (p.104).

It should be acknowledged, however, that many contemporary language theorists, and
indeed post-structuralists in general, would find inherent difficulties with the whole
notion of shared meaning as coming about as a normal communicative process. The
idea that we can ‘think together’ is problematic when as Nathan Scott (1988) says ‘the
name of the game that we are fated to play (the game that organises our culture and
our consciousness) is pluralism’. Linguistic relativists deny the adequacy of language
as a medium for stating truth and cultural and moral relativists deny the possibility of singularity of truth at all.

Even where a ‘mainstream’ culture acts as a ‘cohesive’ element within a group engaged in dialogical activity, postmodernist theory has revealed to us the awesome ramifications of individual interpretation. Even when linked by understanding of a mother tongue, interpretation of issues/events/concepts/texts depend upon each individual’s own life experience and subjectivity. Accepting therefore the problematic nature of interpretation that occurs within a monocultural situation, the question arises: is it ever possible to transcend cultural and moral differences that arise when members of a community of inquiry come from different cultural backgrounds, wherein they subscribe to different moral/ethical values? In the context of a multicultural Australian school, is it possible for example, for a little girl born in the Middle East and a little girl of Anglo-Saxon background, to reconcile their differences in a community of inquiry as to what constitutes fair and just societal punishment for theft?

Christina Slade (1996) in her article ‘Conversing across communities: Relativism and difference’, recognises this problematic issue of cultural and ethical relativism. She seeks to determine whether cultural and linguistic differences exclude communication. Slade is concerned to ask if there are ‘universal logical or dialogical principles to which we can turn in order to find procedural principles that would allow debate across difference?’ (p.10).

She cites Habermas’ (1989) *Ideal Public Sphere* in which he advocates a resolution of difference via rules of rational debate. Slade along with Fraser (1993), Benhabib
(1993) and Young (1990), argue that Habermas’ concept is narrow in that it assumes qualities of articulateness that the marginalised may not possess. Habermas’ model has also been criticised not only on the basis that it excludes the inarticulate and inexperienced debater but also on the grounds that it is gendered and ethnically specific.

While not discounting Habermas’ ideas, Slade goes on to investigate Lipman’s community of inquiry model because she allows that students are able to discuss their own ideas and the ideas of others, in a forum governed by criteria of rationality - criteria that can themselves be debated.

Both Habermas’ and Lipman’s models are perceived by Slade to be creditable however, for the reason that they both ‘bring a set of procedures to the issue of how to discuss across difference’ (Slade 1996, p.26). She points out the need to think of meaning as not being located in separate communities, but rather to think of meaning as something that must be negotiated in a way that gives ‘proper respect for difference in the creation of meaning’ (ibid., p.26). She acknowledges that this perspective is not new, but contained in the writings on language, by Kress, Halliday, Tesin van Dijk and Wittgenstein. In terms of ethics however, she maintains that ethics discourse is less familiar. As a theory of reasoning, dialogical models, ‘while having a venerable heritage from Socrates through Lorenzan, have been underplayed’. Slade sums up her argument by suggesting that the virtue of Habermas and Lipmans’ dialogical models which attempt to bridge cultural and ethical bridges may lie in the space they leave for discussion ‘across difference, conversing across communities’ (p.26).
Even within the same cultural group efforts to create a community of inquiry may not eventuate. Hreinn Palsson (1987) in his research carried out with Sixth graders in Iceland sought to explore how communities of inquiry were formed in a school context. In the case of one of the two classes involved in his research, Palsson acknowledged that a community did not in fact evolve. However, he was pleased to note that efforts to promote a dialogical community did have some positive results. Over time, he was able to register measurable improvements in children’s logical reasoning abilities.

As an active member of the *Group for Research into the teaching of Philosophy* (GREPH), French post-structuralist Jacques Derrida and his colleagues are keen not only to extend philosophical education within the French school system, but to uncover the reasons for the strong opposition in France and elsewhere, to philosophy being taught to students before the age of 16 years. He states: ‘We wanted to analyse the presuppositions or prejudices of a philosophical or socio-political nature, which lay behind this opposition to extending the teaching of philosophy to younger age groups’ (Derrida in Mortley 1991, p.93).

Subsequent to their research Derrida suggested that the reason for the reluctance to teach philosophy to younger students may lie in the nature of philosophic inquiry itself in that it encourages critical examination of what is most often taken for granted. He contends that Philosophy encourages questions and critical examination of the status quo. This questioning according to Derrida and his *GREPH* colleagues, is perceived as being transgressive in relation to norms of behaviour which are ‘considered to be necessary for adolescents’ (Mortley 1991, p.95).
The presentation of Philosophy to French high school students, asserts Derrida, is set in terms of general questions, actions, thought, knowledge, ontology, ethics. ‘But it is true that many teachers insist on the need to study these issues on the basis of historic treatments, and Derrida is himself of that view’ (Mortley 1991, p.94). It is with this need for the presentation of a historical perspective that most proponents of the Lipman model would disagree.

Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, as already noted, show how children are naturally inclined to use narratives as a tool to formulate questions philosophically (Lipman et al. 1980, p.33). They maintain that highlighting the history of philosophical thought would probably indicate that expert adult thinkers have already addressed issues and concepts. Such an historical approach could deter children from engaging in philosophy if they felt that the most relevant questions have already been explored; it could also serve to signal that philosophy was taught rather than practised. Lipman et al. prefer to leave the teaching of philosophical theories and their historical development to where a student has reached the university level of education.

The use of narrative as the medium for instigating philosophic discussion with children may also provide grounds for potential criticism. It is maintained by the proponents of the community of inquiry model, that human beings in all cultures search out the meaning of their own existence in narrative. Listeners and readers of narratives consciously or unconsciously seek to find common human experience. Such recognition of common human experiences assists individuals to come to terms with their own reality and this, they maintain, is as true of children as it is of adults.
Neo-Platonists could however, level the criticism that fictional narrative is mimetic in its intended imitation of human experience. Levin (1998) states that ‘mimicry is not identity; it can never be as realistic as novelists have always liked to pretend; at the most it is a symbolic approximation rather than a literal reproduction’ (p.44).

While this position taken by Levin (1998) is difficult to counter, Vendler (1988) offers the compromise that while literature is at best a mirror of our human condition, it is the best mirror that we have (Vendler 1988, p.24). Vendler, while acknowledging the mimetic nature of the fictional story, points out an aesthetic dimension. And she would not only grant this aesthetic dimension to the ‘great tales of our inherited culture’ but would also include ‘the local and the ethnic’ as having powers of ‘inward-turning self possession’ (ibid., p.24). She reminds us that Wordsworth thought that prose and poetry ‘conferred divine light’, while Wallace Stevens apologised for the fact that his poems so poorly reflected ‘the riches of sensation and memory’. She argues that the “conflicting” nature of both these statements are reconcilable when she states that ‘we must recognise the truth of both assertions and alternately dwell on one or the other’ (Vendler 1988, p.23).

Jerome Bruner (1996) asserts in his discussion of narrative that: ‘nobody questions that learning the subtleties of narrative is one of the prime routes to thinking about life’ (p.94). He rejects as a ‘perverse idea that teachers and students cannot deal with narrative matters with comparable skill and openness and with a comparable gain in self-awareness’ (p.96). He calls for the use of narrative as a means of promoting dialogue about all aspects of the curriculum and values the opportunities afforded by multiple interpretations and perspectives.
Rowley and Toye (1998) address a further general criticism that is often levelled at Philosophy for Children. This criticism sees Philosophy for Children as being too radical in its efforts to achieve egalitarianism between teacher and students. It is seen as being associated with “progressivism” in education. This perception stems from the idea that a primary goal in the community of inquiry is that of the gradual diminishment of the teacher. Rowley and Toye (1998) acknowledge that it is the ideal that all members of the group attain egalitarianism, and that the children set the questions which provide the agenda for discussion. They also maintain that the teacher does not abnegate responsibility as an experienced and mature member of the group. In echoing Dewey (1938), they argue that what is called for is subtlety of facilitation. They see the development of strategies by teachers as a positive measure because it fosters stronger input into the areas of investigation. This input, they contend, should be done subtly so that ‘children still understand the agenda as theirs... in philosophical inquiry children must have a perception of control over the agenda while still being under the skilful guidance of the teacher’ (Rowley and Toye 1998, p.13). This ‘skilful guidance of the teacher’, this subtlety of facilitation, could be interpreted as a pretence of implementing democratic principles, and as a manipulation of the young.

Mary Warnock’s strong criticism of the practice of philosophy with children however, is not concerned with its processes of facilitation but rather with what she refers to as its age inappropriateness (1988, p.56). Warnock argues that philosophy is not an appropriate area of study during school years. She takes this position out of a belief that it is not possible to study philosophy profitably without entering fairly deeply into the history of the subject and she contends that school time constraints do not allow for such in-depth study. Further she sees that such a study of the history of philosophy
would only interest a few pupils since ‘School is a place for acquiring expertise in those subjects which philosophy may later critically examine’ (Warnock 1988, p.57).

While she does call for a curriculum that would liberate a child’s critical faculties, her reformulated curriculum, as does Philosophy for Children, would highlight learning techniques as opposed to the emphasis on the learning of content. These learning techniques would encourage ‘the grasp of intellectual principles that may be applied and reapplied in different circumstance’ (p.56).

Warnock argues that a grasp of general principles is what is needed in order to bring about the much-needed transformation of the curriculum. This grasping of general principles would connect the concepts inherent in each subject area, she maintains. She acknowledges that the study of philosophy would appear to be the subject that would draw all together in relevance, yet she maintains that it could only be done at school on a superficial level.

Conclusion

Educators advocating Philosophy for Children appear eager to address any such charge that the study of philosophy at school could only be done superficially and that the study of philosophy could only appeal to a limited number of students. They do so on the basis of a number of factors.

Foremost among these factors is a rejection of the elitist attitude to philosophy which has in the past they maintain, seen this discipline as being the sole area of male university academics, a tradition which has until recent times, mostly excluded the wisdom of women (de Haan 1994 and Lamb 1997). Such a dominance, these
educationalists/philosophers assert, denies the natural richness and understanding stemming from 'ordinary' human experience and insight. They further suggest that the wisdom inherent in the life experience and nature of childhood should not be discounted. The participation of children broadens the parameters of the discipline of philosophy, making it less of an 'alienating' male orientated tradition. She notes that the practice of philosophy with children offers explicit alternative directions in terms of participation, relatedness, relevance to personal experience and social and political concerns. Indeed, de Haan would have us appreciate that Philosophy for Children in its recognition of the potential wisdom of children, practices a counter to western cultural traditional tendency which undervalues the body, the personal, the feminine and the emotional aspects (de Haan 1994, pp. 1-8).

It is further maintained by advocates for the teaching of Philosophy to Children, that young people are natural philosophers, natural wonderers. In the introduction of this dissertation, Matthews (1994) was quoted as saying that the discipline of philosophy itself, is in many ways 'an adult attempt to deal with the genuinely baffling questions of childhood' (p.13). Carl Sagan's pleasure at the questions that children ask was also alluded to. Such questions include: What do black holes look like? What is the smallest piece of matter? Why do we remember the past and not the future? How it is, if there was chaos early, that there is, apparently, order today? Why is there a universe? What was a concern to Sagan, and what continues to be a concern to educators endorsing Philosophy for Children, is that the questioning, the wondering, lessens as children grow, and seems to virtually cease altogether for most people in adulthood.
A community of inquiry is seen by educators advocating Philosophy for Children as sharpening a child’s natural disposition to ask questions about things, ideas and concepts. The practice of philosophy in childhood will hopefully flow on into adult life so that phenomena and ideas worthy of wonder will not become natural and commonplace. To practise philosophy from youth, they posit, is to set in motion a lifelong practice of asking questions; to set in motion a lifelong process of intellectual liberation. ‘Children who do philosophy see the world in new ways’, state Splitter and Sharp. ‘They gain access to ideas which otherwise might not have come their way, and they begin to make connections which lead to greater understanding and insight’ (Splitter and Sharp 1995, p.118). Splitter and Sharp would further have us see that this liberatory process while freeing children from the ‘shackles imposed by their own egos and value commitments ... involves understanding that ideas are part of an interconnected whole in which thoughts, words and beliefs resonate with behaviour, and contribute to the kind of person that each of us is in the process of becoming’ (p.119).

The 1995 study by Field (mentioned above) would seem to support Splitter and Sharp’s statement. Although Field was primarily concerned to study whether ‘average’ children as young as grade two, could be emergent philosophers, she also noted positive behavioural changes which she believed came about as the result of the practice of philosophy. These changes consisted in a significant reduction in the level of sarcastic comments and name calling on the part of the experimental subjects. Gardner (1998), also cited above, has been able to show evidence of moral growth in children practicing philosophy, above those of comparative peers not engaged in philosophy.
The whole nature of Philosophy for Children invites innovative and enlightened use. Sharp (1995) in her article ‘Philosophy for Children and the Development of Ethical Values’, ‘searches out’ possible directions that Philosophy for Children can take. She is keen to point out the usefulness of a community of inquiry method in assisting children to grapple with the complexities of living in a modern society. She says that the scope of the program can go beyond its conventional use as a ‘pre-school and elementary school language arts or reading program as well as an independent course in philosophy and reasoning. It can also serve as a civics program, an ethics program, a program in human development or a program in critical and creative thinking’ (p.51). She further states that Philosophy for Children has been used successfully in facilitating the teaching of English as a Second Language.

As yet, however, the literature does not show philosophy specifically being used with unreasonable students in order to bring about reasonableness. Further, the literature shows that the majority of research has been carried out in the pre-school and primary sector of education.

There are two themes in the literature which have encouraged the project outlined in the present thesis. These are that the practice of Philosophy for Children is a liberating process which opens up to children ‘greater understanding and insight’, and that ‘the thoughts, words and beliefs gained thereby resonate with behaviour’ (Splitter and Sharp 1995). These observations invite the question of whether the practice of philosophy can encourage reasonableness in high school students who are at risk, a question explored in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 3

THE SITE, METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Chapter 3 locates the research site in a particular socio-economic area of Sydney and discusses some educational problems associated with this area. This chapter also outlays the process by which the 12 student participants were selected. It further seeks to justify the chosen methodology, research tools and data collection and analysis procedures as being the most appropriate to the context and requirements of the study.

The site

The High School involved in the project was established in 1994 in the area of Mount Druitt located in the outer western suburbs of Sydney. In the context of the wider Sydney culture, Mount Druitt is considered far flung from any ‘mainstream cultural’ centre. It has many of the problems associated with satellite suburbs of large modern cities in that unemployment is high, transport and industry are sparse and educational institutions are overcrowded and chronically lack facilities.

The challenging prospect of creating a new high school in Sydney’s west prompted 309 teachers to apply for the eight teaching positions available in the first year of the school’s operation. In the school’s second year, 208 teachers applied for the additional ten teaching positions. The amount of choice afforded by the extent and depth of applications allowed the principal to form a foundation staff which he described ‘as exceptional in its dedication and professionalism’ (Doyle 1997).

Over time it became increasingly apparent that student literacy problems were bound up with second language difficulties, although few students spoke with any marked accent. A questionnaire administered to students revealed the school to be a strong example of a multi-cultural school, registering 27 different language groups. The
main language and cultural groups other than English at Emeritus High (the school will be known by this name) are: Arabic, French, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Malay, Maltese, Polynesian, Melanesian, Polish, Spanish, Tagalog (Filipino), and Vietnamese.

The particular language and literacy needs of the students were a focus of teacher concern from the outset. Norm-assessed reading and comprehension exercises administered to the incoming Year Seven students over several years substantiated teacher observation that the majority of students were second phase English as a Second Language users.

In the third year of Emeritus High’s existence, a classroom area called the School Learning Centre had been put aside for special educational needs. These needs included individual teaching to students with special remedial needs. It was also an area where students could seek extension in individual or group projects of their choice. The rationale behind the inclusion of both forms of education within the one physical area was to encourage positive perception of special education. Group projects (other than this project) occurred in the School Learning Centre on a daily basis and as such were perceived by the school community as being an everyday educational occurrence. The setting therefore was a naturalistic one as the participants were operating within a normal school context.

**Pressures associated with the Mount Druitt area of Sydney**

In January 1997 Rupert Murdoch’s newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* published a front page photo of the 1996 Year Twelve class at Mount Druitt High School with the caption ‘The class we failed’. The accompanying story dealt with the low tertiary
entrance rank results of the students. While the article acknowledged the existence of a two-tiered schooling system in Sydney in which students, such as those coming from the Mount Druitt area, were significantly disadvantaged, the written text and the photograph were insulting and the story incorrectly assumed all the students had failed.

The article and its accompanying photograph so incensed students, teachers and parents in the Mount Druitt area that they, along with the New South Wales Teacher’s Federation, lodged a complaint with the Press Council. The Press Council in February of the same year criticised ‘the misleading statements’ made in the article, but the Council also commended The Daily Telegraph for reporting the state of inequities in the New South Wales educational system. Nineteen of the twenty three students in the photograph organised as a group, and began legal proceedings against the Murdoch publication (Clark 1997).

The NSW Department of School Education released in September of 1997 a document which was a response to the article and photograph printed by The Daily Telegraph and which also was a response to concern in general about educational disadvantages inherent in the Mount Druitt area. A New Way Forward (DSE 1997) used data taken from the 1991 Australian Census to highlight the social and economic disadvantages associated with the area. The restructuring of the NSW Higher School Certificate is in many ways an effort to reduce the disadvantages suffered by such young people as those living in the Mount Druitt area.

Pierre Bourdieu (1993) contends that only an institution like a school can ‘.... offset (at least partially) the initial disadvantage of those who do not receive from their
family circle the encouragement to undertake [dominant or “high”] cultural activities’ (p.233). It would appear from the results of the 1991 Australian census, along with the findings and recommendations of *A New Way Forward*, that many families of Mount Druitt and its environs do not have significant investments in what Bourdieu refers to as [dominant or high] “cultural capital”. In many instances the population of these socio-economically deprived areas is made up of recent immigrants to Australia whose cultural values are other than those of mainstream Australians. Iredale, Fox and Sherlaimoff (1994) posit that the difficulties surrounding the abilities of students with non English speaking backgrounds are not restricted to the management of English but include stress and difficulties associated with their, and their family’s, endeavour to cope with ‘new and multi-faceted situations’ (1994. pp.31-33).

Bourdieu is concerned to emphasise that the school must work in a systematic way to redress gaps resulting from socio-economic and ethnic factors. These gaps he sees as occurring between those whose family environment imparts cultural capital to its younger members and those students whose families do not impart [high] cultural competence or the desire to acquire symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990, p.137).

In the context of the education system, “symbolic capital” would equate with a high Tertiary Entrance Rank which would as such guarantee “universal” recognition of an acceptable standard of educational achievement. Not to seek to redress educational imbalance would give, according to Bourdieu:

> free play to the objective machinery of cultural diffusion without working systematically to give to all, in and through the pedagogical message itself, what is given to some through family inheritance, that is, the instruments which condition the school message, for it to redouble and consecrate, by treating them as natural inequalities or, in other words, as inequalities of gifts or natural talent (1990, p.233).
Selection of the 12 student participants

The administrators, teaching and auxiliary staff of the new High School involved in the project had from the outset of the school's existence been aware of the reality of many of its students' economic, social and [dominant] cultural deprivations, and had consistently implemented strategies to redress imbalances.

In 1995, the second year of the High School's inception, it was seen as being imperative to form a Students' Support Group in order to address more comprehensively the 'cultural, spiritual, social, educational, emotional, behavioural and relational' needs of its student body (Vision statement of the Students' Support Group, 1995). The membership of the Support Group comprises the school principal, the assistant principal, the student counsellor, the four school house co-ordinators and interested members of staff. In consideration of the particular needs of students, persons such as parents, tutors or members of external agencies, are sometimes requested to attend meetings. The researcher was not a member of this committee, nor were the twelve young people participating in the project aware that the Students' Support Group had nominated them as students most in need of behavioural support.

The nature of secondary school is that a student may encounter within the course of a single day many different teaching styles ranging from highly structured and teacher-centred to cooperative peer learning situations and permissive classroom structures. An important factor in choosing participants for the philosophy group, therefore, was whether the disruptive and uncooperative behaviour exhibited by a student was general across subject areas and not located in a reaction to an individual teaching style. Anti-social behaviour on the playground along with negative reactions and
relationships with auxiliary staff were also considered when selecting students to be invited to take part in the project.

Noting over time the reports made at staff meetings by representatives of the Students’ Support Group about their efforts to assist disruptive students, the researcher surmised that such a group might be the means of objectively providing candidates for a project involving the encouragement of reasonableness. The researcher received permission from the Principal of Emeritus High School to explore the possibilities of a study and attended a meeting of the group in the month of November 1997.¹ The facilitating of philosophy groups within the school as special learning centre projects along with the awareness that this prospective group of young people would probably not be as cooperative as other students within the school, led the researcher to believe that the interactions of more than twelve students might be unmanageable. The members of the group were therefore invited to submit the names of twelve students who were considered to generally display disruptive and uncooperative behaviour.

All the members of the Students’ Support Group warmly received the prospect of conducting a philosophy group for these students in the expectation that the formation of such a philosophy group might be of assistance to young people. They subsequently submitted a list of twelve student names in early March 1988, from a pool of seventeen prospective candidates from Years Nine and Ten. As a result of the researcher’s efforts to identify criteria relating to “reasonableness” as outlined in

¹ Before commencing the research on the 12th March 1998, formal permission to conduct the research was obtained from The Human Ethics Department University of Wollongong, The Catholic Education Office at Parramatta, The Principal of Emeritus High School and the 12 participants and their caregivers. Copies of these letters are set out in the appendices.
chapter 1, a questionnaire was formulated (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire correlates with the three dimensional aspects of **reasonableness** - the intellectual, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal, and the five criteria whereby reasonableness is defined in terms of this research project (see ch. 1). The Students' Support Group was given a range of four categories: *Not At All, Seldom, Usually, Almost Always*. The results of the questionnaire relating to each student participant are shown at the beginning of chapter 4 following the section on student profiles. The questionnaire also allowed for comments to be written about the general behaviour of the student.

The names of the participants have been altered throughout this dissertation to protect their identity, and any remark made by the Students' Support Group which would identify a participant has been removed.

The Students' Support Group had recommended that some students should not be put in combination with certain other students. They also recommended that the proposed community of inquiry group should contain some students who were recognised as helpful and reasonable young people, so that cooperative behaviour would be modelled. The researcher declined on both counts, asking that students be chosen on the basis of greatest need in the area of reasonableness and that "unsuitable" combinations not be considered as reason to exclude any student.

**Invitations to join the project**

The students and their caregivers were given, prior to the research, letters explaining the nature of the research and the fact that the sessions would be recorded on audio tapes. It was also originally envisaged that the sessions would be recorded on video camera, but concern about anonymity of the participants dissuaded the researcher
from doing so. Prospective participants and their caregivers were also given a contact telephone number of the Human Ethics Committee at the University of Wollongong should they be unhappy about any aspect of the research, along with the reassurance that they could withdraw from the project at any time. The students were also reassured that they would be given different names in any written material emanating from the research. All twelve invitations to join the research project were accepted.

A qualitative multiple case study inquiry

A qualitative/multiple case study approach, with the researcher as a participant observer, was chosen as the research methodology based on the following considerations. One of the expectations that a facilitator has when starting a philosophy group for children under the principles of Lipman’s paradigm, is that ultimately a community will be formed. The researcher, therefore, was not only interested in the intellectual, social and educational enhancement of the individual participants, but was also interested in the possibilities of their development as a cohesive group with a corporate search for meaning. Case study, observes Tuckman (1988), is concerned with the ‘Observation of phenomena in action’ (p.393); it is concerned with observing the working of both individuals and the group in which they operate, in an endeavour to construct meaning. The perspectives of the case study method, which not only takes into account the participants as individuals, but also considers the group in which they operate, seemed to be the most appropriate approach to meet the purposes and requirements of the study.

Interacting with the group as a participant observer, making genuine, sometimes risky contributions to the community’s inquiries, allowed the researcher, a teacher at the school and potentially a representative of staff interests (Bogdan and Biklen 1992) to
acquire over time ‘....the status of a trusted person...that motivated them [participants] to tell what otherwise they might not have’ (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, p.39).

A major component of the project was to determine what adaptations needed to be made to Matthew Lipman’s model of doing philosophy with children in the context of this particular study. Two considerations were foremost:

• the participants of this project had been classified as disruptive and uncooperative by their school community and as a consequence of their behaviour they were at risk of being asked to leave the school community
• the project occurred in a multi-cultural high school in what is recognised as a socio-economically deprived area of Sydney.

The generality and non-categorical nature of these factors called for a flexible qualitative approach.

**Research design**

The research involved assembling the twelve participating students for two consecutive periods each week, usually on a Thursday. The school timetable allowed for 28 sessions over the 1998 academic year and they were conducted from the 12th of March to the 5th November 1998. It was originally envisaged that the participants would sit around a table and voluntary turns would be taken to read aloud stories that had been specifically written for children’s philosophic inquiry. After allowing a time for reflection, participants were to be asked to respond to the narrative text via questions, statements and identification of problematic issues, which were then to be written down on a whiteboard along with the student’s name. Links or connections between contributions were to be made so that an agenda for discussion could be worked out. It was also originally planned that the novel *Suki*, written in 1978 by
Lipman for a target group of Years Nine and Ten, would be used. This novel investigates the relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic experience as it explores different perspectives in thinking. The character Suki focuses on meaning through literary expression while the character Allan is driven by the requirements of logic.

The formal nature of the above approach had to be discontinued after four sessions and the novel Suki was never used because the researcher increasingly came to appreciate that the substance of Suki would hold no interest for the participants and that other stimulus material would have to be found. The stimuli used included short story anthologies; an extract from the novel Anna Karenina (1997) by Tolstoy; space documentaries recorded on video; a program about the human body recorded on video; a contemporary film recorded on video; a popular song and some poetry.

After the 7th session the agenda for discussion was not written on a whiteboard as originally planned, but occurred in a more spontaneous way. The following approach was adopted instead. The participants gathered each week around a table in the school's Learning Centre or around a video player in the school library, where we investigated stimuli, chosen in many cases by the participants themselves, for philosophic content.

There was from the outset an expectation that the researcher's 'authority' role as a teacher would ultimately disappear in an egalitarian community where all opinions would be given equal respect and consideration. Out of recognition of the established behavioural problems of the student participants, however, and the deliberate absenting of students who could act as role models, it was realistically expected that
the researcher would have to have a high profile to begin with. There was an expectation that she would have to model and scaffold the process of inquiry. This modelling included the challenging of assumptions, the calling for clarifications, the owning of ignorance, and the genuine revelation of a desire to understand that which was problematic. It also included the endorsement of self-correcting statements made by participants, the pointing out of inconsistencies within an argument, and the use of other philosophic tools. Above all it was recognised by the researcher that she would have to model genuine courtesy and respect and demonstrate, as Philip Cam emphasises, the difference between attacking someone’s argument and attacking their personality (Cam 1995).

It was also intended by the researcher, and subsequently achieved to a limited extent, that the researcher would relinquish, over time, the role of recording the sequence in which students indicated their desire to speak on an issue. This role of indicating speakers was to be given to other members of the group happy to take a turn at this task. The researcher’s rationale behind this expectation was that this task when carried out by a teacher could be symbolic of power and authority.

Data collection
The pre- and post-study questionnaires, audio tapes of each session, Students’ Support Group comments, student reflections on their own efforts, researcher reflections and comments by members of the school community were perceived to be appropriate sources of data for the project. These tools allowed all stakeholders; student participants, researcher and other adult members of the school community, opportunities to gauge any growth in reasonableness both on an individual and community level. As earlier explained, anonymity of participants was also a
consideration, consequently a tape recorder was chosen in preference to a video recorder.

Extracts from the transcripts were chosen on the basis of best typifying the tone and nature of each session. They have been included in this dissertation on a sequential basis in an attempt by the researcher to present an historical account of progressions and recessions in group, and individual reasonableness. The aim of any transcription extract, is to present sequences of talk as accurately as possible while maintaining a discourse that is comprehensible. The purpose has been to identify extracts from the sessions which throw light on the thinking processes and interactions of the participants and which best typifies the tone of the session. The normal use of capital letters, question marks and full stops has been retained, while commas and exclamation marks have been excluded.

Data analysis

Data derived from the sessions including the participants’ own evaluation of how the sessions went, along with interviews with teachers and anecdotal material relating to the behaviour of the participants, have been presented and analysed in chapters four, five and six. This conscious sequential relaying of data is intended to give a historical perspective of events.

Analysis of individual growth in reasonableness:

Individual growth in reasonableness has been recorded and analysed in the following way.

- The differences that emerged in the perceptions of the participants by the Student Support Group between the pre- and post-study questionnaire.
a) These ten questions were three-dimensional in nature in that they incorporated intellectual, interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects. The questions incorporated the five criteria which constituted reasonableness in the context of this study. The rationale for the arrival at these five criteria is discussed in chapter one. Tables 2 and 3 represent a synthesis of the pre- and post-study questionnaire results.

b) Space was available at the base of the pre- and post-study questionnaire for a general comment to be made by the Student Support Group. Consistency of perception of students and changes of perception of students were noted and analysed for difference.

- Comments made about participants by teachers and auxiliary staff not on the Student Support Group. These comments, offer anecdotally given and recorded in diarised field notes, were analysed in relation to the five criteria for reasonableness outlined in chapter one.

- The audio tapes of the sessions. The reflection/analysis section of each session was carefully monitored for indicators of individual growth or otherwise, and related to the five criteria of reasonableness outlined in chapter one.

**Analysis of community growth in reasonableness**

The growth of the individual within the context of Philosophy for Children is of necessity bound up with the growth of the community in which the inquiry is taking place. Underlying the whole process of this research project has been the expectation that not only would individuals grow in reasonableness, but that the group itself would develop reasonable processes and cohesion.
Community growth in reasonableness has been gauged in the following ways. One assessment of the group involved self analysis. Without letting this assessment task intrude too much on the dialogue of the community, approximately ten minutes were allowed at the end of each session for the students to evaluate the quality of their dialogical effort. This corporate evaluation sometimes involved the participants looking at their own individual efforts within the session.

The participants’ evaluation up until session nine took the form of a discussion around the following questions which were simplified for student understanding from Philip Cam’s (1995) List of Questions and intended by him to be a guide for teacher assessment of the workings of a community of inquiry. The students’ responses to all, or some of these questions, were written up by one of the group under instruction from the whole group, in a community journal.

**Inquiry Skills**
- Did we ask fruitful questions?
- Did we consider reasons/evidence?
- Did we seek explanations?
- Did we explore alternatives?
- Did we engage in self correction?
- Did we stick to the point?

**Reasoning and Conceptual Skills**
- Did we clarify meanings?
- Did we make useful distinctions?
- Did we make appropriate comparisons?
- Did we give helpful examples?
- Did we draw relevant inferences?
- Did we make considered judgments?

**Interaction Pattern**
- Did we listen to each other?
- Did we share the discussion?
- Did we help each other?
- Did we explore disagreements?
- Did we show respect for each other’s views?
- Did we accept fair criticism of our views?
These 18 questions were retained in their totality up until session nine. By session eleven, both the researcher and the student participants began to appreciate that the questions needed to be modified and contracted in order to reinvigorate the process of evaluation. Progressively, however, the sessions came more and more to be evaluated by the student participants via 'a discussion about the discussion'.

The enlistment of the student participants as co-researchers was included because there is a growing awareness among educationists that there is great benefit in encouraging students to be responsible for their own learning (Freire and Shor 1987; Smyth 1987; Young 1984, 1992). Splitter and Sharp (1995) maintain that in the context of a modern world, an information explosion among other factors, demands lifelong learning. Splitter and Sharp (1995) further advocate that children should be major assessors of their own development, particularly in regard to a community of inquiry. They suggest that children should consider their own progress by reference to the following:

- how well they employ reasoning and inquiry strategies
- their (reflective) use of terms like 'good reason', 'criteria', 'judgment', 'distinction', and 'relationship'
- their awareness, through language, of the different ways in which meanings can be constructed and communicated
- their capacity and inclination to explore concepts at various levels of abstractedness.
The growth of the community was also gauged via researcher observation of the participants in particular reference to Philip Cam's third group of questions dealing with group interaction.

Analysis of the audio tapes of the philosophy sessions by the researcher constituted the major source of gauging community growth in reasonableness and appears in the data of each session under the title reflection/analysis. This analysis was primarily concerned to deal with examples of, or absence of, the five criteria of reasonableness outlined in chapter one.

*Adaptations of Matthew Lipman's paradigm for practising Philosophy with Children*

In reference to the second research question, any useful adaptations or moving away from, established Philosophy for Children stimulus material, were also noted. These occurrences were noted in the data of the sessions as they occurred.

**Conclusion**

As previously discussed in chapter 2, this study recognises that a group-based method of intervention inevitably entails social processes as well as those of a more cognitive, reflective kind. While being aware of the many cultural, educational and socio-economic factors which may have contributed to the "at risk" behaviour of the participants, this study is not "too" concerned to explain the behaviour of the participants solely in relation to the sociological and cultural factors that contribute to the rich context of the study. The chosen methodology for this study is rather concerned with recording the voices of the individual participants, and the common voice of the group when it emerged. Nevertheless, the adaptations made to the
original Lipman model have been reflected upon in relation to perceived influences that the specific socio-cultural context had on the design of the intervention.
CHAPTER 4
TRAVELLERS ASSEMBLED - THE PHILOSOPHY SESSIONS BEGIN

This chapter sets out profiles of the participants based on sex, school grade, age and the responses of The Students' Support Group to the pre-session questionnaires. It establishes a key to the transcription extracts and reports on the philosophic sessions in the following way: Session number and date, how session was recorded and the number of participants present. It cites the stimulus material used to promote discussion and sets out the evaluation of sessions according to the perception of the participants. It contains transcription extracts from the session and includes researcher analysis under the heading of 'reflection'.

The following table relates to the participants at the commencement of the study in 1998. It should also be noted that English was a second language for six of the twelve participants. Only two of the participants were girls.¹

Table 4.1 Profiles of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME (pseudonym)</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zac</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tito</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruben</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The statistical likelihood of having only two of twelve, or 16.6 per cent girls, is consistent with many reports of behavioural problems in classrooms, where over 80% of serious cases are boys.
In the 10 areas of the pre-questionnaire filled out by the Students’ Support Group, the participants were perceived as follows:

**Carlo**
- Appears to value and practice logical thinking: Not at all
- Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others: Not at all
- Is sensitive to the opinions of others: Not at all
- Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others: Not at all
- Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Relates to peers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Can wait for attention: Seldom
- Is able to accept positive criticism: Not at all
- An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics: Not at all
- An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness: Not at all

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Carlo were as follows:
Carlo’s behaviour and attitude is of concern. He displays a manner of self indulgence. His manner and thinking rarely consider others and he does not seem to understand that all things have consequences. Carlo’s social skills are lacking and certain situations indicate that his attitude to others is quite negative.

**Zac**
- Appears to value and practice logical thinking: Not at all
- Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others: Not at all
- Is sensitive to the opinions of others: Seldom
- Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others: Seldom
- Relates to teachers in a friendly way: Seldom
- Relates to peers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Can wait for attention: Seldom
- Is able to accept positive criticism: Seldom
- An awareness of, and appreciation for, ethics: Seldom
- An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness: Not at all

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Zac were as follows:
Zac’s behavioural problems are primarily located in his lack of respect for teachers - particularly casual teachers. He is resistant to authority in general. He indulges in hard core swearing particularly in regard to his mother. He seeks attention and then rejects it when it is given. He frequently breaks into floods of tears if he is confronted with his recalcitrant behaviour - which he will not own.

**Pace**
- Appears to value and practice logical thinking: Not at all
- Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others: Not at all
- Is sensitive to the opinions of others: Not at all
- Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others: Not at all
- Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way: Not at all
- Relates to peers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Can wait for attention: Seldom
- Is able to accept positive criticism: Seldom
- An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics: Not at all
- An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness: Not at all
The Students' Support Group's additional comments re Pace were as follows:

Pace behaves in a manner that indicates that the world owes him something. He is very aware of differences, and in some instances, racial discrimination plays a major role in Pace's life. Pace struggles with acceptable social requirements and fails to understand the consequences of his behaviour. Pace is very keen to place blame elsewhere.

**Micha**

- Appears to value and practice logical thinking: Seldom
- Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others: Seldom
- Is sensitive to the opinions of others: Not at all
- Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others: Seldom
- Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Relates to peers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Can wait for attention: Seldom
- Is able to accept positive criticism: Seldom
- An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics: Not at all
- An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness: Seldom

The Students' Support Group's additional comments re Micha were as follows:

Micha often manifests her own problems in inappropriate, aggressive behaviour (but not aggressive physical behaviour). She has significant potential as a leader in spite of her intolerance of others. In 1997 she received a great many votes for membership of the school student council, but staff vetoed her nomination on the basis of past and present behaviour. Micha lacks any motivation to be successful at school and after an aggressive encounter with a student or teacher, she appears to deliberately withdraw her mental attention.

**Tito**

- Appears to value and practice logical thinking: Not at all
- Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others: Not at all
- Is sensitive to the opinions of others: Not at all
- Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others: Not at all
- Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Relates to peers in a friendly positive way: Seldom
- Can wait for attention: Not at all
- Is able to accept positive criticism: Not at all
- An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics: Not at all
- An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness: Not at all

The Students' Support Group's additional comments re Tito were as follows:

Tito never appears to take responsibility for either his own behaviour or his own learning. While he is very strong - he could be a leader - he never listens to the ideas of others. He is very aggressive, vindictive and often nasty with his peers. He has built up a tremendous degree of avoidance towards schoolwork. He has been known however, to go to the special education teacher on the morning of a class test and demand that she go with him to the Learning Centre in order to help him prepare for the test, even if she is going to teach another class. All offers to help him in regard to this very test - which would have been made in the preceding weeks - would have been strongly rejected by him.

If there is a situation of team teaching going on in a classroom and he needs help, he will choose the teacher from whom he wants help, reject any offer of help from the other teacher, and loudly and persistently demand help from the teacher of his choice even if the said teacher is engaged in helping another student. Tito will always choose a male teacher in preference to a female teacher.

Tito believes that he is always absolutely right - his agenda is the only agenda! He is prepared to share his opinion but not your opinion. If he believes something is black and it is white to everyone else, he will not even consider the possibility of modifying his opinion. You can not get through to him that if he were not to engage in a particular activity the whole group would benefit; he has no concept of serving any interest but his own. During weekly clean up time, he has inventive strategies to avoid
community service. On the positive side however, he will take on a mate’s position if it is the same as
his own.

Ruben
Appears to value and practice logical thinking....................................................Seldom
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others.....................................Seldom
Is sensitive to the opinion of others..............................................................Seldom
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others.....Seldom
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way....................................................Seldom
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way......................................................Seldom
Can wait for attention.....................................................................................Seldom
Is able to accept positive criticism.................................................................Seldom
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics..................................................Seldom
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness.............................Seldom

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Ruben were as follows:
Ruben is very immature and seems to experience difficulty in relating to teachers, particularly younger
women, and more particularly when reprimanded. He appears to be preoccupied with himself and he
projects an image of self importance. He also appears to only follow the rules if they suit him, not
because the rules fulfil social requirements.

Tim
Appears to value and practice logical thinking.....................................................Seldom
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others.....................................Seldom
Is sensitive to the opinion of others..................................................................Not at all
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others...Seldom
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way....................................................Seldom
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way......................................................Seldom
Can wait for attention.....................................................................................Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism.....................................................................Seldom
An awareness of, and consideration for ethics..................................................Not at all
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness.............................Seldom

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Tim were as follows:
Teachers are experiencing difficulties handling his surly manner and reluctance to do homework. He
constantly challenges the school rules by anti social behaviour; and by not wearing the correct
uniform, the wearing of jewellery and extreme hairstyles. He has been regularly involved in fights.

Gary
Appears to value and practice logical thinking....................................................Not at all
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others.....................................Not at all
Is sensitive to the opinion of others..................................................................Seldom
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others...Not at all
Relates to teachers in a friendly way.................................................................Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly way......................................................................Usually
Can wait for attention.....................................................................................Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism.................................................................Seldom
An awareness of, and consideration for ethics..................................................Not at all
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness.............................Seldom

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Gary were as follows:
Gary after periods of suspension from school because of serious misbehaviour, has given to both
parents and school authorities, assurances that he would henceforth, try academically and also avoid
committing serious misdemeanours. Gary’s pattern of behaviour however, has been consistently
troublesome.
Note: Gary was only present for the orientation meeting and one other session, as a result of a school-based incident occurring in week two of the project. Both the school authorities and his parents believed that Gary needed a ‘new start’ at another school.

**Peta**

Appears to value and practice logical thinking.................................................. Seldom
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others.................................. Seldom
Is sensitive to the opinions of others................................................................. Seldom
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others... Seldom
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way.................................................... Not at all
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way....................................................... Usually
Can wait for attention......................................................................................... Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism...................................................................... Not at all
An awareness of, and consideration of ethics..................................................... Seldom
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness............................ Seldom

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Peta were as follows:

Peta’s general attitude to schoolwork and particularly to teachers, is of major concern. She gives minimal attention in class and does the minimum amount of work. She rarely brings the right books to class and even more rarely does her assigned homework. She has on several occasions defied teachers in relation to attending detention sessions in order to catch up with work not done. Peta is particularly adroit at challenging the authority of young inexperienced teachers and casual teachers, thus causing significant loss of class time.

Her surly negative manner appears to be gaining momentum, and the Curriculum Co-ordinator has signalled that Peta will not be eligible to gain the school certificate unless she meets assignment and studies requirements.

**Stephen**

Appears to value and practice logical thinking.................................................. Seldom
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others.................................. Seldom
Is sensitive to the opinions of others................................................................. Not at all
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others... Not at all
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way.................................................... Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way....................................................... Usually
Can wait for attention......................................................................................... Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism...................................................................... Seldom
An awareness of, and consideration for ethics.................................................. Seldom
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness............................ Seldom

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Stephen were as follows:

Of major concern over the past three and a half years has been the way Stephen has teased a peer who is height challenged by putting things out of reach. These actions have caused distress both to the young peer concerned and other young people standing nearby. Stephen has been suspended on a number of occasions for misbehaviour, particularly for defying directions given by younger or casual teachers. On several occasions he has come close to being asked to find another school. On the positive side, Stephen has for the most part a pleasant manner and a good sense of humour.

**Allan**

Appears to value and practice logical thinking.................................................. Seldom
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others.................................. Seldom
Is sensitive to the opinions of others................................................................. Seldom
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others... Seldom
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way.................................................... Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way....................................................... Usually
Can wait for attention......................................................................................... Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism...................................................................... Seldom
An awareness of, and consideration for ethics..............................Seldom
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness..............Seldom

The Students' Support Group's additional comments re Allan were as follows:
Allan is referred to the project on the basis of past incidents which involved some serious examples of unethical behaviour along with frequent examples of fighting. Our major reason for including Allan's name as a prospective participant in the Learning Centre research project is the concern that his overall behaviour is deteriorating rapidly.

Tony
Appears to value and practice logical thinking.....................................Seldom
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others.........................Seldom
Is sensitive to the opinions of others.......................................................Usually
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others...Seldom
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way...........................................Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way.................................................Usually
Can wait for attention..........................................................Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism......................................................Usually
An awareness of, and appreciation for, ethics...........................................Seldom
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness.................Usually

The Students' Support Group's additional comments re Tony were as follows:
Tony is very much influenced by the need for attention and acceptance from his peers and this is getting him in progressively more and more trouble. With encouragement Tony can reflect on situations and act on the basis of this reflection. It is for this reason that we are offering his name as being a candidate that could benefit from this Learning Centre research project. We are also aware that Tony's behaviour is deteriorating to an unacceptable level.

Table 4.2 Synthesis of Pre-Study Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Questionnaire</th>
<th>Calio</th>
<th>Zac</th>
<th>Pace</th>
<th>Michi</th>
<th>Tito</th>
<th>Robert</th>
<th>Tim</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>Pete</th>
<th>Stephen</th>
<th>Allan</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values own logical thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to opinions of others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willing to modify opinion</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates to teachers in friendly way</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates to peers in friendly way</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can wait for attention</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to accept positive criticism</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and appreciation for ethics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and appreciation of social appropriateness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY: 1 = Not at All; 2 = Seldom; 3 = Usually; 4 = Almost Always
Reflections on the comments and perceptions of the Students' Support group

While perceptions of students varied, the above table is still significant in the amount of *Not at alls* and *Seldom* that were recorded. While not rating highly, the areas in which the students were best perceived were in that of friendliness to teachers and peers and also in their ability to wait for attention. Countering friendly attitudes to teachers and peers, however, was a perception that this group of students, with the exception of one student, was insensitive to the opinions of others. The least favourable area was in their awareness and appreciation of ethics.

The initial reaction of the researcher was one of surprise at the low esteem in which the Students' Support Group held the prospective participants of the research project. The occasional *Seldom* had been expected but the researcher was unprepared for the number of *Not at alls* that were registered on the questionnaires. The nature of the comments made about the students was also surprising. With only three exceptions, the comments were extremely negative, and the oral comments which accompanied the transfer of the forms indicated attitudes of long-suffering both on the part of the group, and the school executive. The researcher's surprise may also be due in part to the perceived image that she had of the school (and referred to in chapter 3 in the section entitled 'The Site') i.e. as an enlightened educational institution with resources of persistence and patience. Further puzzlement arose out of the awareness that adult caretakers within the school had from the outset of Emeritus High encouraged good relationships with students. These positive relationships were demonstrated by such events as the students returning in numbers on the first days of holidays because they knew the teachers would still be at the school. Courtesy was also highly valued in the culture of the school. It was usually only necessary for an adult to remark on a
student's lack of courtesy to bring about an immediate apology. The researcher had had no previous association with the participants and has always avoided accepting disciplinary roles within the educational field so had not encountered them in a disciplinary capacity. The tentative assumption was made that the negative response of the Students' Support Group lay in their frustration at the resistance of this group of students to fit into the culture of Emeritus.

The group's orientation meeting took place on Thursday the 12th March 1998.

Session 1 2 - 'Orientation'
Date: 12.3.98. Orientation session not recorded. 12 participants present. Notes made directly after the session.

Reflection/analysis

The first double period of 1 hour and 55 minutes allotted to the group was time penalised through the necessity of trying to locate 5 of the 12 participants, who in spite of numerous reminders during the preceding days had failed to turn up at the agreed time. I intended to approach our first meeting in the manner of previous orientations in philosophy courses conducted as Learning Centre projects. These elective courses are very much in demand with more students wanting to do the courses than there are places available. I was therefore accustomed to a relatively high level of enthusiasm among the participating students. The initial withdrawn attitude of the students at the beginning of this orientation meeting was interesting but caused me to often falter in my responses and general presentation.

The Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong required the information letters issued to participants and their caregivers, to be quite specific regarding the

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2 As the writer is a participant observer in this research project the text from this point will move from 3rd to 1st person narration.
nature of the research project. Each letter included the phrase 'the encouragement of reasonableness in young people who were generally perceived as being unreasonable' (see Appendices 2 and 3). I had been concerned about this requirement as there was an anxiety on my part that such specific language might be construed as insulting and provocative to the prospective participants. Nevertheless all invitations were accepted. Indeed, at our first meeting the students looking around at each other asked 'Why us? Why were we invited?' In view of the specific nature of the letter and the behavioural history of the students involved, I was extremely surprised but relieved by this question.

My response was that I had been practising philosophy with young people for some years without formally assessing positive things resulting from these philosophy groups. I was hopeful that learning to use philosophic tools like defining words and terms, challenging the thinking of others, investigating alternate points of view, analysing reasons and values and so on, might transfer over into their general thinking and writing skills and result in overall academic benefits.

In response to their inquiry as to what the word philosophy meant

We looked up several dictionaries in order to find basic definitions. I further followed this up with a short talk of about 30 minutes on some aspects of the history and traditions of western philosophy over the past two thousand five hundred years. I emphasised the human characteristic of wonder particularly in children and philosophers. This talk was given to both de-mystify the word 'philosophy' as well as to engender it with value and relevance in the students minds. Lipman’s paradigm for doing philosophy with children seeks to avoid looking at the history of philosophy, as was previously mentioned in chapter 2. I have found in my teaching practice at this
school, however, that there is value in highlighting the classical links with western philosophy as the students then see it as a tested and worthwhile pursuit.

The customary response to this short talk that I have given to other groups is usually one of keen interest supported by questions. The dynamics of this group were both interesting and counter to my usual experience. I always subscribe to the practice of conducting communities of inquiry in a circle, or if the group is small enough, around a common table so that participants in the inquiry can see each other’s eyes. At this initial meeting eye contact with each other and particularly with me was avoided and, as a result, I found my inability to gauge interest disconcerting.

Zac was focused on a scab on his knee, which he picked at with a pair of scissors. After some time I pointed out that what he was doing to his knee was worrying some of us. He immediately pulled the whole scab off and started to suck the wound. This action brought cries of disgust from members of the group, particularly the two girls.

Micha put her head down onto her arm which was resting on the table, particularly if there was something to look at like a poster or a map of Greece.

Pace with very little contextual relevance made these provocative statements at the end of my talk on the history of Western Philosophy: ‘Men should never cry except at funerals’, and ‘Boys are smarter than girls’. He had also arranged for a friend to come to the Learning Centre in order to join the group, and he found it difficult to accept my sending his friend back to class.
Although the two comments cited above were in no way related to the context of the talk on the history of Western Philosophy; the reaction that they evoked particularly from the two girls, provided me with an opportunity to discuss the concept of attacking someone's argument without attacking them personally. I also used Pace's comments to further discuss the idea of philosophic tools, and quite specifically the challenging of a generalisation. I attempted to do this in a gentle yet objective way, so that Pace would not feel demeaned. He appeared not to be so.

I then explained the nature of a community of inquiry in simple terms, highlighting the aim of equality of membership in a group that sought to forge a community through good thinking practices and mutual co-operation. I particularly endorsed as being worthwhile, the ability to be influenced by the good thinking of others, and as a result of listening to good reasons and so on, to re-think our own positions. I was keen to point out that while I had called the group together, I was anxious to become an equal member and not to hold a position of presidency. They agreed to call me by my first name, Maureen.

**Participant self-assessment**

As interested parties in contributing to the management of their own lives, I proposed that they contribute to the formal evaluation of our meetings by keeping a journal in which they recorded evaluations of their discussions. This could be done by responding to questions relating to the nature of what had emerged in the dialogue and the way that we cooperated or did not cooperate with each other. The student participants agreed to evaluate our meetings.
**Choice of narrative material**

While the above introduction/discussion/information session may appear to have been ordered and sequential, it was otherwise. There was a great deal of banter and some indications of friction among the participants. There were constant interruptions to speakers, and multiple peripheral conversations sometimes took place. I made a point of correcting the students only where it was absolutely necessary; for example, when a student left the group to go and use a computer. In this case my remark was; ‘Tony, you can only leave the group to make a cup of coffee, that seems reasonable doesn’t it?’ I still regretted having to use authority, no matter how disguised. The confusion of the session, along with the students’ distractibility, led me to make a snap decision. The set of student texts *Suki*, (as mentioned in chapter 3) which I had purchased for use in the project because of its age correlation and focus on literature and the arts, was inappropriate to use at this stage.

As a group, we examined copies of Michael Parker’s *The Quest For The Stone*, and Philip Cam’s *Thinking Stories 111* along with several anthologies of Australian Short Stories for young people. The group opted for Philip Cam’s *Thinking Stories 111* along with a short story anthology entitled *Top Drawer*.

**Session 2 - ‘Confusion and Empathy’**

Date: 26.3.98 Session recorded on audio tape. 9 participants present.
Stimulus: Philip Cam’s (1997) *Thinking Stories 111*. This book was written by Cam as a text to promote philosophic discussion among adolescents. It is located in suburban Australia and deals with conventional but problematic situations that young Australians might encounter. *Thinking Stories 111* has an accompanying teacher’s book.
Participants' self assessment

The responses to the questions were handled without any degree of thought and discussion. The participants were convinced that their thinking had been good. On the positive side, several students reminded me 10 minutes before the end of the session that they had to evaluate their discussion in their journal.

Unlike the previous week, no one had to be sent for. Two students were absent however, and one participant, Gary, following an incident earlier in the week, had been asked to leave the school.

What follows is a particularly interesting extract from the day’s session that was prompted by the first story in Cam’s text, which dealt with, among other things, the concept of “fairness” in physical fights. A discussion occurred in which the group explored the possibility of understanding how others might feel.

**Key:**
- R. represents researcher
- - represents a pause
- -- represents a longer pause of more than 2 seconds
- ... represents words that are indecipherable
- :: shows speaker is interrupted
- [ ] unstated referent is bracketed
- ( ) additional information will be put in parenthesis if essential to understanding of the text

**Extract from session 2.**

**Carlo** I’m in a play and I’m homeless. Yesterday when it was cold and raining we were rehearsing outside - what I actually felt - like a poor homeless person.

**Pace** You are poor.

**Carlo** Shut up - it made me realise like what they have to go through - eh maybe it’s worse.

**R** So you felt empathy with them - you felt sympathy with them?

**Carlo** Yeah - so if I win lotto - maybe half of it I’ll give to them.

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Reflection/analysis

The above extract is a pleasing example of interpersonal concern in its empathy and desire to change the poor conditions of other human beings. As such it loosely fits in with the 4th and 5th criteria of reasonableness, i.e. dealing with ethics and social appropriateness. As such, it stands alone in a session bereft of either philosophic content or reasonableness. During this session I was aware that I was watching myself as much, perhaps even more, than I was watching the students. This reflection deals more with my own amazement at the chaotic nature of proceedings and my own unhappiness about this, as a personal emphasis in this research had not been my intention.

The students continuously spoke over the top of each other in spite of constant reminders about the impracticability of doing so, and the result was chaos. There was constant movement from one subject to another without any degree of intellectual rigour. In an effort to work towards equality, I relinquished the authority that I might otherwise use in a conventional classroom situation, an authority that I have never had to assert in a Learning Centre philosophy group before. I found on listening to the tape, however, that I was manipulative and perhaps patronising, in that I tended to overpraise any sign of logical thinking on the part of the participants. The tape also revealed constant linguistic and relational repairing, on my part, as well as summarising and scaffolding.

An indication of the constrained financial circumstances of these young people is indicated by the response to my question, ‘Are we always free to choose which way we will go?’ was taken quite literally by Ruben when he said, ‘No, if you have no money you can’t catch the train or anything’.
Session 3 - 'Modest Increase In Rigour of Participants' Self Assessment'

Date: 2.4.98. Session recorded on audio tape. 10 participants present.
Stimulus: As in session 2, Philip Cam's (1997) Thinking Stories 111 was used.

Participants' self assessment

The response to the student questions were handled in a spirit of good will and banter, with the following responses receiving more than the basic 'yes' or 'no' of session 2.

Did we engage in self correction? The participants cited two examples of where they had corrected themselves.

Did we clarify meanings? Received a 'Not really, we never stick to the point'. This response is at odds with their 'yes' of the previous week.

Did we draw relevant inferences? 'No,' said the participants, 'we just yelled at each other.'

Did we make considered judgements? 'Oh Yeah!' (Sarcastically).

Did we help each other? Yeah, we got coffee and tea for each other!

Did we show respect for each other's views? Absolutely no.

Reflection/analysis

What I was specifically looking for in the sessions were examples (promoted by philosophical discussion) of the five criteria of reasonableness as outlined in chapter 1 and more succinctly enunciated in the statements of the questionnaire given to the Students Support Group. There had little been little evidence of this to this point excepting Carlo's statement of empathy as reported on in the previous session. General chaos continued. What was heartening and constituted progress in group cooperation, however, was the marginally extra time the students took to fill out their journal. It was not just a case of getting the answers out of the way; they did
remember one or two examples of speech events on which to base their responses. For example in response to ‘Did we engage in self correction?’ the participants after a brief discussion of several minutes, cited two examples of self-correction which led them to instruct the student filling out the journal to put ‘yes’. They had yet to realise that one or two examples did not constitute a pattern.

While I invited the student participants at our first meeting to call me by my first name, they did not really take up the offer to do so. Initially they appeared to avoid calling me anything at all, and if they did use my name it was in a very constrained way. By this session they had reverted to ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs. Mac’. It would seem that as Horowitz contends it is the interactions between the researcher and the researched that determines the role that the researcher plays (Horowitz 1986, p.410). I was uncertain as to what that emerging role was. Perhaps their reluctance to call me by my first name was a product of social conditioning? It might be a signal that I was distanced from their school reality? It might indeed be a signal that they wanted me at a distance.

Since the nature of philosophy is very much concerned with the asking of questions, I had been experimenting with the idea that the cooperative endeavour of the community itself could be measured in terms of referring to a list of 25 open Socratic questions composed by Robert Fisher (1996). Fisher in this list offers the questions as a means of measuring cooperativeness in a group. It was difficult, however, to determine from the transcripts whether the participants were asking questions or making statements. Carlo for instance said in session two: ‘The only reason that we are here is to reproduce eh.’ The use of the definite article ‘the’ at the beginning of his sentence establishes the sentence as a statement; but the ‘eh’ at the conclusion,
along with his rising voice tone indicate that he could be calling on the group to respond to his statement as if it were a question. There are numerous such examples in the audio tapes to this point. Such an example is Carlo’s empathetic feelings towards homeless men, as reported on in the reflection of the previous session. Carlo’s empathy was articulated via a statement not a question. If the increase in questions emanating from a group is used to measure that group’s growth in philosophic endeavour, such a method could not be applied to this group of young people as their questions are often indistinguishable from statements.

Session 4 - ‘Emptying the Cup of Resentment’

Date: 10.4.98 Session recorded on audio tape. 9 participants present.
Stimulus: Philip Cam’s Thinking Stories 111

Participants’ self assessment

Again it was heartening that the participants evaluated ‘their philosophic growth’ with slightly less certainty than in previous sessions and demonstrated that they were becoming more aware of the requirements of a philosophic dialogue. This lack of certainty was reflected in the modality of their responses. There were two examples in the responses which indicate that at least two of the students (Stephen and Pace) saw the answers as being dependent on their own individual contribution to the discussion.

Did we engage in self-correction? ‘Yes - well no. Maybe once. Well I did’, said Stephen

Did we listen to each other? ‘Yes because we were able to argue -- but we only half listened’ (one participant but agreed to by all).

Did we share the discussion? ‘No - because I spoke too much’ (Pace).
Did we show respect for each other’s views? ‘Yep - Nope -- but kind of - no (different participants) - change to no’ (eventual general call for ‘no’).

An extended extract of session 4 appears below as an early example of the discourse of the group. Retrospectively I came to realise that this session was something of a turning point in our relationships with one another in that straight talking occurred. This session was open in statements of racism, resentment against teachers and resentment in many cases against each other. In some respect, the student participants ‘threw down the gauntlet’ challenging me as a representative of “authority”, interested perhaps in where I would position myself.

Understanding of the tone of the extended transcript is enhanced by the awareness of the multi-cultural composition of this group of young people. As stated at the outset of this chapter, English was a second language for six of the twelve participants. Their places, or their parents’ places of origin, ranged from Nigeria, Spain, Poland, and Lebanon to Tonga in the South Pacific. Eight of the participants had white skin tones and four had black skin tones.

After reading pages 3 and 4 of Philip Cam’s (1997) Thinking Stories 111, which dealt with the interaction of a boy and his younger sister. The sister is remonstrating with her brother about a fight that he and a companion have had with another boy

**R**  OK. Anybody got anything significant out of that - jumping out and biting them on the nose?

**Stephen**  Yeah. How come the girl said that just because Neil said like that what’s his name - yeah - Neil’s friend - he goes um - I been in a fight with a black guy and the girl straight away thought it was an Aboriginal?

**R**  That’s my question too. Anybody want to write [the questions] on the board?

**Zac**  Yeah I will.
R Stephen asks: Is it worse - is it worse if you beat up a black person or a white person?

Tim Yeah it is.

Multiple bids to speak
R Wait a minute let’s get the question on the board.
Stephen What if you are both black?
Allan Specially if they come after you with their spears and boomerangs.

General student laughter
R What we have got to do is think about our answers because what we are trying to do is be intelligent in our arguments - so really think about what we are saying. Is it worse if you beat up a black fella or a white fella?

Tito Worse. If you beat up a black fella cause the black fella will get all his black fella mates.

Pace Nope - right Tito? (Threatening tone)
Stephen What about all your white fella mates?
R You want to keep it [the question] as is? - - Any other questions?
Ruben What difference does it make if you are Aboriginal?
Stephen Yeah how come the girl thought straight away that the guy was Abo? (Repeating his question)
R Do you just want to discuss this thing? You don’t want to put up a whole lot of other questions? Just the one?

Allan Yep.
R All right. OK.
Allan Why does if - a black person say we gonna have a fight with a white person, the black person always says I gonna get my mates and we’ll beat you up cause you’re white? You know they think....

Stephen Cause they’re dogs - and not just good enough for a fight.
Tim It’s the same thing about white people.
R Allan says they always say that. Do they always say that?
Allan Not all of them.
Tim It’s the same thing for white people - one group says they will beat the other because of such and such.

Zac Some people bash you cause you’re white - in A. [here suburb is mentioned]
Ruben Eh! Now you go to B [here suburb is mentioned] you’ll get bashed
Pace Wogs or black people always bash white people - OK
R Do you really mean that’s good?
Pace Yeah.
R Why is it good?

Multiple comments that are indistinguishable
Pace Headbutting is something white people don’t like you know.
Ruben You can’t say you hate all white people.
Stephen I think he’s a bit outdated - a bit out-numbered.
Pace You can [say you hate all white people] who says you can’t?
Carlo You are a bit out-numbered here man - if you want to keep going you know.
Pace I am keeping - I am going [on].
Ruben Can I say something?
R Hey guys - Tito (several participants had risen to their feet).
Pace Do you think I have Australia on me?
Stephen I thought we were gonna have to take you outside.
R This guys is what I didn’t want to do. I am kind of being a teacher here and I would rather be....

Carlo A member.
R Yeah - A member of the community.
Pace Have you got a membership card?
R Well the membership card will probably be when you guys say to me – no you have been talking to long. It’s our turn - and you said things - in a nice way - respectful to me as you would be to each other. That would be an indication of my membership.

R Pace has said he hates all white people.
Several voices He’s racist!
Stephen So black people say it to whites - it’s the same thing see.
R It’s Ruben’s turn. Ruben.
Pace So a black person is going to go up to a white person and say – Oh you milk chocolate or - you milk pig.

General student laughter

R. OK. Ruben?
Ruben I could say that’s like a stereotype. Say my - my mum like wouldn’t let me go out when some person like a mass murderer or something. I say no all people are like that. You can’t say the whole area is like that. Like there might be some good people in B [here suburb is mentioned]- you can’t say the whole of B. [here suburb is mentioned] is filled with Aborigines who are going to get back on you.

Zac Yeah that’s dribble [spoken to Ruben].
R Right. Your turn [to Tito].
Stephen Go do a door knock Ruben.
R You next - and you next. Hand down - we have registered that you want to speak.

Stephen People fighting - black - white (spoken reflectively).
R All right - Tito
Tito You can’t say much about white people cause black people are racist too.

Multiple bids to speak

R Sorry - sorry - we are going to listen. I am going to look after you as I know you will look after other people. Tito wants to talk here now – so we’re gonna listen.

R Pace - Pace (a request for side discussion to cease).
Zac Can I go now?
Tito All - you know how you said all white people are racist - well it’s the opposite because black people are racist too.

Stephen Not opposite (pointing out that Tito’s statement was illogical).
Carlo How are they?

Multiple bids to speak

Ruben Everybody is racist in their own way.
Tito See you just called me milk chocolate [ to Pace]

General student laughter

Stephen It’s still being racist but [to Pace].
Zac As an example?

Multiple asides to each other
Can I interrupt? First of all - Pace - Pace - Pace (a request for him to settle) OK. It’s Tim’s turn - but before we give Zac a turn I would like to congratulate you [Zac] on something you said. You said then - you said - give me an example.

Yeah.

That’s really good thinking - give me an example. That’s good. OK. Zac.

What about - what about - you don’t have to say things to be a racist. What about when black people just pick a white person out of a crowd and bash him for nothing.

What? (Incredulously)

What about when black people pick on a white boy cause he’s there. That’s being racist.

The most things on the news is black people [Black people in trouble].

How is it? Not white people?

Thanks - yep (indicates next speaker).

But what do you call black? What do you call black but ... What do you call black? Do you call just African and Aboriginals black?

Any person with skin like mine.

(Repeating Pace that he Tony, is present).

Not black - brown. (A courtesy to Tony).

Pace - Pace (calling for him to settle) OK. Stephen.

What’s black? Is Ruben black?

(Sequencing bids to speak) Stephen - Carlo - and we have got to hear people out - not just give them a chance to say one statement - they might want to stop for a second or two and then say some more.

Take a breath.

OK. Go.

Is Ruben black? and Carlo black?

Ruben is half caste.

Hey - I’m olive.

So what’s that mean? That means that black people are gonna bash Ruben and so are white people because he’s in-between?

They’re not gonna bash Ruben because he’s half caste.

So that means that no white people will bash him either.

Exactly. That racist - that’s racist - that’s racism without no words.

.... when people call you black nigger or tease you about your skin colour. [addressing this comment to Zac] What did you say yesterday? - No what did you say yesterday? - Something racist right?

Yeah.

There you go. Did I say you milk checker or dairy product or anything to you?

No but ::::

I was teasing you but I wasn’t saying....

But it’s more getting bashed the shit [out of than] being called a nigger or whatever.

What about skip?

OK who’s next?

Yeah.
Ruben - Ruben’ next.
Ruben  I think - I think sometimes people see cause they’re different than others they think they have a privilege cause they’re different. But what we’ve all got to remember is we are all equal - it’s just a different skin slapped on top of us.
Stephen  Yeah That’s what makes the difference - but....
Ruben  We’re still brothers hey.
Carlo  No.

General laughter

Carlo  Miss....
R  No - refer to the group.
Carlo  The group. This is going to do the topic a bit. If Adam and Eve right? Just say they were white right? How come - how do you get Chinese people like that?
Stephen  Because Adam - Adam and his daughter and Eve and his son.

General indistinguishable comments ( followed by researcher’s explanation of myths and skin pigmentation).

R  OK We’ll continue with this? Who’s next?
Pace  Me and Carlo.
Zac  Can I say something? If you get called - like a nigger or something - I don’t reckon it would hurt more than getting bashed by a bunch of black people.
Pace  What if they [white people] didn’t get racist they wouldn’t have to get bashed.

General indistinguishable comments

Tito  What’s a racist bloke?
Pace  You want to know a racist bloke? White people are racist blokes.
R  All white people?
Tito  So Father X’s [mention is made of parish priest] a racist bloke?
Pace  No.

Several voices in unison  He’s white

General indistinguishable comments

Pace  If he wasn’t in that priest thing he probably would be as well.
R  So when you say probably - you’re saying he isn’t now? So you have found an exception?
Pace  No I’m not saying he isn’t now - he could be - I don’t know - he could be or not.
Allan  How do you know all white people are racist then?
Pace  I haven’t seen all the white people in the world but all the white people I’ve seen are racist.

Zac & R in unison  Me?
Pace  Yes.

General laughter

Allan  When did I say racist shit?
Pace  Of course - you’re white [referring to researcher].
Pace  Do you want me to give you an example?
R  Give me an example of when I behaved in a racist way?
Pace  I’m not saying you [referring to researcher].
R  Well we have one person that isn’t racist (laughing).
Pace  Miss [here Pace names a teacher] is full on racist.
Miss [here teacher is named by researcher] is not racist OK.

She went ballistic at me because someone was spitting stuff at the poster of Cathy Freeman [an Aboriginal athlete] - and she went at me for it - and I told her where to go.

Oh yeah! You Zac and ....

So there’s an example of her [referring to the teacher accused of racism] fighting against racism Pace - how do you cope with that?

Yeah Miss, but that could have been just to protect herself.

She needs a punch in the head.

Pardon? What did you say? No - don’t tell me I don’t want to know (what you said).

I swear I’m gonna do it (punch the teacher in the head)

And he’s only been here about a month.

Look guys :::

But not every teacher you should expect us to like you know [addressed at researcher].

No but :::

Exactly.

I think I’m gonna back you up [to Tim re. punching teacher in the head].

OK Sometimes there are people that you can love in your family but that you don’t necessarily like.

I don’t like my brother and I don’t love him neither.

Yes you do don’t worry.

If you don’t you gonna be crying your head off.

Bull - If you seen all the things he done....

You know how Miss [names teacher] hates people doing....

Sometimes there are people that you can love in your family but that you don’t necessarily like.

I don’t like my brother and I don’t love him neither.

Yes you do don’t worry.

If you don’t you gonna be crying your head off.

Bull - If you seen all the things he done....

You know how Miss [names teacher] hates people doing....

I’m not gonna talk about another teacher OK

Nah - you know how teachers in this school - I’ll say teachers - I already said her name - Miss [here names teacher] Teachers - you know how when someone does a burnout in front of the school or something and the teachers go off - they go - ‘that’s stupid’

And then the teachers do a burn out but.

I’ve seen the teachers like take off and do a burn out out of the carpark. I can’t wait till I get my licence.

But that’s not all teachers

See I think that what we are talking about here this morning is we can’t say all - Ruben - Tim we can’t say all [to stop side conversation].

[No you can’t because you just said I wasn’t [racist] so - you said I wasn’t so how can you say all?]

Can’t talk because of biscuit.

[to Pace] you got shot.

You say all but like Miss - I don’t want to be rude right? - cause I’m talking to you as a member not as a teacher.

Good.

You’re racist in your way Miss maybe....
Stephen: You don’t express it.
Carlo: You might not think that you’re racist; you might think like - I don’t want to use....
Pace: Go boy. Go boy.
R: Pace. Pace [to calm him down] - But then could you say the same thing about Pace? Is what he is saying here racist against white people?
Stephen: Yes he is - he called me white wood - he called me dairy product.
Carlo: Everybody is racist in their own way. Do you think that you are racist?
Pace: I think I’m racist against white people - yes - but nobody else.
Stephen: You’re not racist against blacks? How many people in the world are white?
Pace: Yeah - but if black people had a fight with white people....
Tito: We would eat black people alive. What would you say if you were white?
Stephen: Yeah! Look at all the species you got. [referring here to his previous question to Pace: you’re not racist against blacks?]
Tito: Pace what would you say if you were white?
Stephen: And who won? First Fleet or Abos?
Pace: [referring to Tito’s question] I am not white. I don’t want to imagine myself as white. I don’t want to even think that I’m white because if I was white I would not be here right now. I would be 6ft. under. (Spoken dramatically).
Stephen: Because a black guy would kill you?
General laughter
Ruben: I think that Pace is trying to follow more of an image - an image of where all hard people don’t like white people and they don’t associate with white people.
Pace: Why should they. Look at what they did to us before? Now then everyone was racist.
Zac: What’s that got to do with us now?
Tito: Who starts the wars - who starts the wars?
Pace: What? How come white people always get involved in wars?
General indistinguishable comments
Stephen: So we can kick your black ass. (In north American accent).
Tito: If you hate white people so much why are you in Australia?
Pace: Did I choose? Can I say ‘Mum I want to go back to Ghana.’ ‘OK I give you money.’
Stephen: I’ll sell you my canoe - row back - see you later.(This comment - towards the end of the sessions that is - develops as an in-group well intentioned joke).
Pace: My mum said I have to stay here till I get my education. Then if I want to go back - and I am going back. But before I leave some white people are going to be bashed.
Ruben: So say you - say someone is half white and half Negro - right?
Allan: Half-caste.
Tim: So who gets to bash them?
Pace: They’re not going to fight for anyone.
Tim: So they’ll never get bashed? Ruben been bashed.
Pace: All the half-caste people I know hate white people.
Ruben: Do they - why?
Pace: Chris hates white people.
Ruben  Chris who?
Stephen  Chris is nearly black but.
Ruben  Chris who?
Pace  Nagle.
Ruben  He doesn’t hate white people you stupid....
Pace  You want to make a bet?
Ruben  Yes.
Pace  Do you want to make a bet?
Ruben  Yes.
Carlo  Who knows him more?
Ruben  I’ve known him for a while.
R  Let’s stay reasonable here - remember let’s not attack people – let’s attack their argument.

Reflection/analysis

It became “clearer” after this unruly session that I had tried to retire into equal status with the participants before it was possible to do so. It would be interesting, however, to see if a community of inquiry could evolve with ‘difficult’ adolescents with a minimal amount of adult guidance...just role modelling. It is obvious however, that one school year is insufficient for such a project and furthermore, facilitating improvement in the quality of their lives was of paramount concern.

My intention, therefore, was from the next session (after the school holidays) to gently and firmly intervene more often in order to facilitate more orderly sessions. This intention was underscored with the hopeful expectation that I could gradually withdraw...or even better, be told to withdraw by student insistence that my position was too prominent.

There was a niggling worry, however, that my plan to assert additional authority might ‘kill’ the dynamic language that the participants had been using, which at times was both confusing and amassing in its elliptical and allusive nature (Edwards and Mercer, 1987). This use of non-standard English, this code-switching, might have
occurred because the students were organising ownership of their group. Or conversely, they may have felt comfortable about using the language of their own subculture. I personally, had never heard it used so strongly at school before - and never in class. While this group of young people was not manifesting indications of being a true community of inquiry, most were meshing into some sort of recognisable group. This was particularly borne out by the fact that when Tito left the Learning Centre for a few minutes during this session, the rest of the group was unanimous in the demand: ‘Why does he have to be with us? Can’t we get rid of him?’ I concluded from this demand that while Tito was not wanted, the rest of the group, in spite of their antagonism towards each other, as borne out by the extended extract, wanted to be there together.

During this session I was also interested in the comment made by Pace when he insisted on being allowed to speak: ‘I have to get out what I want to say before I forget it.’ It would appear that Pace who was particularly prominent in this session was not open to his opinion being changed too readily, at least on the issue of race relations which formed the basis of our discussion. Pace had an opinion which he wanted to state, an opinion which he was not keen to modify via the contributions of others.

Recognition of differences

There had been concern from the outset of the project, that because the participants were coming from a school-based background where they were considered ‘difficult’ students, there was a danger that the sessions might be driven by a therapeutic need to discuss real or imagined grievances. This fourth session would seem to demonstrate that the students did indeed have grievances against the school administration, and
also differences with each other which they wanted to air, particularly differences based in racism. David Bohn in his discussion on the nature of dialogue, reinforces social constructivism in general when he says that ‘a society is based on shared meanings which constitute the culture. If we don’t share coherent meaning, we do not make much of a society’ (1989, p.7). He would see the first step in the creation of a discussion group as residing in the recognition of differences. The recognition of differences, he maintains, ‘will bring about a certain order. If we can work this through we will then have a coherent meaning in the group, and hence the beginning of a new kind of culture’ (1989, p.7). The working through of these differences is perceived by Bohn as being an emptying process, he states ‘The cup has to be empty to hold something’ (p.5).

Session 5 - ‘Some Turn Taking’

Date: 8.5.98. Session recorded on audio tape. 9 participants present.
Stimulus: Philip Cam’s (1997) Thinking Stories 111

Participants’ self assessment

This session saw the participants respond to all 18 of the questions adapted from Philip Cam’s list of questions relating to the quality of a philosophic discussion. Their answers were arrived at in consensus via a general discussion. They took the task seriously and in general, they perceived the session to have been one in which they had manifested elements of cooperativeness towards each other.

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Between the fourth session and this fifth session, Tim’s parents were asked by the school administration to place him at another school. The participants now numbered 10. Tim, however, visited me at the school eight months later to ask if I could help
him to be accepted back at school (see section entitled ‘Tim’ in reflection of session 27).

This first session of term two was one week late due to my absence following corrective surgery on my foot. The participants chided me and said that they had missed not having a session during the previous week. There was a noticeable improvement in their cooperativeness during this session or indeed I may have become more accustomed to the dynamic nature of their interactions. As discussed in the reflection/analysis section of the previous session, I also surmised that session 4 had provided an opportunity of catharses in which the participants aired many of their grievances against each other, particularly in relation to racism. During this fifth session the participants for the most part listened to the narrative, and the sole beanbag which each participant tried to claim each week was under the insistence of Carlo, Ruben and Micha, placed under my bandaged foot. I had not asked for this to happen.

The following transcript shows that participants in this session were very interested in discussing death and exploring the possibility of reincarnation.

**Extract from session 5**

| Tito | Excuse me Miss can I say something - Carlo Carlo (calling on Carlo to be silent and listen to what he had to say). Like in my family right - since like 94 since my brother died like my sister had a baby - naw my uncle died first then straight away after that my sister had a baby and then my brother died and straight away after that my sister had a baby again. And then like - my Nan died and straight after that ::: |
| Ruben | She had another baby? |
| **Some general mild laughter** |
| Tito | No no no no my brother’s girlfriend had a baby and I reckon its like reincarnation. |
| RDo you? |
| Tito | Yeah like their spirits - like if they died I reckon like umh first my sister’s first child my nephew - I reckon that his spirit is my uncle’s I reckon.... |
| RWell.... |
| Pace | Did your uncle die? |

94
Tito Just before his birth (Tito’s nephew’s birth).
R I don’t agree with that but....
Zac Are you the....
Tito Naw.
Zac Is he in the shed?
Tito Yeah - he hung himself.
Zac But can I just say something.
Pace Is that before his [uncle’s] birthday or birth? [of nephew].
Carlo It would be a pretty lucky person who gets my soul (This seemed to be said to alleviate the pain of Tito’s revelation).

General laughter
Micha It was the same with his brother (Referring to the death of Tito’s brother).
Tony Like my brother - a week before I was born - terrible.
R Tito I don’t agree with you but there are millions of people in the world - who would say that’s possible [Referring to Tito’s theory of reincarnation].
Tito Like I reckon - like I reckon - like his soul is someone from your family from the past.
R Do you?
Tito Yeah like it’s from your family.
Zac Miss can I say something?
Ruben Bull....

Multiple bids to speak
R OK you two guys down the back who keep talking (calling for them to stop talking to each other and join the dialogue of the group).
Ruben If you say it has to be someone from your family....
Tito It doesn’t have to be - but that’s what I think that’s my point of view.
Ruben OK I’ll just show you how your point of view can be.... I’ll just change it a bit. All right - say well there used to be less people now there’s more people more people doubling and doubling in what - three years?
Micha Cause more people are having :::
Ruben Exactly - there are more people:::

Multiple bids to speak
R What you say might be changed by what he says - if you listen - so listen (trying to get order so that Ruben can finish what he wants to say).
Pace OK.(Pace’s comment here as likewise Zac’s in regard to Pace, were sincere, they were not sarcastic).
Zac Because he’s very smart you know.
R You’re all smart
Ruben If there -if there were less people in your family back maybe twenty years ago and your family has doubled over twenty years how can there be enough souls or spirits for that family?

Reflection/analysis

In this session the students took more control over the management of turn taking, indeed they all wanted to be the person to nominate speakers. ‘Let us be the teacher’
said Carlo. I noticed that the difficulty of the task caused each ‘person in charge’ to surrender the position after about five minutes!

There was a discourse relating to cloning, and the nature of a ‘human soul’ which was generally pleasing in its efforts to grapple with ethical and metaphysical issues. There were also during the course of this session, many calls from participants to let other participants finish what they were saying. This was a definite progression in terms of social appropriateness and interest in what a peer was saying.

The extract from the transcript of this session demonstrates how Ruben’s initial response to Tito’s ideas about reincarnation was quite dismissive with his use of the word ‘Bull’. He moderated his reaction a few exchanges later thereby demonstrating a pleasing sensitiveness to a peer’s opinion by saying: ‘OK I’ll show you how your point of view can be - I’ll just change it a bit.’ Ruben then proceeded to extend Tito’s idea out to its conclusion thereby demonstrating in a considerate way, its illogical nature. In this session, the participants for the first time showed a desire to explore the nature of death, a theme that they often returned to in other sessions. Zac’s and Tito’s use of the present tense in referring to Tito’s uncle who committed suicide in the back shed was also very interesting and suggested that they thought that the uncle’s spirit may linger around in the back shed?

Zac Is he in the shed?
Tito Yeah - he hung himself.

This extract also shows for the first time in the transcripts, the hurt that some of these young people are carrying through family suicides and deaths.
There was also a great deal of good intentioned but slightly risqué fun during this session, particularly in regard to hypothesising about the sexual life of a Siamese twin who, according to one of the participants, fathered 17 children! I came to accept that the age and interests of the participants led them to often bring the subject of sex into their discussions.

Session 6 - ‘Subject of Death Reintroduced’

Date: 13.5.98    Session recorded on audio tape.  9 participants present.
Stimulus: Philip Cam’s (1997) Thinking Stories 111.

Participants’ self assessment

In answering questions related to their quality of discussion, the students wrote down nine successive no’s. They stopped at this point and after some discussion agreed on the following as their response to session 6:

‘We could not answer the questions today because no good thinking has occurred.’

I as the researcher, would partially disagree with the negative value that they put on their discussion.

This session was held in the library as the school’s Learning Centre was being used for other purposes, and the session time was reduced to only one period. The participants complained about the reduced time. We were ‘accosted’ by five students at the beginning of our session who had previously done a philosophy course with me as a Learning Centre project. They tried to “trick” their way into the group, and this was good as the participants in the project saw philosophy as being very much valued by “good” students. The participants sought reassurance from me that other students would not usurp them!
When it was time to address the student questions they decided after a succession of 9 ‘no’s’ that while they had had a lot of fun they had not done any worthwhile thinking. They made a comment in their journal to this effect. The transcription of the tape revealed otherwise with quite a few instances of thoughtful dialogue, particularly at the beginning of the session.

Extracts from session 6

**Ruben**  How can we compare death to sleep if we don’t know what death is like?

**R**

I kinda get irritated when I see on gravestones rest in peace because I never want to rest in peace - they say eternal rest grant unto them - what’s eternal rest? I don’t want eternal rest - I want eternal activity. I want eternal dynamic activity - eternal thinking.

**Ruben**

I think that’s OK. Eternal get away from your parents.

**General laughter**

**R**  But - like there’s the notion isn’t there of [death being like]sleep - may they rest in peace - sleep in - sleep in Christ and so on - how does anyone - does that irritate anyone?

**Micha**  Never has before - but now that you mention it - umm.

**Carlo**  I’ve never actually thought about it but....

**Stephen**  You just think it’s nice to say that stuff.

**Micha**  How can you rest in peace

**Zac**  Rest in sporting activities.

**R**

Something - something Stephen said- -something Stephen said there (earlier) was applicable to the story I think

**Stephen**  See that’s what I was thinking about (Stephen here anticipates what the researcher is going to say as he nodded while I made the following statement).

**R**

The mother is saying put her [the cat] to sleep and the kid is saying - the kid is saying - no you’re not talking about sleep you’re talking about death.

**Reflection/analysis**

In the first extract, Ruben challenges a comparison between sleep and death. This challenge on logical grounds is an example of how the participants (particularly Ruben) were beginning to develop a philosophic sense, in that he questioned
definitive statements made by fellow participants about phenomena of which they had no knowledge.

The second extract serves to show how the participants appear to have become more open to areas of thought that they had not explored before as is demonstrated by Micha’s: ‘Never has before - but now that you mention it - umm’; and Carlo’s ‘I’ve never actually thought about it but....’

The section of the stimulus story, Cam’s Thinking Stories 111 (1997), used at this session dealt with human responsibility for domestic animals. The participants were not concerned about the possibility of the cat in the story having to be put down. In other groups that I have facilitated, the possible putting down of this cat did constitute an ethical problem. For this group the putting down of an animal, particularly a cat, was not an ethical issue with them. They left the issue of the cat in the story to again discuss human mortality.

In the next small extract Tito relates back to the information that he and Micha had shared with us in session 5 i.e. that his uncle had hanged himself in the shed and that ‘it was the same with his brother’. (Tito reveals in latter sessions that his brother had actually died from a drug overdose). His words appear to indicate that he is concerned that they have not, and cannot find rest and probably also indicate why he expressed a belief in a reincarnation process in the previous session:

Tito Like you can’t say like rest in peace - like some people like they hang themselves and that’s like there not sleeping and that’s not sleeping like from natural causes - it’s just like disturbed sleep....

99
The general improved air of friendliness along with more willingness to listen to each other in this session seemed to indicate that we were bonding as a group and that the aggressive edge of earlier sessions - particularly sessions 1 to 4 - was diminishing.
CHAPTER 5

'DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE NOISE MISS, THEY'Re THINKING'

The extracts taken from this point appear to offer indications of progression in community and more ownership of the sessions by the student participants. It is from this point that the student participants bid for more control over the stimulus material. The same format that was employed in chapter 4 for reporting on the sessions is followed.

Session 7 - 'Death Again, and Group Rejection of Established Philosophical Stimulus Material'

Date: 20.5.98  Session recorded on audio tape.  9 participants present.
Stimulus: Philip Cam's (1997) Thinking Stories 111. Michael Leach's (1997) *The Great Apes: Our Face in Nature's Mirror*. This text by Leach was introduced in the second part of the session after the recess break because the students had several times alluded to the theory of evolution.

Participants' self assessment

The participants took some considerable time in their evaluation of this session. They were concerned to state – particularly in reference to the question: Did we make appropriate comparisons? – that they had supported their positions by including relevant stories. They saw their efforts in this session as being superior to those of previous weeks.

The narrative was still located in the section of Philip Cam's story where a family is trying to decide whether to put down their sick pet cat or not. This inclination to talk about death was further 'encouraged' by the burial that day of a local fourteen year old boy who had died from stab wounds to the stomach; and who was personally known to two of the participants. It had emerged over the preceding seven weeks that five of the ten participants had suffered the death of a sibling, and one participant had lost a parent while others had lost people close to them – Tito and his uncle for
example. While I would perhaps have been happier about another topic area, I neither encouraged nor discouraged their choice of this discussion topic. The dialogue centred on whether they should die before someone they loved died, particularly their parents. The following extract shows that Peta and Tito were hopeful, for different reasons, that their parents would die first. Peta saw her parents dying before her as being less problematic because she did not want them to experience again the grief of losing a child. Tito, on the other hand, saw his survival beyond his parents as allowing him to carry on their beliefs and values. While Tito does not allow for the formation of a set of beliefs and values different from that of his parents, it is none the less praiseworthy in recognition that his parents’ beliefs and values were worthwhile.

Extracts from session 7

Tito  I reckon they [parents] should die first so that I can believe in their stuff and carry on with what they did.
Peta  My mum and dad have been through enough, they’ve already lost one kid. I don’t think that umm - they would like ....
Pace  At birth or older?
Peta  Older - I don’t think they’ll be able to cope with another kid dying on them.

Pace’s concern about the age of Peta’s sibling at death relates to his own mother’s loss of her young brothers, an account which emerged in a later session.

Ruben, who had originally stated that he would rather die before his mother, showed that he could change his mind because of the thinking of others, that is the thinking of Peta and Tito. He reasoned that his mother had lived through the death of his father and brother; and then when his mother’s sister had come out from Lebanon to comfort the family, she also had died tragically in a car accident. He, like Peta, did not want his mother to endure another family death.

R  It seems to me - it seems to me that what we are talking about here - tell me if you think I’m right here - but are we worried about causing pain to
other people? So we would rather die? Rather than see our parents suffer
the pain is that right? But Peta says :::

Ruben
That it's reversed.

R
Because she doesn’t want to see her parents:::

Peta
Yes suffer....

Pace
Suffer....

R
Suffer the pain - so I think that we’re talking about really caring about
people here - you are all concerned about your parents and I have sat here
on other occasions and heard you say some pretty rough things about your
parents but when it comes down to the crunch what you are concerned
about is that they not suffer. Hey that’s interesting isn’t it?

Recognition by participants that it was interesting.

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After recess

R
What I’ve brought today - because you guys are always getting onto
evolution - you know we’ve spoken about it and some of you are
Catholics and you’re worried that you’re kinda betraying your faith if you
believe in evolution - no no it’s OK.

Ruben
I always find that like - that science and faith kind of - science kinda says
like no to faith like how god gave Moses or whatever - the rainbow - and
then we find out in say science that there are six different colours make
the air and when the water comes into the sunlight it miffs it up into
different colours which give us the rainbow it kinda like - says that all that
we believed in can be otherwise.

What followed was a short explanation of the process of evolution. The researcher
also showed the participants the cover of a BBC production tape entitled ‘Stephen
Hawking’s Universe’ (1998) with the promise to run it as a stimulus for philosophic
discussion if they so wished at another time.

Pace
But will we understand the words he uses?

R
Yes because you’re smart kids and you’ve got to stop thinking of
yourselves - you’re very smart - very smart all right - and you’re got to
have more confidence in yourselves - with a little scaffolding from me of
course you’ll understand this - maybe we can fast forward some sections -
but you will find it interesting because I’m starting to read these stories
and I’m starting to get the impression that maybe you think that they are a
bit babyish for you and you want to get into something that tests your
intellect.

Peta
This book is boring.

General backing up of Peta’s statement.

R
If you think this book is boring – let’s put it aside.

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Reflection/analysis: Vygotsky/Bruner/Shor and Freire

In order to conform to the requirements of the facilitator within Lipman’s paradigm
for a community of inquiry, I had tried in previous sessions to down play a
teacher/adult role. However, in the context of this session it was appropriate to adopt a teacher/adult role for I was conscious throughout of the thinking of Vygotsky (1934), Bruner (1996) and Shor and Freire (1987) which I saw as having aspects of compatibility.

I was conscious throughout of Vygotsky and Bruner's premise that it is the people in a child's world who promote development; and also their assertion that the only worthwhile learning occurs when a child is drawn on beyond where she or he would be without intervention. I saw the direction that the participants took in this session as indicating a need for specific adult guidance. I was also becoming increasingly aware that the area that appeared in most need of scaffolding in these young people was confidence; a belief in their own powers of perception. The students needed to be aware that I had real confidence in their intellectual abilities, and in addition, that they had the right to reject a learning stimulus because it was not inspiring in the light of their personal or corporate experience. Ruben and Carlo stayed behind after the session to discuss a point that had come up that morning. This gave me a further opportunity to build confidence by revisiting a discussion that we had had in session 2 in which Carlo had demonstrated compassionate empathy with homeless men. I explained that in so doing he had demonstrated higher human thought and feeling. Ruben remembered the incident and he too entered into endorsement of Carlo's contribution thereby demonstrating an appreciation of a peer's thinking.

The thinking of Shor and Freire also influenced the nature of my responses in this session in that they maintained the necessity of creatively adjusting a proposed course of pedagogy to the needs of the students who are involved (1987, p.115). Freire in particular perceived the teacher/facilitator role as: 'a helper of students in their
process of formation, of their growing up' (p.118). He perceived this process as being an 'artistic one' with the teacher ever sensitive to the needs of students. This sensitivity, he believed, should be heightened at times of intense formation so that students could be assisted with whatever scaffolding they needed in their process of self-shaping.

Other groups of students (who have records of high academic achievement) have found *Thinking Stories 111* useful in the promotion of their discussions; yet these students (who have not got a successful record of academic achievement) needed a more adult stimulus. It could be asserted that the tragedy of the fourteen year old's burial that day was more real than the fight that occurred in the novel – after all, fights are fairly commonplace in these young peoples' lives. Or the memory of the death of a sibling, parent or other close relation, in some cases through suicide or drug overdose, relegates into perspective a cat’s euthanasia. All of the nine participants were keen that the cat should be put down; they did not see any significance in the death of a cat. I have facilitated other philosophy groups where the students have seen the ethical dilemmas associated with choices surrounding human needs, but not always necessities, taking precedence over the life of an animal under human care.

Without negating the thinking achievements of these other groups of students, there was in this project group significant empathetic feeling for the pain that their parents had endured over the loss of a child. Their fellow participants showed support by listening quietly during this part of the discussion to what they had to say.

The personal experience of a death of a sibling or close relation, often through tragic circumstances, has one positive side among the myriads of negatives. Such an
occurrence does potentially open up opportunities for reflection. It is hoped that the
sessions of the group ultimately encouraged habits of reflection in the participants. A
habit of reflection is an important factor in promoting lifelong learning. Reflection on
attitudes and events can, according to Coleman (1996), encourage balanced emotions.
Success or failure in our relations with one another, again according to Coleman
(1996), is often determined by the degree to which a person achieves this emotional
balance.

Session 8 - 'Ruben Emerges as a Model for the Group'

Date: 2.6.98  Session recorded on audio tape.  10 participants present.
Stimulus: ‘The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber’ from The Short Happy Life
story was chosen in the hope that it would stimulate a discussion about what
constitutes a worthwhile life. The persona of Macomber is portrayed by the author as
being in his mid thirties, yet as only really being alive in the last few hours of his life.

Participants’ self assessment

At the conclusion of this session, the participants spent approximately 10 minutes in
discussing Cam’s questions in regard to their dialogical performance. They
determined that their discussion had been overall satisfactory and chose to record their
response as a single statement rather than individual responses to each question.

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Hemingway’s story with its values relating to the hunting experience and also acts of
bravery that are ‘expected’ from men, reactivated thoughts and comments that have
appeared in discussions in other sessions. I thought that the subject of hunting might
elicit more involvement from Allan as he, his father, uncles and brothers are avid
hunters. I wanted also to revisit a discussion that we had had in session 3, which had
involved the morality of throwing rocks at buses. Five of the nine participants present
at that session had seen the enjoyment of the chase between them and the bus driver as making the rock throwing activity worthwhile. We had hypothesised about possible outcomes stemming from the throwing of rocks – people being hurt or even killed by such actions. One such hypothesis put forward by a participant was that of an old man being killed. ‘It wouldn’t matter – he’s lived his life.’ I saw the persona of Francis Macomber, therefore, who is portrayed as only “really living” in the last few hours of his life, as both countering their negation of the “hypothetical old man’s life” and also providing a door into a discussion where we could speculate about what constitutes a worthwhile life.

Extract from session 8

Allan When I go hunting Dad says don’t shoot just for the sake of killing it.
Zac Cause it’s there you don’t have to shoot it.
Allan Yeah.
Pace You have to have a reason for killing it.
R Well why would you shoot it?
Stephen Cause you can. (Spoken with a little sarcasm and directed at Allan).
Allan For meat.
Stephen For sport. (Again spoken with a little sarcasm and directed at Allan).
Allan If there’s a deer or whatever over there you would shoot it - you just won’t leave it there - you would do something with that animal.
Carlo Like I would get it and keep its head for a trophy and you would just shoot it and leave it there - want to bet? [to Stephen].
Allan You shoot it and it dies on the ground and you walk away - what’s the use of doing it - that’s what dad says - what’s the point of doing it you waste a bullet....

Multiple interjections

Stephen What’s the challenge - look at the size of it [implying to Allan that the target size of the deer makes it less challenging].
Allan Meat - the trophy - what about the meat?

R So how do you feel about taking life? [addressed to Allan].
Allan Well it depends what you are gonna do with it - if you eat it - it is fair enough like we have to live off it.
R We eat sheep and things don’t we? [Addressed to whole group].
Stephen Yeah but they’re bred to eat.
Allan Cause they’re farmers and all that.
Zac They’re bred to be killed - they have a mission.
Allan then went on to explain the challenge of crawling on your hands and knees up a mountain in order to hunt a deer. He was so involved with this topic that he spoke about it at length. His considerable input during this session appeared to make a difference to his overall participation as from this point on he always made some contributions to discussions.

What follows is another short extract from the discussion in which male stereotyping is examined and questioned.

Ruben: The thing is - in life - um crying is kinda like releasing our pain. And um it’s changed for guys because now - or for many people like when you’re hurt you feel pain but you don’t need to cry, there’s no need to cry, you just....

Allan: But if you gotta cry you get called a wuss and all that.

Multiple interjections that are indecipherable

Ruben: Back then right there was eh - the term like - you couldn’t cry because you would be perceived as not having strength - (in response to group prompts) and yeah and not being macho or anything.

Carlo: Why?

Stephen: You’d be destroying the stereotype of a guy if you cried now.

Reflection/analysis

When Ruben said ‘or for many people’ he modified his claim that things have changed and that all men may now cry - he allows that the change is not universal. Stephen, in his response, recognised that the requirement of not crying for a male is only in place to support a stereotype. His recognition of macho stereotyping was very pleasing. Ruben’s use of the word ‘perceived’ was also interesting and I surmise that I was not modifying my language as much as I had in previous sessions and that Ruben was absorbing new words.
Carlo and Ruben stayed behind again after this session during recess to chat to me. A picture of a Greek amphitheatre on the wall of the Learning Centre provided the stimulus for our conversation, and we discussed the difference between Greek use of a theatre and Roman use of 'theatre'. While both boys associated ancient Greek use of amphitheatres with civilised projects and Roman use with more violent and cruel pursuits, Ruben still saw both Greek and Roman use of amphitheatres as being forums involved in the pursuit of power. He said that the role of a Roman games entrepreneur was obviously about the gaining of power and influence, but he maintained the role of a poet was also involved with gaining influence. 'He [a poet] has power as he conveys a message to other people,' he concluded. Carlo listened and appeared to reflect appreciation of what Ruben had said.

As previously stated, the Students' Support Group had recommended that I include among my participants, one or two students who could act as role models for the other participants. I declined to implement their recommendation, opting for student participation on the basis of greater need for reasonableness. What happened with this group of young people, however, was that Ruben emerged as a role model in that he demanded that his peers back up their claims with examples. He also became more sensitive to the feelings of others when he rejected opinions running counter to his own, as in session 5 when he said: 'OK I'll just show you how your point of view can be.... I'll just change it a bit.' He also engaged more and more often in a role of interpretation as he sought to clarify the views of his fellow participants. From session 4, Ruben started demonstrating on a regular basis what Splitter and Sharp (1996) describe as a 'philosophic ear' when he asked such questions as: 'How can we compare death to sleep if we don't know what death is like?' (As quoted and previously alluded to in session 6).
Session 9 - ‘Ten Minutes of Good Thinking’

Date: 12.6.98. Session recorded on audio tape. 9 participants present. Stimulus: ‘Only Ten’ by Allan Baillie, (1996) from Top Drawer: a collection of short stories. This short story was chosen because it deals with a young boy who had migrated to Australia from a country involved in a civil war. The story is located in a contemporary Australian multi-cultural school population and it deals with stereotyping of newcomers to Australia and the assumptions that are often made about them.

Participants’ self assessment

The students co-constructed the following statement to be recorded in their journal:

‘In most of our session today we did not come anywhere near a philosophic discussion so there is no point in filling out the questions. In the last section however, we did 10 minutes of good thinking. We made a discovery - we think that everything can be defined in terms of numbers and we would like to come back to thinking about this at another time.’

Extract from the transcript of the last ten minutes of session nine

R Does anything last?
Zac Yes - love.
Stephen Philosophy lasts - longlife milk lasts.
R But how long? [milk] it’s got a use by date on it. So it doesn’t last. What does last mean?
Tony Forever.
R Forever?
Tito Forever more.
Micha Never ending.
R Do you know of anything that will last forever?
Tony Numbers.
Zac Language.
R That’s brilliant.

General laughter at my enthusiasm
Tony Like it [numbers] never stops.
Pace Yeah it does - actually it doesn’t.
Zac It doesn’t.

Spate of indistinguishable contributions
Tony It goes on forever.
Stephen Numbers stop at nine. Numbers keep on repeating themselves.
Pace: No - even a million - it never stops.
Tony: No never stops.
Micha: No - keeps on going - just put another number on
Stephen: Just one two three - numbers stop at nine.
Carlo: No - doesn’t stop.
Stephen: Because they just keep repeating themselves after that.
Pace: What’s after nine? [Addressed to Stephen].
Stephen: Ten.
Pace: What’s after 10?
Micha: Put another digit on and it keeps on going.
Stephen: It just doesn’t happen then.
Zac: It’s just not happening.
Tony: It never stops. It never stops.
R: So what about tomorrow if - supposing we’re the only life [capable of dealing in numbers] in the whole universe and tomorrow we’re hit by a great meteorite and the whole planet is wiped out - do numbers still continue to exist?
General: Yes.
Zac: Yeah. How do you break [destroy] numbers - you can’t even see them.
R: How do they continue to exist?
Zac: In your mind they do.
Carlo: But you would be dead.
R: But every body’s dead.
Indistinguishable contributions
R: So are numbers a human invention? or do...
Tito: Oh! Time doesn’t stop, that’s another thing.
R: Wait a minute let’s handle one thing. If we can have 3 minutes of good thinking, the whole session’s been worth it, and we are on the border of having this good thinking. OK but I wish you would put the questions instead of me.

Transcript advanced to where discussion on numbers is taken up again

Stephen: If the world blew up - then numbers on earth would stop
Pace: But time - time is numbers
Zac: How can numbers stop when you can’t see them? No one owns them - or nothing - they can’t stop.
Tony: It’s unstoppable - that’s a word for it.
R: Numbers are unstoppable?
Pace: Are numbers human made or what?
Zac: How would we know?
R: Yes that’s right. Are numbers a construct of our mind or do they have a life in themselves. I think that’s a great question Pace.

Reflection/analysis

Midway to three-quarter way through the session, the students asked me to delete from the tape what had been recorded up to that point as they considered what they had discussed to that stage was not worthwhile. I was surprised at their awareness of
the tape recorder as they appeared not to notice it at other times. I did, however, do as they requested.

While Tito was still the target of regular sarcasm from his peers, I noted that from this time on, generally there was far less sarcasm among group members. I noted also that if a participant had forgotten to come to our group meeting, other participants offered to go and get him or her. In this session it was said of one participant, ‘It would not be fair to leave him out, he would want to be here.’ Indeed, the elements of good feeling that were occurring resulted in students often sharing aspects of their personal lives and this inhibited the onset of philosophical discussion. The significant part of this session occurred in the last 10 minutes after I asked the question: ‘Do you know of anything that will go on forever?’ Tony replied: ‘Numbers.’ At the end of the session the following comments were made:

R You have done the best thinking in this school today.
Tony Other kids could have done it too if they had been in here.

Multiple comments of agreement.
(The participants quite noticeably looked at me for some sort of statement - I am unsure that I gave the right one).
R But they were not here - you were here - you did the good thinking.

Session 10 - 'Stephen, Micha and Zac Apologise'

Date: 19.6.98 Session recorded on audio tape. 9 participants present
Stimulus: Stephen Hawking's Universe (1998) BBC video. I chose Stephen Hawking's Universe as a means of entry into discussion because it deals with 'deceptively simple but immense and fundamental questions' (Filkin 1998, p. 17). Further, in the person of Stephen Hawking, we have much that runs contrary to the values of popular youth culture. Stephen Hawking is physically helpless, he is frail and unable to communicate without the use of his specially constructed computer which is attached to his motorised wheelchair. However, the man comes over as a delightful human being who regards himself as lucky that the motor neurone disease that he has only affects his body, leaving his mind free to think. I surmised that the image of Stephen Hawking would be confronting to some members of the group, eight of whom have something of a profile as good sportspersons.
There also appeared to be present among these young people a certain intolerance of those who did not value or excel in physical pursuits. Pace, in particular, has hopes of being a professional sportsman. Further, Pace had stated in session 5: ‘Why would you want to be alive when you’re mental or there is something wrong with you? If I was too sick - like I couldn’t walk or I was paralysed or something - I’d kill myself. There’s no point in living if you can’t do nothing that normal people do.’ In addition, Stephen has on many occasions since year seven, been in trouble with school authorities because of his treatment of a height-challenged peer.

**Participants’ self assessment**

While we interrupted the video at many points so that discussion could occur, we did not leave enough time and energy at the end of our session to answer the student questions in depth. We agreed that we would be mindful of this next time we watched a video. The participants stated their interest in the video and agreed in general that the session had been a fruitful one.

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**Reflection/analysis**

Our time for answering the student questions this week was further eroded by resentment between the participants and the school librarian. A clash had occurred at the beginning of the session as they waited for me to arrive. During this session there were three other occasions which showed that the resentment between the participants and the librarian continued.

One such incident was when Ruben had to leave the library to go to a chess tournament. (His send-off from the group was particularly pleasing in its friendliness and good luck wishes). On his way out the librarian challenged him and told him he could not go as he should be in one place or another during the middle of a period. On his return to our group, I encouraged him to calm himself and to claim his right of exit calmly and firmly, which he did. This afforded me the opportunity to talk about
moderate language strategies for handling ‘difficult’ situations and the wisdom of not making a dramatic stand over every issue of difference.

The member of the library staff remonstrated with me for talking to the students after the end of the last period, thus keeping them from the school clean-up. The students picked up on the critical nature of the comment, but I was able to model restraint in my response.

This session was pleasing on several counts. The first of these factors entailed both Stephen and Micha changing their opinion about an issue and openly admitting that they had been wrong without any pressure from the group to do so. Stephen’s change of opinion occurred when he asked for the Stephen Hawking’s video to be rewound in order to prove his point. The example that he sought did not support his argument and he admitted that he was wrong. Micha agreed that she had also been wrong in that what she had been referring to was the speed of sound rather than the speed of light.

As previously discussed in chapter four, the composition of the group was made up of ten boys and two girls, and as such, the boys tended to predominate during the sessions. Micha’s strong involvement in this session was therefore pleasing.

Another indication of progress occurred when Ruben was explaining his thesis about what constitutes the best time period in human history. Zac interrupted to give his opinion, realised that he had interrupted, apologised and withdrew his bid to speak in order to let Ruben finish what he had been saying.

Even more pleasing, however, was the way the group listened to what individuals were saying. While side conversations still occurred, they were on the decrease. A
negative aspect of this session resides in my having spoken and insisted on doing so when there were bids from other participants to speak. I did not realise that I had done this until I listened to the tape of the session.

Session 11 - ‘Three Participants - Micha, Peta and Tito’

Date: 12.6.98 Session recorded on audio tape. 10 participants present.
Stimulus: The film Contact (1998). This video was chosen because it dealt with some of the issues that had emerged in our discussions, particularly in our discussion of Stephen Hawking’s Universe. One of these issues was mathematics as phenomena that are discovered rather than invented. A second issue was the reality that we have been signalling our position to other possible intelligent life forms in the Universe ever since we started radio and television transmissions. The students had wondered how a more technological advanced life form might treat us.

A third issue common to past discussions and the video Contact was a possible irreconcilable division between science and religious faith. This particular ‘faith versus empirical evidence’ theme was first raised in session 7 when Ruben said: ‘science kinda says like no to faith...says that all that we believed in can be otherwise.’

Participants’ self assessment

The responses to the student questions were handled in a hurry as we had not heard the bell for the change of period. We agreed to be careful about this in forthcoming sessions, and we also agreed that there was a need to revitalise the participant questions as there had been a certain lack of energy in our approach to them over the last three sessions.

All the participants had their parents’ permission to watch the video Contact. The story by Carl Sagan deals with a group of young scientists who successfully pick up a transmission from intellectual life on another planet in our galaxy. This life form encrypts in their transmission instructions on how to make an apparatus which enables a single human person to transcend time and space as we know it here on planet Earth,
in order to visit their planet. Throughout the film there is a discussion about the differing perspectives inherent in religious faith and the discipline of science – between what is accepted on faith and what is proved by empirical evidence.

The choice of a film as a stimulus for discussion rather than a written text resided in the following. The participants belong to a late 1990s youth culture that favours visual stimulus material – the positive reaction of the participants to extracts from the video Stephen Hawking in the previous session endorsed this. I reasoned, therefore, that a film might stimulate their interest more than a written narrative.

Reflection/analysis

The opening of the movie managed to effectively impart a sense of the immensity of the universe, as the camera perspective left the Earth’s atmosphere and panned out into our solar system and beyond. The camera perspective was then lost in the colours of space which, when focused, turned into the colours of a single eye. I reasoned this scenario might open up ideas surrounding relative relationships. ‘Is the universe as we know it, contained within the eye of a little girl living in a larger dimension?’ I tried to introduce this concept after we had viewed the film in its entirety.

All of the 10 students were present. We deliberately set the session on Thursday so that we could celebrate Tony’s birthday with a cake; however, I made the mistake of not placing the microphone in a more central position. The students spreading out on the floor so as to watch the video more comfortably further confounded this. Certainly once they settled, they listened quietly. I had not experienced any form of
extended silence with them before. Zac’s comment that the silence of space would be
too loud was very interesting. He was conscious of the paradoxical nature of his
comment and followed it up with: ‘you need sound.’ Also interesting was their
reference to headaches. Six of the 10 participants admitted that they got headaches
very easily and saw the silence of space as acting either positively or negatively on
their headaches.

I offered the remote control to the participants in order to make my facilitating of our
meeting less obtrusive, and also out of a concern that I might stop the flow of the film
too much by trying to introduce discussion at every turn. Prior to the commencement
of the film there were many comments by the boys about the possibility of love
scenes. When we encountered the tail end of such a scene, the boys hypothesised
about the possibility that the female film star may not be wearing underwear – there
appeared to be no awareness that their conversation could be of offence to the two
girls present and also to myself. I did not remonstrate with them about their socially
inappropriate comments and the girls did not make any comment either.

The participants were at home with the film genre. There seemed to be an
understanding that you should not interrupt the flow of the film too often by
commenting. This flies in the face of conventional classroom use of film as a learning
strategy where the teacher is the one who decides when discussion will take place. I
am so accustomed to this practice that I often tried to talk over the film. On several
occasions the students signalled to the student holding the remote control to stop the
tape in order to listen to me – but not always. A comment by the main actor in the
film that ‘Mathematics is the only true universal language’, linked in with our
‘successful discussion’ of session 9 where numbers were seen by Tony as never ending and capable of defining all things. The main actor’s comment that after 100, numbers start repeating themselves also linked in with what Stephen had said in session 9, only he had maintained that numbers started repeating themselves after the numeral 10. These two links provided exciting discussion material for the participants, which we revisited many times in forthcoming sessions.

During the recess break we had to move to another room before the next period as the room we were in was needed by another class. My being on crutches at this time meant that I was dependent on the students to move my tape recorder and clean up our cake plates and so on. The girls automatically started the packing up process without being asked. This did not happen in the earlier sessions and I was often left stranded. I pointed out that while I was grateful for their help they needed to be careful about fitting into the expectation that girls always did the packing and cleaning up. From behind me came the comment: ‘We are boys and we are helping.’ Two boys, Tony and Allan, were indeed cleaning up and I had not noticed. I apologised.

Micha

Micha, during the first part of the session, had displayed concern because I was not eating the birthday cake, so she broke her mandarin in halves and insisted that I take a half. This action alerted the participants to the fact that I did not have an orange drink and that there was no more orange juice left. They were upset by their oversight and rectified the situation by contributing from their own glasses.

At the beginning of the second part of our session Micha announced that she had joined ‘The Greenies’, a group which handles recycling for the school. She further
asked if I would help her formulate an entry for an international competition run by Fr. Brian Gore in the Philippines. The competition involved suggestions as to 'how a group of children could immediately have an effect on the health of the world's oceans.' I was delighted by this request for the following reasons:

* Micha was going to present her suggestions to a class for their acceptance or otherwise;
* she was concerned with formulating an entry on behalf of the school; and,
* her interest in entering the competition demonstrated a care for the ethics of environmental protection and was a further development of her recent commitment to the school recycling group.

We arranged a time to meet, and after discussing her ideas at our meeting, I helped her to formulate an entry.

**Peta**

Peta, as in session 4, took an opportunity when Tito was out of the room, to ask if he could be excluded from the group. I responded with the statement that his behaviour had improved and that one of our aims within the group was to get on regardless of whether we liked each other or not. 'He's getting better and you're being tolerant of him and that's terrific,' I told her. She responded with, 'Only in here, not outside.' While I would rather have not heard that his improvement was so 'local', I was delighted that Peta was talking to me and that she valued the time the group spent together.

**Tito**

Ten minutes before the end of the session, I asked for the tape to be stopped so that we could have a discussion. Several of the students, i.e. Tito, Allan and Pace, displayed no interest in a discussion. They chose to throw a basketball around the room to each other. I suspect that they were not trying to be disruptive in a rebellious sense, but simply had had enough of concentration and stillness. I showed a little
verbal frustration over their behaviour. I was still hampered by crutches so Tito (perhaps to make up for his behaviour or simply to miss the beginning of his next class) offered to help me to take my things to the staff room at the conclusion of the session. I accepted and we had a chat on the way about his expectation of opening his own business as a mechanic one day. I apologised over the fact that I had been a little short with them when they had thrown the ball around the room. He responded, ‘That’s all right, you’re a teacher.’ It seemed to be an expectation on his part that to be a teacher was to be necessarily disapproving of students.

On arriving at the staff room I asked him if would he take my things all the way to my desk. This, I knew, would give him an opportunity to look around as students are rarely allowed in the staff room. On reaching my desk, I asked him to sit down on a chair (he went to sit on the floor and this distressed me) while I wrote a note of explanation for his lateness to the teacher of his next class. It was then that a piece of magic happened! He enquired as to whether a particular teacher sat opposite me, and I responded in the affirmative. ‘See that picture?’ he said, ‘I painted it but I was going to throw it out, but she wouldn’t let me, she said she wanted it.’ Tito’s painting was the only picture on the wall next to the teacher’s desk and he knew that she had genuinely put the picture up on the wall because she had liked it. I later interviewed the teacher and recorded her thoughts on Tito. An extract from the recorded interview follows:

Interview with teacher re Tito

R Tito carried some things to my desk for me today and he noticed that you had put his painting up on the wall. It is the only painting on the wall and you never anticipated that Tito would see it - and I believe that it had a really positive impact on the boy - he will go away and think about it - how do you find Tito generally?
Teacher  I have only ever taught him twice - this term as a replacement for his usual art teacher. I was a little bit nervous about having him in my class you know - he’s got a bit of a reputation.

*Here both teacher and researcher laugh a little*

But I have to take him as I find him and he was quite OK. Perhaps if I had him all the time it would be a different matter - I don’t know. But I didn’t want him to throw his work away - I said to him ‘Give it here don’t throw it away I’ll have it.’ I really liked his arrangement of colours. He has since made me an ash tray.

R  That’s great.

Teacher  I wasn’t so keen on that [laughing] but we won’t tell him that.

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**Session 12 - ‘Don’t Worry About The Noise Miss - They’re Thinking’**

Date: 25.6.98  9 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: The film *Contact* (1998) reactivated our discussion on numbers, which in turn led into a discussion on the nature of language and culture.

**Participants’ self assessment**

I have noted over the past few weeks that the participants had lost some of their enthusiasm for answering the questions set out in their journal. In recognition that the design of this research project is subject to emerging needs, I reduced the number of questions this week to three, hoping thereby to promote prolonged debate about the quality of our discussion. The three questions and their responses were as follows:

**Q. How did the discussion go today?**

A. At times we didn’t listen to each other and at other times we did listen to each other.

**Q. Were we good mannered towards each other?**

A. Yes and No.

**Q. Did we try to really worry a point - like a dog worries a bone. Or did we jump all over the place?**

A. We stuck on a point more than usual. It was basically all the same thing, we didn’t go off into sex or allow ourselves to be too much distracted.
I was pleased to hear the students talking about how the philosophy meeting was their 'best thing in the school week' and how much they looked forward to it. While I knew their appreciation of the sessions was somewhat supported by my offering of coffee and biscuits, there was evidence to suggest that they enjoyed the cut and thrust of discussion. They seemed to appreciate the adventure of engaging in dialogue with persons they would not ordinarily mix with, and more importantly, they sometimes indicated that they were pleased with their thinking processes.

Extract from session 12

**Allan** My dad works in trucks and he sent this guy in a truck to go to some spot and there were two cars and one of the cars smashed into the truck- and it was a husband and he didn’t even know how to speak one word of English and his wife was translating. I reckon that’s not allowed. How can you read signs - how can you read signs? and he doesn’t even know how to speak English.

**Micha** They can’t they just learn it.

*Multiple overlapping comments*

**Ruben** But you can take the learner’s test in different languages so they must allow him to drive.

**Pace** Yeah you can.

**R** You can take the learner’s test in different languages?

**Allan** What’s the use of that if it’s got a 60 sign in English and you can’t....

**Ruben** No, no, numerals are different.

**Micha** They can understand numbers.

*Multiple overlapping comments.*

**Carlo** It was in the movie how - they said that maths - was it in the movie that we watched?

**R** Contact.

**Carlo** The only universal language.

*Multiple overlapping comments*

**Pace** I reckon numbers were made by humans [referring to session 9].

**Tony** See miss, I was right, I was right.

**R** All right wait a minute. Pace says they’re made by humans but you [Tony] maintain they exist anyway - they have a life of their own.

**Pace** How do we - how do we pick like how do we pick [numbers] up?

**R** Anybody answer Pace’s question?

**Tito** Well how do humans pick up language?

**Pace** Numbers idiot - numbers. (Said with good humour).

**Micha** Who named this pencil case?

*Indecipherable contribution from Pace which elicited the following frustration from Ruben.*

**Ruben** Oh my God.

**R** OK.
Tito  There’s a 1 you put 2 - there’s a 2 like you....
Pace  But how do you know there’s a 1- 2?
Allan  How do you know that’s a 1?

Multiple contributions of: ‘They made it up’
Ruben  Pace - they made up a name for the object - for one object - so they named it one.
Tito  If they said there’s like 1 there’s 1 there’s 1 there’s 1- if they counted that up - if they went 1 1 1 1 1 there’s 5 - they done it up like that- they would of.
Zac  I reckon whoever made numbers up is pretty smart.
R  Can I point out something here that may be helpful OK. Now this is a....
Carlo  Respect?
R  Why don’t we try an experiment - henceforth in this group or elsewhere too if you want - why don’t we call something that’s common - a different name?

After some further discussion we decided that we would not only rename a hand by a different name, we would use a word that currently meant something else to us. We decided to call ‘a hand’, ‘a jar’.

Pace  But Miss you’ve got a different language - I’ve got a different language, he’s got a different language.
R  But we’re going to create our own language - we’re going to create a word in our own language.
Pace  I’m talking about cultures here.
R  You’re talking about cultures? So what do you think about cultures?
Carlo  So do I.
Pace  Why has he got a different culture to him - and him to me or....
Carlo  Why is mine different? Why isn’t yours different? [referring to Pace]
Tito  I want to know what aliens speak.
Pace  Mine is different to yours.

Many indecipherable contributions
R  Can we go back to what Pace said. Do you notice what he said?
Ruben  Yeah. Why do we all have different ....
R  He said different but different was for Carlo - he was talking about himself as having the right language.
Carlo  Yeah that’s what I said to him.
R  And you said the same thing - my language is right, yours is different.
Allan  But miss why couldn’t they just make one language.
R  Who are they?
Ruben  A universal language.
Allan  Jesus - God.
R  What did Jesus have to do with it?
Carlo  Creator, creator.
Allan  I believe he did something - in my heart.
R  Yeah - but he didn’t create language mate - he was born into a Jewish culture - Jesus was a Jew.
Allan  Yeah but why didn’t everyone make one language, why did they....
Ruben  A universal language.
R  We have a question here - anyone like to answer it?

Several contributions later Pace responds to Allan’s question with the following
Pace Because different cultures make different languages.

Reflection/analysis

There was something of another breakthrough in this session as the students seemed to want to explore the origin of language and the arbitrary nature of naming. They were also able to see that language and culture were connected and they were keen to explore these connections as was demonstrated by Pace’s comment: ‘Different cultures make different languages’. The participants were concerned in this session to use language to examine their own learning; they consciously used language to talk about the nature of language (Cook-Gumperz 1986).

This session was also interesting in its discussion of racism. The multicultural reality of this group of young people was never far from the surface. Racist tension exploded in session 4 and more moderate comments relating to race emerged at regular intervals from then on. In session 4, Pace judged all white people to be racist against black people. In session 4 he took up a ‘me against the rest of the you’ attitude – even to excluding peers in the group who were black. He further stated in this fourth session that he intended to leave Australia when he was old enough to do so. In this twelfth session, however, he refers to members of the group as ‘us Australians’.

Another source of interest in this session was when Micha tentatively explored the philosophic argument ‘that if creation shows signs of design there must be a designer’. She tried to further explore this idea when she hypothesised that ‘God must also have a designer’. I noticed that an idea that is introduced tentatively by a participant is often reintroduced by the same participant several sessions later, only with more confidence. This suggests that there has been some reflection on the idea.
that took shape during dialogical exchange, and as such demonstrates Vygotsky’s theory that dialogue precedes reflection. Micha did indeed reintroduce this line of thinking in two subsequent sessions.

At the end of our discussion just prior to addressing the three participant questions set out under the section ‘Participants’ self assessment’, a discussion broke out about an issue associated with the film Contact. Indeed several of the participants had risen to their feet in an endeavour to be heard. Micha who was sitting next to me smiled and said, ‘Don’t worry about the noise Miss, they’re thinking.’ My response to her was, ‘I know, that’s why I’m not trying to stop it.’ It was, I believe, an illuminating moment for both of us.

Peta

Prior to my taking the above session, a teacher relayed in a good natured way the following about Peta:

T I know that you are interested in Peta, so I must tell you what happened. Last religious lesson as I was leaving the classroom I overheard her mimicking me. I didn’t mind - she did a rather good job of it - it wasn’t harsh.

Here both teacher and researcher laugh

R I know that she has given you a rather bad time in the past....

T Well two weeks ago I put her and two others out of my lesson - but I’m over that now.

R Apart from that time [two weeks ago] are there any improvements in her behaviour this year?

T Yes in so far as she is now handing in work - but there is still a lot that she owes me and I know she owes science some too. She’s working in class better - less fuss - except for that lesson [two weeks before].

I would argue that if Peta is mimicking, she is relating with her peers – although the Student Support Group’s response to this aspect of the questionnaire was that she usually did. I was also optimistic about relational prospects between the teacher and
student based on the ‘gentleness’ of Peta’s mimicking and the good-natured way in which it had been taken by her teacher.

Session 13 - First Feedback from Representatives of the Student Support Group

Date: 21.7.98  9 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.

Stimulus: The time was cut in half due to school based activities, so it was impracticable to finish the film Contact (1998). I thought, therefore, that it might be profitable to begin our session with two questions that had come up regularly in our discussions:

* Is biology the primary driving force in our existence?
* Is the production of offspring the main purpose of our existence?

Participants’ self assessment

Students ignored any specific questions about the nature of their time together and chose, after a general discussion about the session, to set down the following as a comment that best encapsulated their interactions. ‘Towards the end of our session we started to come to grips with some sort of philosophic discussion. We should probably avoid the discussion of sex because it is hard for us to be sensible. We object also to only having one period this week as we are entitled to two periods.’

Reflection/analysis

The major thrust of our discussion again focused on race relations – and this reflected the discussion that was going on in the Australian community at large, particularly in relation to the recent successes of the One Nation Party whose major foci were problems stemming from racial and ethnic differences. All members of the group felt a sense of puzzlement over the idea that it was not as offensive to call a white person ‘a white bastard’ as it was to call a black person ‘a black bastard.’ We agreed that we should address this dilemma in another discussion in order to try and understand this discrepancy.
While there was a general disappointment over the fact that we only had one period available for discussion, there was a certain pleasure about being together again after the holidays, and much of our restricted time was taken up with social conversation. I had learnt from past sessions that to show any sort of tension over the fact that a prolonged philosophic dialogue was not emerging was a mistake. The students appeared to be constrained under any such pressure from me, and they had, on occasions when encountering pressure, closed up and abstained from meaningful discussion altogether. In addition, if I pressured them in any way I had a feeling of ‘using’ them for research purposes instead of being there to help them in the more fruitful management of their lives. Pressure from me only resulted in an overall loss of sincerity. I have learnt therefore to be at peace about a session like session 13, which was fairly uneventful from a philosophic and quality thinking point of view, but nevertheless, allowed the participants to engage in friendly social relations with each other and, as such, nurtured the social aspects of reasonableness.

Feedback from representatives of Students' Support Group

As outlined in chapter 3, *The Site Methodology and Procedures*, the only structured feedback expected from the Student Support Group was the filling out of the pre- and post-study questionnaires. Circumstances construed, however, that I should be sitting in the staffroom after school on the 21st July having a chat with the kernel of the Student Support Group, i.e. the school principal, the assistant principal, the student counsellor, along with the studies co-ordinator, and the co-ordinator of students with special needs. The assistant principal made the comment in passing that we appeared to be ‘making headway with Stephen. I think that he is growing up,’ she said. Some further positive things were said about Stephen. I intervened to ask if Tito was
making headway too. The principal replied, ‘Oh he’s growing up too.’ I then proceeded to ask for general perceptions about each member of the philosophy group. It was then that the connection was made by all present that I was asking for feedback about the students that they themselves had referred to me at the beginning of the year. I received good-natured and humorous responses about all participants. Some of the comments were: ‘Carlo who?’ ‘Pace is growing up too! They are all growing up!’ There was even an acknowledgement of Ruben’s obvious exceptional reasoning skills in spite of his overall poor academic results. It had taken six months for any positive comment about the participants to come from school authorities, and these were given in a light-hearted way.

I was extremely heartened by the more positive perceptions of the school administration towards these students, and by the way their previously highly unfavourable profiles were fading. These improvements to this stage may be due to maturation – they may indeed have grown up – many other factors may have been involved, but I was quietly optimistic that our efforts to form a dialogical community had contributed to these more positive perceptions. For some months we had had no further expulsions – although one would occur this term – of students coming from our group, neither had any of the participants been subject to either internal or external suspension. Over this time other Emeritus students had been subject to these disciplinary actions, yet it was the participants of the research project who had been identified by the Students’ Support Group at the beginning of the school year as being those students who were most troublesome within the school community. Teachers and school administrators had on several occasions made the comment to me that: ‘[naming difficult student] should be in your philosophy group.’
At the beginning of this third term of meeting together as a philosophy group, I was optimistic as a result of the positive if somewhat light-hearted feedback of the school administration, that progress towards reasonableness had been made by the participants. As indicated in the literature review of this dissertation, Field (1995), who was primarily concerned to investigate whether children as young as grade 2, could be emergent philosophers, also noted that in the third term of her research project the children in her experimental group were engaging in ‘less sarcastic and name calling behaviour.’

Session 14 - ‘To See How People Come to My Funeral’ - Researcher Objectivity and Subjectivity in Conflict

Date: 27.7.98  8 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.  
Stimulus: I was not able to gain access to a VCR to finish viewing the video Contact (1998) so I offered the participants the following poems for their consideration and discussion: ‘Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone’ by Auden; ‘Marriage’ by Thomas Shapcott and ‘The Road Not Taken’ by Robert Frost. I chose these poems because past experience has shown me that young people of this fifteen/sixteen age bracket enjoy the themes inherent in these poems and readily engage in discussion of them. The themes include ‘loss of love or loved one’, ‘perceptions coloured by love/relationships’ and ‘life choices’.

Participants’ self assessment

The eight participants present for session 14 chose again to ignore any set questions and instead debated their performance and then in common, formulated the following comment to be written in their journal: ‘We are listening to each other better all the time and we shared the discussion more. We tried on several occasions to give reasons for what we said but we did not always show respect for each other when we disagreed.’

There was some surprise at the beginning of the session when I expressed a desire to use poetry as a means of entering into dialogue. While it could be said that there were
not very many positive comments about the use of poetry as a stimulus, there were also very few negative ones, indeed the participants were silent while poems were being read and they appeared to listen very intently.

Initially we attempted to discuss the nature of love; in particular we were keen to find some commonality that linked all types of love together. The participants focused particularly on the love they had for their parents and also on romantic love. The following extract serves as an example of their reasoning surrounding the love by a child for parents:

**Extracts from session 14**

Tito Your parents, you just love them because they brought you up or whatever because they’re your parents.

Carlo So if your parents didn’t bring you up you wouldn’t love them?

Ruben You wouldn’t know them if they were not your parents.

Tito Yeah.

Carlo All right, just say you lived with your auntie or something.

Ruben You can also love your auntie just as badly.

Tito If my auntie brought me up, I would call my auntie my mum.

Pace No one can top up your mum, man.

Tito No but if she brought me up from birth then who are you supposed to call mum - who’s the one who brought you up.

Many indecipherable comments.

R OK. So you’re talking about loving your parents.

Tito So you don’t listen to any other lady except your mum? (Addressed to Pace).

Allan A teacher.

Carlo I do, it’s just that I listen to my mum more.

Tito You lick your what?

R Careful - careful.

*Tito is the only one who laughs*

Carlo Yeah you boofhead [addressed to Tito].

R OK. You’re saying there if I’m right....

Pace This guy likes being gay [referring to Tony who read Auden’s poem ‘Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone’] he likes reading gay poems.

R It’s not a gay poem - what I believe....

Carlo It’s the meaning.

R It’s the meaning - perhaps - I could be wrong- perhaps this meaning can be transferred to other sorts of love?

*Here the researcher shares some recollections about her own feeling of sorrow at times of personal loss through death.*
Ruben: Only you realise later that the world does go on - and [only] when you die everything will be still.

Pace: Sometimes I want to die to see how people come to my funeral.

*General laughter.*

Tito: Same here. Same here.

*General participant laughter and agreement.*

R: I think that we should get clear about one thing - when you’re dead you’re dead....

Tito: You’re dead.

R: You don’t actually get to see your funeral.

Tito: How do you know? have you been dead?

R: Say that again.

Tito: How do you know? Have you been dead?

Pace: Yeah but it’s true [you can’t see your funeral]

Tito: No but your spirit [what about your spirit].

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**Reflection/analysis**

During the course of the day, Stephen and Allan found me to express regret that they had missed the session due to another school-based commitment. I found their apology pleasing in its recognition of socially appropriate behaviour.

I was very conscious at this session, after we discussed Auden’s poem ‘Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone’, of quite deliberately trying to bring home the final nature of death. I did this because the participants were discussing how they would like to be present at their own funerals. Australia has a high youth suicide rate that has increased 112% over the past 20 years (Parents Representative Council, Parramatta Catholic Education Office 1997). Some of the participants had been to the funerals of siblings or relations who had committed suicide and had, as a consequence, witnessed the grief and associated regrets of family and friends regarding the deceased. To be the cause of, and to witness, such a high level of ritual and grief was a pleasing thought to several of these young people. I felt compelled, therefore, to most forcefully enter the discussion as a senior member of society in order to emphatically state that ‘when you are dead you are dead.’ Tito with his
'belief' in reincarnation (session 5) and his notion that the 'spirit' of a person survives the dissolution of the body (session 6), persisted with his idea that a person's spirit could be present at their funeral:

R You don't actually get to see your funeral.
Tito How do you know? Have you been dead?

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) question whether a researcher can ever be a 'cool, dispassionate observer'. I was at this site because I was a long-standing teacher at the school and I hoped, a responsible, caring adult. Privately owning my subjectivity, and acknowledging the role that we, the participants, had constructed for me, I felt constrained out of a sense of protection for these young people, to intervene in order to make their lives more secure. I therefore encouraged a discussion that I intended would banish any misconceptions they – particularly Tito – might have had about the reality of death.

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After we read the poem 'Marriage' by Thomas Shapcott in which a husband favourably comments on his wife, the following discussion took place

Pace Who says this to a girl?
R It's nice isn't it?
Carlo It starts you thinking.
R Will we explain it a little more or will we just read it [again]?
Responding to nods for more explanation.
R OK so the guy is there - he sees his wife - they're probably been married some years - she is carrying his child....
Peta What guy is like that but?
Pace Well there's a guy like that - he's in there [referring to the poem].
Indecipherable comments
Carlo Can you read it again?
R All right.
Carlo Just listen OK [addresses this comment to peers].
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Further reflection/analysis

What followed was a second reading of the poem where the participants listened so intensely that Tito laughed because he found their mood too serious, particularly Peta
and Pace's intensity. He was scolded (and jokingly threatened) by group members because he had interrupted a time of reflection. At the conclusion of the reading of this poem, Pace asked if I had ever written a poem and when I replied that I had written a few, he asked me to bring the best one along to one of our sessions and read it to the group.

After some sessions together, I sometimes felt disheartened as I feared that nothing in the way of dialogue, or even progression in respect and consideration for others had occurred. After listening to the tapes, however, I noticed dialogue, comments or even periods of silence that I had not realised were there, as well as examples of consideration and courtesy. Although I may not have always been conscious of improvements during the sessions themselves, I did notice that from session 9 onwards, the tapes became progressively easier to transcribe as the participants were not talking over each other as much.

In this session, the tape highlighted how quiet the participants were during the reading of the poems – perhaps they had given their attention to poetry for the first time ever? They took it very seriously and even reprimanded Tito for his interruption. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) maintain, the process of researching reveals much about yourself as both a researcher and a person. I would further suggest that in the case of my own research, it revealed much about my own teaching practice. On listening to the tapes, I often encountered missed opportunities where I had not encouraged bids to speak, primarily because I was concerned with speaking myself. However, in essence, the session was a pleasing one. The participants listened to each other and on the whole, were tolerant of opinions different from their own.
30th July 1998: Stephen, Micha and Carlo

On the 30th July I was giving an introductory talk to a group of students who had chosen to do philosophy as a learning centre project. Stephen, Micha and Carlo turned up to this meeting and I explained that this session was not for them, and that they had had their own orientation meeting in term one. They insisted so persistently that after gaining permission from their class teachers I allowed them to stay. The participants, along with 18 other students, gathered around posters of ruins of classical Greek times and a map of ancient Greece and Asia Minor. The three participants were exemplars of cooperative behaviour.

Were they there because they wished to miss another class? Were they there to demonstrate in front of other students some sort of school-based ownership of the practice of philosophy? Or were they keen to pick up what they had missed in their own orientation session due to lack of interest at that time? On this occasion they certainly listened very intently; and I suspect that their wanting to attend this orientation class was a mixture of all three of the above reasons.

Session 15 - Concerned with the Group’s Perception of when a Philosophic Discussion Occurs

Date: 31.8.98 7 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape. Stimulus: Our time was reduced to one hour again today due to a school-based activity, and as this was insufficient time to see the conclusion of Contact (1998) and have a discussion too, we used the medium of poetry as we had on the previous week to promote dialogue. We read ‘Mending Walls’ and ‘The Last Mowing’ by Robert Frost, and ‘Ambulances’ by Philip Larkin. The two Frost poems were chosen because the participants appeared to have liked Frost’s poem ‘The Road Not Taken’ which we had used the week before. Philip Larkin’s poem ‘Ambulances’ was included because I personally find it thought provoking in its exploration of chance encounters with other people’s lives. I hoped that the students would find it thought provoking too.
Participants’ self assessment

R How would we sum up our discussion today?
Pace Crap - crap - crap.
Tito At least we listened today - at least we got somewhere.
R Do you think that we really tried to have [sustained] quality of thought and conversation here today?

General consensus was ‘no’.

R So you guys are now starting to understand what a really quality conversation is - what a quality dialogue is - but it didn’t happen today? So what do you believe is - when do you think it happens - when does it happen?

Tony When everyone is here.
Pace When we talk about things we want to talk about.
R Like what? Like what? But you’ve agreed that the poetry was OK.
Pace Yeah I know that - but still.
R But what? When does it happen for us - when do we have a philosophic discussion? And what do you count as a philosophic discussion?

Some discussion ensued about when philosophic discussion occurred. Tony then said that real discussion had occurred when we had discussed Robert Frost’s poem ‘The Road not Taken’ in the previous session. All student participants agreed on this.

Reflection/analysis

On listening to the tape, I was again surprised at how silent the participants had been during the reading of the poems. I had some hope, therefore, that we might indeed explore the composition and aesthetic nature of literature as I had originally planned through Lipman’s text Suki before our sessions together were over. Nevertheless, we never used Suki in our sessions as I “judged” it inappropriate to this group of young people right up to the end of our sessions. The negative reaction to the day’s discussion as set out in the Participant self-assessment was surprising in that the session, while not of great philosophic depth, had still appeared to go well. I surmised that the participants were signalling that enough poetic stimulus material was enough!
Session 16 - Indications of Group Cohesiveness?

Date: 3.8.98  10 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: The conclusion of the movie Contact (1998).

Participants’ self assessment

There was a certain resistance by the group to going through a list of questions in order to evaluate their discussion. Recognising this, I proposed therefore, one single general question: How do you think our discussion went today? After a few minutes dialogue the student participants came up with the following response: We were happy about our behaviour and what we talked about – and the way we talked about it.

There was some concern again this week over two other groups of students who were doing philosophy as a learning centre project:

Extracts from session 16

Allan          You know the other philosophy group are they doing it twice a week?
R              Once a fortnight.
Allan          So we do it?
R              Once a week and they do it once a fortnight.
Ruben          It doesn’t matter what they do.
Pace            Don’t give them lollies and make it every second fortnight [for the other groups].

General laughter

Pace            You should [addressed to researcher].
Zac             You don’t give them all this hey [refers to coffee and tea].
R               Not quite the same (laughing).
Carlo           Three frogs - strictly BYO (laughing).
R               I like them too guys - they’re important.
Micha           But Miss we’re your main group.
R               You’re special there is no doubt about it (laughing).
Pace            You love us?
R               Absolutely.
Pace            Mmmm.
Reflection/analysis

I had not taken too much notice of this exchange at the time. I was amazed, however, when I listened to the tape after the session. Coffee and tea are available to all learning centre participants, and likewise I always have a tin of sweets on the table in any project that I am coordinating so that participants can help themselves at will; so these things cannot be so different or important? Pace’s comment is astounding. His ‘Mmmm’ was also interesting in that it appeared to be a satisfied sound. Pace’s comment might relay a message that there was too close a relationship between the participants and the participant observer. There was from session one, however, an appropriate distance that was always maintained and this was supported by mild but friendly formality in our greetings when we encountered each other in the playground. Respect between the participants and myself grew significantly throughout the sessions and this is supported by the content of the transcripts. Further, I would posit that what Pace was meaning to say was: ‘Do you sincerely care about us?’

The next transcript taken from this session refers to the segment of the film Contact where an astronaut is preparing to travel to the system Vega. The transcript also explores the possibility of experimenting in time/space. I have primarily included this segment because it demonstrates vigour – an enthusiasm to explore at some length concepts outside the concerns of our own immediate lives. Ruben astutely points out to the group in the first section of the transcript that a ‘world space project’ should not be symbolised by any one country’s flag. Stephen somewhat pragmatically counters with the point that we do not have any symbol of world unity. Ruben accepts Stephen’s point but still theoretically rejects the ethics of national ownership of such projects.
There is some general enthusiasm for the possibilities of space travel, but in the case of Zac and Allan, resistance to such endeavours.

Ruben has got a question guys listen in - nice and loud Ruben.

Miss - if they are representing the world why is he wearing the American Flag?

Yeah OK. Why is he going with the American flag?

What’s the world flag look like.

We don’t have a world flag exactly - so we shouldn’t have any flag on it so.

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We don’t need a worm hole. Why do we need a worm hole?

Because we need something that will go faster than the speed of light - because the speed of light would take us so long to get anywhere.

But why do we need that?

Why do we need space travel? Why do we need space travel guys?

To discover.

Because we’re bored.

To find out.

Micha says to discover. What do you mean?

Well....

If we didn’t have TVs we would be more active. I reckon we sit on the lounge watching TV.

Oh what are we going to do - walk out the front....

But what are we talking - when you are talking about not being a TV potato - we’re going a lot further than that - we’re talking about outer space. Why do we try to discover what is in outer space?

Because we are bored.

If we didn’t have TV we would do a lot more things.

Because it’s our universe too.

I reckon.

Our universe?

Yeah well if there is other things or whatever out there - like our universe and the world - it’s theirs as well. So we have the right to try to discover.

I reckon scientists are bored with stuff on earth and they’re just trying to think new.

Is there an obligation to try and discover things?

I don’t know - just think in about in the olden days far back before Christ and everything, they never would have thought we would be going to space - they probably never knew there was space. Now they’re probably thinking ‘Oh no we’ll never go further than that - but in the future they probably will be already there.’

Do you think that we need to investigate space in order to survive?

Yeah well what happens when like....

Well why do you want to go to space?

Well where would you go Allan?

It’s not a matter of life and death to go to space.

Well I’d give up my life to be on that thing [space vehicle in film Contact]

I would too.

Several voices agree that they would go as well
R And I can't explain why - I'd just like to know.

Allan I'd like to go up but we've already got rockets isn't that enough?

R But we never would have invented rockets if we had of thought that way.

Micha But it's not enough.

Ruben Wouldn't you give your life to travel through ...[space?]

R Why isn't it enough - explain it for me Micha.

Micha We want to get past just going to the moon.

Zac Get more like....

Micha We want to get past all that, there's probably something even better past....

Several voices bid to speak

R Let her finish let her finish - what do you think?

Micha I don't know.

Allan Miss if they want to get further away send satellites first.

R But Allan if we had of had the same mind set that you're talking about - not bothering about things in outer space we wouldn't have even had satellites.

What ensued was in essence a discussion about the uniqueness of each individual's experience. On the other hand, we also discussed the possibility that there might be parallel universes, and other dimensions to our own planet Earth. Ruben was keen to explore the possibility that there might be a parallel philosophy group to our own discussing the same topic that we were in a parallel universe.

Micha Another world could be just this world and they could be saying the same thing.

R All right what do you say [to that] Ruben?

Ruben Like there could be another Maureen in exactly the same grass in exactly the same....

R Well it wouldn't be exactly the same because it wouldn't be the same grass, it would be parallel Maureen and grass.

Ruben No what - the grass is exactly the same....

R No it can't be exactly the same - this finger isn't exactly the same as this finger.

Ruben Well if it's made up of the same object [substance] it would be.

Tony It is.

Ruben And it's placed in exactly the same way - if you're saying there is another thing exactly like you well wouldn't it be the same object as you?

Zac I think it is the same.

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Further reflection/analysis

Micha and Ruben open up for the group, particularly Tony and Zac, the problematic areas of the nature of parallel universes. Ruben is concerned to point out that the
word ‘exactly’ means composed of the same substance. As he puts it, ‘Well if it’s made up of the same object it would be...if you’re saying there is another thing exactly like you well wouldn’t it be the same object as you?’ Ruben’s logical argument prompts Tony to agree with him, and Zac to more tentatively agree.

In my own regard, I found that on occasions I was dialoguing in such a way as to genuinely call upon Micha to speak, not because I wanted to encourage her to continue to speak, but because I needed her to explain what I was having difficulty explaining. Likewise in my dialogue with Ruben, I was perplexed as I seriously tried to gain understanding about the nature of a ‘sameness’. This situation which saw me so engaged in the dialogue, and the students’ acceptance of this situation and their help, demonstrates a certain level of egalitarian community.

Micha’s contributions to the discussions became more regular as the sessions progressed. Peta appeared to become increasingly involved via attentiveness and body language but she still did not contribute orally on a regular basis. Peta did not seem to be overawed by the robustness of the boys but rather quietly interested in what the group had to say.

Session 17 - Student Participant Appreciation of Work Ethic in Tolstoy

Date: 10.8.98  8 students present.  Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: An extract for each participant dealing with the reaping scene from Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy(1997) and an old scythe to give visual impetus to the story. An extract from the BBC series on The Human Face. (1998). The reading from Anna Karenina was chosen because it is generally perceived as a particularly beautiful piece of prose and it generally promoted discussion in English classes at Emeritus High. It deals with a scene in which a person of a high social standing chooses to take
himself out of his world of privilege and allow himself to be tested in an unfamiliar world of physical labour.

*The Human Face* was chosen because we had over the sessions often discussed the nature of language. I thought that another dimension to language i.e. para-language through physical expression, might be of interest to the students.

**Participants’ self assessment**

The participants wanted it recorded that they were reasonably pleased with the way they had organised their points of view and generally listened to the opinions of others. They wanted it recorded, however, that there had been nothing like agreement over the matter of societal punishment for drug users. As a consequence of the level of intensity over this issue, they requested that we discuss material relating to crime and appropriate punishment next session.

As a visual stimulus to the extract from *Anna Karenina*, I took along an old scythe that I had found on a farm some years ago, and put it on the table around which we gathered. At the beginning of the session I said the following to the participants:

**R** What I am hoping for is that we’ll discuss after we have read it - what it is that is really beautiful about this extract, because there is really not a whole heap of action here - maybe you won’t find it beautiful but I suspect you will.

I gave the participants some historical background to the extract, and I also alluded to the idea that labour, or some forms of labour, may have some inherent value and dignity. Levin, as a socially “privileged” person, may have believed this too when he deliberately placed himself on an equal playing field with his peasants. Retrospectively, I realised that I had tried to condition an appreciative response from the participants, and that on this occasion I could not divorce my position as a teacher in the school from my position as a researcher. Over time I came to understand that both positions of teacher and researcher had to be accommodated. Like Helen Vendler
(1988) I use Wordsworth's words at the end of *The Prelude*, as my justification:

'What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how.'

Seven of the eight participants present listened with what could only be called rapt attention; and on three occasions when Tito sought to distract his peers the following comments were directed at him:

Ruben  Tito where is your respect? (I am not sure if the word 'respect' applied to me or the piece of prose that I was reading).
Micha  This isn't fair OK.
Ruben  Shut up.
Micha  If you don't want to be here Tito, get out.
Stephen  Fair dinkum [addressed to Tito].
R  I don't want him to get out - I want him here but I want him to give me a fair go.
Zac  Yeah.
Tony  Go on Miss.

Silence followed the end of my reading the extract. Ruben was the first to speak.

Ruben  Miss can you read that - that part that's kinda smudged [each of the participants had a copy of the extract].
R  No I can't, I've deliberately cut that out because that's kinda the end of the episode. It's strangely beautiful isn't it?
Micha & Ruben  Umph. (Agreeing)
R  Do we know why? If we have to think of a story - I and I guess you guys too - like a lot of action in a story sometimes - yet there is no action in this. Why is it so beautiful?
Micha  Because the man - like he's the leader - and he is not just getting paid for it, he's going out there and actually working - doing what they do. He's not treating them like trash - he wants to feel how they feel.
Ruben  He's a very just man.

Reflection/analysis

We did not achieve the level of discussion or dialogue that I had hoped for but there was a perceptible air of appreciation of the text and Micha, Stephen and Ruben took it upon themselves to remind Tito about his socially inappropriate behaviour. The participants listened intently throughout the reading and I was satisfied that we were
all exposed to – and enjoyed – an aesthetic piece of prose. We did, however, sustain approximately 10 minutes of overall discussion about the extract. I have read this extract in other more economically privileged schools and there has never been the level of interest (and understanding?) that this piece of prose received at Emeritus High.

We next watched a section of the BBC video documentary *The Human Face*, and we had to change rooms from the school learning centre to a science laboratory in order to gain access to a VCR. Zac, although he had been reasonably settled during the reading from *Anna Karenina*, was very unsettled just before and during the video. At one stage he jumped up onto a laboratory bench and at other times threw a small piece of plastic piping around the room. I felt compelled to correct him about his behaviour, but he was still reluctant to join our circle, insisting on sitting outside it.

After an initial discussion dealing with a definition which sees the human face as being one end of a digestive system, while I had hoped that the discussion would move on to the exploration of para-language, the students moved on to talk about the use of drugs. This led on to a story where Tito and Zac had gone into a public toilet at a local shopping centre to find a man ‘shooting up’. This man subsequently was taken out of the shopping centre and beaten up and kicked by the shopping centre’s security guards. The discussion then went on to examine what a police person or a security person may or may not do; it also led on to discussion of whether a person should be punished by society for drug addiction. Tito and Zac did not see a problem with the security men’s treatment of the drug user. Zac stated that the man deserved to have
‘the crap kicked out of him because suppose a little kid had of gone into the toilet and saw him.’

It was a fruitful discussion but it would be inappropriate to record it here as some of the contributions constituted private information about family members. The participants expressed the desire to discuss the subject of ‘crime and punishment’ at our next meeting.

Session 18 - General Regressions in Tolerance, Logic and Courtesy

Date: 17.8. 98 10 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: As requested last week I supplied the participants with written material dealing with crime and the penal system. The text was entitled Discussions and was written by T.F. Smith and G. Spencer (1972).

Participants’ self assessment

With very little discussion, the participants all agreed that their contributions and attempts at philosophic dialogue had been poor.

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Reflection/analysis

Today’s efforts at working towards a philosophic discussion could be described as regressive. The session, while nowhere near as chaotic as the early sessions, was still a backward step in tolerance, logic and courtesy – and perhaps loyalty, in that Tito was told by one of his peers ‘not to be stupid like his family’, and this statement was endorsed by the rest of the group. This comment would seem to be at the very least, a misuse of family history that Tito had insisted upon sharing with us, particularly in the previous session and in sessions six and seven.
At the end of period five, I suggested that it would be a good idea to return to mainstream classes for period six as nothing resembling a true effort to enter into a philosophic dialogue had occurred. I tried to be rational and just in my attitude; and I put it to them that we were wasting time and that there did not appear to be any hope of a discussion that day. Several members of the group tried to lay the blame at Tito and Zacs’ door, but I would not allow the blame to be put on any one participant, although on listening to the tape I recognised that Tito and Zac had been particularly uncooperative. The animosity felt towards Tito at this session was very obvious.

My sending the participants back to classes was a risky thing to do as they are very proud young people and there was the danger that they might not return for future sessions. I saw it as being the right course of action at the time because, while the participants were not nearly as badly behaved as in the early sessions, we had moved on since then to higher standards of courtesy and tolerance. Their behaviour during this session was a clear backward step from these higher standards.

**Peta and Micha**

When I had suggested that we were wasting our time and that it was a good idea to go back to class, Peta and Micha did not resist the idea, but all of the eight boys resisted. Micha, during this session, put her head down on the table as she had in the orientation meeting, signalling, I thought, that she did not want to be part of the proceedings. When I asked her later on that day, ‘Do you think that I did the right thing in bringing the meeting to an early close?’ she replied, ‘Yes you did because everyone was yelling over each other. It was boring, we couldn’t discuss anything.’
Tito

Tito returned after the other participants had left to ask if he could take home the scythe that I had brought to the previous session in order to sharpen and polish it for me. He appeared, as in session 12, to be seeking reassurance or acceptance. After eliciting promises from him that he would not decapitate other students, I agreed! I arranged for him to pick the implement up after school ended that day. He himself organised that his brother should pick him up after school so that he would not travel in the school bus. This I surmised was a courtesy extended to me in order to alleviate any worry that I might have on a safety score. He returned the scythe two days later. The blade was sharpened and polished and firmly attached to the handle, which had been varnished. He must have expended many hours of work on its restoration. He asked me several times since giving the scythe back, what my husband thought of its restoration. Male approval seemed important to Tito. One of the Student Support Group’s comments on the questionnaire had been ‘Tito will always choose a male teacher before a female teacher’. Yet Tito appeared to go out of his way to give me a friendly greeting in the playground.

A possible explanation for the disorderly and uncooperative behaviour of this session may simply lie in the nature of the weather. The word in the staffroom that day was that classes were unruly. It was generally felt that the rainy conditions over the past three weeks – particularly the extreme wet conditions over the weekend – were causing the students to be, as two teachers put it, ‘stir crazy.’

18th August 1998: Ruben

Ruben was suspended on the 18th August for threatening to wait outside the school in order to fight a young male teacher. The threat followed a power play in which a
young male teacher told Ruben to pick up some papers in the school playground. Ruben passed some comment registering his disapproval of the request and as a consequence the teacher increased the number of papers to be picked up to 25. The power play continued till the number of papers to be picked up reached 100. At this point Ruben issued his threat. The teacher relayed the threat to the principal and Ruben was subsequently suspended.

While Ruben was in isolation waiting for his mother to pick him up, I went and talked with him. He was very sad as he regretted the 'pain and shame I will cause my mother.' I did not remonstrate with him, nor did I speak about the silliness of such power plays. However, I did relay my sadness over his predicament. The suspension was for two days and was lifted after an interview among the principal, Ruben and his mother.
CHAPTER 6

‘WOULD A BLIND MAN HAVE NO SOUL?’

At this point the group appeared to recognise the need to move into more rigorous discussion procedures. While there are some lapses of cooperative behaviour among the participants, nevertheless this chapter offers more consistent examples of sustained philosophic discussion and empathy towards the suffering of others. Further, there are significant examples – particularly towards the end of the sessions – where participants appear to have a genuine interest in each other’s well being.

Session 19 - Dialogue on the Nature of “The Soul”, and Religious Faith

Date: 24.8. 98  8 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady as retold by Selina Hastings and illustrated by Juan Wijngaard (1985). This narrative was chosen as a stimulus to discussion because it seeks to explore the idea of a universal. It revolves around the question put to King Arthur by the Black Knight: ‘What is it that every woman most desires?’ This story from Arthurian folklore also examines other philosophic questions and issues such as ‘When am I my true self?’, ‘What is beauty?’ and ‘Is it ever right to manipulate others in a good cause?’

Participants’ self assessment

Prior to beginning our session we agreed that we would evaluate our discussion around the seven following areas:

* turn taking
* respect for one another – disagreeing with an argument not a person
* being open to the thoughts of others
* avoiding being silly
* posing good questions
* keeping in mind that the real reason for our discussions is to gain understanding
* keeping in mind that everyone’s opinion is of equal value

As a result of the above considerations the participants at the conclusion of the session said: ‘There was respect between some people although we did pick on Tito a little, but it’s his fault. We did allow ourselves to be influenced by the ideas of others; and there were some good questions in among some silly ones. We should continue to work in this way, only better.’

-----------------------------------------
I had been fearful that the participants might not turn up this week following my sending them back to class last week. All 10 participants were waiting for me at the conclusion of lunch however. During this session I requested that we observe more rigorous procedures. I perceived the session as a reasonably good one in spite of the somewhat negative appraisal given to it by the student participants. In this first extract the students are concerned to understand the nature of desire and whether it is located in a physical or mental realm.

Extracts from session 19

Ruben Does a desire have to be like something that comes -- from - your mind or could it be related to....
Micha Where else is it gonna come from?
Stephen Your heart?
Ruben Can it be related to food and all that?
R So is it physical or is it mental? Is a desire physical or is it mental?
Stephen Mental.
Ruben Yeah like food and women [agreeing with the physical/mental components of the question].
Micha Mental because it’s a desire.
Ruben No, no, I’m saying is the craving actually mental or physical?
Micha Both.
Ruben For food and sex, that’s physical. To have a desire for knowledge that’s not physical.
Stephen Yeah it is for if you got rid of your body you wouldn’t get it.

Carlo then asked the group if he could ‘get off the track a bit’, and he told us the story line of a movie that he had seen recently in which aliens believed that the way to capture a human’s soul was through their conscience. ‘It wasn’t a good movie,’ he said, ‘but it made you think – I mean really think.’ When he was asked what his point/question was he said:

Carlo I’m not really asking anything. I just want to put forward a point about your soul kinda thing.
R Have you got any ideas yourself about what a soul might be?
Carlo responded to the above question by telling us about another film that he had seen called *City of the Damned*. In this film there had been a quote – ‘The eyes are the windows of the soul’ – which Carlo thought related to our search for understanding about the nature of the soul and could thereby add to our discussion. In the following extract they seek to link the physical with the spiritual.

Ruben: I like that wording ‘The eyes are the windows of the soul’.
Micha: Yeah.
Ruben: Because when you think about it - what’s let come into your soul.
Micha: Yeah because your eyes influence it like seeing it and....
Ruben: Yeah.

The Year Tens were at the time studying the play *Macbeth*, so as a counter to the idea that ‘The eyes are the windows to the soul’, the researcher reminded the Year Ten students of King Duncan’s saying: ‘There’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face.’

The Year Ten students then gave a brief overview of the *Macbeth* plot to their Year Nine peers. Carlo then came up with the following question:

Carlo: Would a blind man have no soul?
Stephen: But he still has eyes.
Ruben: But it didn’t say the windows are the soul.
Carlo: He’s got eyes but what’s so good about that if he can’t see - like he’s blind.
Ruben: No it’s just using it as an example I think - ‘eyes are the windows of the soul’ for people who can see.
Pace: But then he’s saying [Carlo] what about blind people?
Stephen: What’s their window to their soul?
Micha: Ears.
Ruben: Ears yes. What they hear.
Stephen: Then that makes that quote wrong then.

The participants in this exchange see the notion of “a window into the soul” as being a means by which something enters into the soul, rather than a means by which a soul is revealed to an observer. Micha and Ruben’s idea that ears substitute for the eyes of
a blind man exemplify this perception. Initially, however, the participants were confusing ‘windows’ with the soul itself, but Ruben straightened them out by his distinction: ‘But it didn’t say windows are the soul.’ Stephen questions the whole truth of the metaphor on the grounds that to have found an exception – a blind man having different soul access – is to disprove the universality of the statement.

Micha Miss can I tell you what I reckon the soul is - I reckon - a soul is there for us for when we die it goes on to the next thing - like to heaven or whatever.

R This was an old philosophic debate - Plato and Aristotle felt differently about it. Plato said that the real ‘you’ was the soul and that when the body died the soul was kinda free. Aristotle said, ‘Oh no the soul and the body are one’ - kinda united and blended into the one thing so that when the body dies the soul does not survive what he called ‘the dissolution of the body’.

Tony Miss you can come back to life....

Tito Your soul is where you get hurt....

Carlo You can come back to life.

Pace What the soul? Miss, miss, I think....

Carlo Reincarnation.

Pace But how can you when you are buried and your body just dies and goes to - yeah but that’s Jesus that not ....

Tony But still it can be other people.

Carlo But where did the soul originate from?

Pace But did the what?

Carlo Where did it originate from? Where did it get the soul? Where did it come - like - Do you know where it came from? [addressed to researcher].

Stephen Adam and Eve. [This is a long standing joke among the participants - when you are uncertain about origins say ‘Adam and Eve’].

Pace You can’t say where it came from because it’s in everyone.

R No better than you can - I can only have a bit of a guess the same as you [responding to Carlo’s question].

Stephen But Miss your soul is like your personality.

Pace No it’s not.

Allan Naw I reckon your soul....

Stephen What about people with like multiple personalities and that.

Micha They’ve got six souls.

R Well have they got multiple souls?

Stephen Because they reckon that their body totally changes - and they have – they know that there is other people there and that they’re all using the same body - your soul might be like - in halves?

Pace How can someone do that?

Tito People say - do you know how people say you don’t have a soul - you know how when people say you don’t have a soul?

R Yeah [responding to Tito].
Tito Because you’ve done something wrong. A soul is where like - a soul is supposed to be where the good things are kept and....
R Don’t they say ‘you haven’t got a heart’?

*Multiple agreement.*

Ruben They define heart and ....
Micha They say soul as well [agreeing with Tito].
R Do they? They’re saying heart and soul are the same thing?
Tito Yep. You’re heart comes - love comes from your heart and happiness comes from your soul.
R What about hate? Where does hate come from?
Pace Your heart.
R Do you remember Romeo and Juliet the movie where Juliet says: ‘My only love sprung from my only hate’?

*Multiple agreement.*

Tony Your soul is everything miss.
R I think poor old Allan has been trying to have a go here.
Allan I think the soul like goes to heaven - I reckon it’s not heaven like you’re invisible - Your soul’s there but it’s invisible.
Carlo A ghost or something?

*Multiple agreement.*

Pace No but - naw - naw.

What followed was a discussion on the existence or otherwise of ghosts, and then Ruben spoke about his own religious doubts which in turn opened up the doubts of others. These doubts are surprising, particularly in regard to Tony, who only several statements before spoke with some certainty about the idea of the resurrection of the body after death, modelled on the resurrection of Jesus. It would appear that several of these young people were wrestling with two sets of ideas: fundamental Christian beliefs; and pragmatic disbelief in the existence of a metaphysical dimension.

Ruben Miss, miss, sometimes like I really think about it - and I think maybe - maybe there is like the soul or whatever or maybe we just die and it will just be like a computer shutting off.
Tony Yeah Miss - say there isn’t - you know they say - like sometimes people really don’t believe in a soul and that - and what if there isn’t a heaven and hell? What if they just made it up?
Pace Why did they make it up?
Tito How do people know that there’s a heaven and a hell?
Tony Yeah that’s what I’m saying.
Micha It’s called faith. *Micha’s comment about faith was followed by a significant silence and then laughter.*
Tony Like you know if you have no soul - like there’s no thing heaven or hell. *A significant silence follows Tony’s comment.*
R You have a good point there Tony.
The discussion moved into the nature of guilt, with both Tito and Pace questioning whether there should be any forgiveness for someone who premeditates a crime of violence – whether the premeditated nature of the violence precludes sorrow. This led into the age-old dilemma of why “bad” things happen to good people. A recent example from our own school community was quoted: that of a father and son drowning at sea.

Pace Some people say that if you believe in God like good things will happen to you. A lot of good people believe in God and look what happened to them. For instance I’m not being disrespectful but look at [here names father in school family] he believed in God like anyone....

Ruben No no no and if he were alive today he still would love God.

Pace Yeah I’m saying I’m saying - he believed in God so much.

Tito God probably wanted him.

Ruben No.

Tony Probably it was time for him to go so.

Allan Time for him to go.

R Do you think that there is the possibility....

Tito The power of the seas like they say that God ....

R I think that’s closest to it Tito - the fact that we say God wanted him – I personally, I’m not at home with that....

Ruben Yeah.

R I think:::

Ruben That means God did not want us.

R He’s out on the sea - and a bad sea comes up like it did - cause and effect.

Ruben His motor konked out.

Ruben again gently and courteously gets to the kernel of the matter. In spite of the fact that he himself doubted the existence of God he still used the idea of God to highlight a logical flaw. To say that God caused someone’s death because he wanted him, suggested Ruben, was to say that God does not want the living.
A little time after the above dialogue, the discussion moved into the area of
vulnerability and the aged. Pace recounted a recent incident that had upset him. He
had seen some youths throw bottles at an intoxicated man, hitting him on the head.

Pace  And the way he was talking like you could tell that he couldn’t talk
properly like he was going....
Tito  But if you was drunk you wouldn’t talk properly.
Pace  He had his head like that and you could see a bone sticking out.
Micha  Miss I used to go out when I was younger - I used to laugh at people with
my friends and that but now when I’m going out I don’t care if they laugh
I just say ‘What are you laughing at, you’re stupid’ and they hate me for
it.

Reflection/analysis

This general sympathy for the vulnerable may have always been part of the way these
young people have thought, but they might never have expressed these feelings. In
session 4, there had been some discussion of how the risk of throwing rocks at a bus,
and possibly hurting someone, was worthwhile because of the excitement of the bus
driver chasing you. This was further discussed in session 8. Here, however, there
was certainly sympathy expressed by the participants for the intoxicated man and the
injury sustained by him from the bottle-throwing youths. Micha was also maintaining
that she now publicly objected to ill treatment of the vulnerable.

Carlo’s request that the group allow for ‘his getting off the track a bit’ so that he could
include in the discussion a puzzling aspect of a movie that he had seen, appears to
indicate several things about Carlo’s thinking. Carlo was recognising that for a
discussion to be sustained there needed to be some continuity of theme. Secondly,
Carlo recognised that although it ‘wasn’t a good movie’, it still had elements that were
worthy of discussion and reflection. Carlo appears to be reflecting more.
Following the success of the early part of session 17 when the participants listened with rapt attention to the extract from *Anna Karenina*, where Levin and the peasants work together, I thought that there might be some value in offering for their reflection another text that ‘I have loved’. I surmise that the life experience of the participants has led them to reject children’s stories per se (see reflection on session six). I believe however, that Hastings’ rendition of *Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady* pleases not only a child, but also pleases the child in the adult; it is therefore, in my opinion, a story for all ages. Hastings uses language creatively and effectively; and Wijngaard’s efforts at medieval illustrations are splendid and every bit as sensuous as Hastings’ prose.

These Year Nine and Ten “sophisticated” students were spell bound by the narrative and illustrations, and objected to our time together coming to an end without completing the narrative. I correctly surmised that the story would provide discussion material for two more sessions. The majority of interruptions that occurred were either philosophic questions or statements that led into philosophic dialogue.

The narrative, *Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady*, revolves around the question put to King Arthur by the Black Knight: ‘What is it that every woman most desires?’ Micha thought that she had come up with a desire common to all human beings when she said that what every human being desires is to breathe. Her rationale for this was that it is impossible to hold your breath deliberately in order to die. This logic was in part negated because the researcher pointed out that a person may desire to hold their breath but physically be unable to do so. This in turn led to the question put by Ruben which is stated at the beginning of the transcription extract: ‘Does a desire have to be like something that comes -- from - your mind or could it be related to....[the
physical]. The session was very pleasing in that the discussion was centred on
philosophic content and conducted for the most part in a reasonable way.

Session 20 - Anomalies Between Academic Products and Thinking Skills

Date: 26.8.98  9 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: A continuation of the narrative, Sir Gawain and The Loathly Lady, as retold
by Selina Hastings (1985).

Participants’ self assessment

The most important thing to emerge out of the participants’ evaluation of this session
was the recognition that they needed to think more about the end product:
understanding. Micha said in relation to being influenced by the ideas of others: ‘I am
speaking for myself here, but I was influenced by Carlo’s thinking about the soul.’

All participants agreed and wanted it recorded that they had been influenced by what
Carlo had said too. The evaluation of the session did not revolve around any
questions but on the request of the participants, followed the lines of a discussion.

All ten participants were waiting outside the school learning centre when I arrived.

Zac

Zac was extremely ‘active’ during the settling in time while we made some coffee,
and insisted on sitting away from the group, and on occasions he walked restlessly
around the room. I coaxed him into the circle but he withdrew almost immediately. I
insisted that he would have to sit with us. It had appeared to me for some time that
Zac needed a significant amount of space around him before he was comfortable, but
the amount of space that he was demanding at this time was impracticable and
unworkable for the dynamics of a community of inquiry. The insistence that he sit
around the table led him to say that he needed to go back to class to finish some work.
This sort of comment had never been made before as the participants were forever trying to get more time for our group and certainly never deliberately absenting themselves. The remaining participants said, ‘Well go then. You’re free to go.’ Several of them encouraged Zac to take Tito along as well. Tito appeared to be embarrassed about their suggestion, but insisted upon staying. I defended Tito’s right to be with us, and I told Zac that I hoped we would see him next session.

The session was fruitful. The participants controlled Tito’s interruptions as they had in session 19. As also in session 19, I gently but firmly, insisted on more rigorous procedures.

What follows appears to the researcher to be a representative example of the tone and nature of the discursive proceedings of this session:

Extracts from session 20

R Real beauty I think - lies....
Micha Within.
Pace But how can beauty be inside that’s stup....[here Pace appears to pull himself up from saying the word ‘stupid’].
R Well what do I mean?
Tito Pace’s beauty [seeking to make the group laugh].
Ruben I know what you mean.
R What do I mean Ruben - explain it for me.
Micha Personality.
Ruben What we look like doesn’t describe us - it’s not the whole us. The real us is our personality and how we are affectionate and all that.
Tony Some people like aged people like - like they don’t care if they’re like ugly or not or how pretty they are. They just like go the way they are. Personality.
R Whether they’re good people?
Micha If you just go for someone because of their looks you won’t end up staying with them.

Multiple comments
Micha It won’t work.
Carlo

Carlo who is the only member of the group keen on acting, often drew analogous examples from film and theatre. On this occasion, in exploration of what constituted beauty, Carlo cited the film *The Mask*. In this film, Carlo explained that a blind girl falls in love with a man that is regarded as being horribly deformed. In this case, maintained Carlo, the girl falls in love with him ‘as a person’. Ruben saw this as relating to our previous discussion about ‘the eyes being the windows of the soul.’

Ruben  You know what this also relates to? The eyes are the windows - she couldn’t let evil come into like her face. She could only judge his goodness cause she couldn’t actually see him.
R  So in a way are - are you saying there - guys come on [calling on several of the group to stop talking to each other about the topic and make the subject general]. Are you saying they’re....
Tito  Excuse me....
R  No because I’m talking.
Pace  Shut up [to Tito].
R  Are you saying that to that girl - eyes would be a disadvantage? That eyes can be a disadvantage?
Ruben  Because to everyone else eyes were a disadvantage [in regard to this ‘ugly’ man].

Reflection/analysis

Ruben’s distrust of the sense of sight in this instance was very interesting, as was also the reflective response that his statement promoted in other group members. There was an ease and sincerity that was developing within the group, even to my telling Tito that he couldn’t speak because he was interrupting me and I wanted to finish my question. That was a personal protest that I would not have *intentionally* granted myself in earlier sessions.
27th August 1998: Zac

Zac was suspended along with three other Year Nine boys over a drug-related incident. The other boys were allowed back into the school after the regulatory meeting of parents, student and principal; but because Zac was the student who brought the drug to school, his parents were asked to find him another school. I am very sad about his leaving. Sadder than I was when Gary and Tim were asked to leave because I hardly knew them.

On a more positive note, the principal told me that Zac had also taken drugs to a party attended by two other research participants. Both of these young people had been offered the drug but had refused it. This may, or may not, account for his increasing inclination to have more and more physical space between him and the other participants, his reluctance to be part of a circle and his insistence on walking around the room during times of discussion (see reflections on sessions 17 and 20). His intolerance towards the drug addict that he and Tito had come across in the toilets at Plumton Shopping Centre was puzzling, however (session 17). He and Tito had fully endorsed the hiding and kicking that the security people had given this man. Zac had said at this session: 'He deserved the crap kicked out of him. Suppose some little kid had come in and seen him.' Sadly, he had not seen himself or his peers as kids; and his intolerance may indeed have been related to resentment of the person who first exposed him to drug taking.

1st September 1998

Teachers were now approaching me regularly to encourage Stephen, Peta and Ruben to hand in assignments. I was reluctant to put pressure on them in this way and always avoided it. My reluctance to intervene was not out of fear of interfering with
my objectivity as a researcher because I had long come to the realisation that I was not a researcher at an unknown site. I had a significant stake in the site, the students were known to me and I had a strong concern and overall dedication to their welfare. My reluctance to pressure them for assignments was based on the ‘hunch’ that these students – Stephen, Peta and Ruben – would only produce assignments if they were individually assisted by their teachers into achieving successful products. Their academic/product level had “slipped too far” below their natural intelligence and, further, they resented products that categorised them at a level below what “they are”. This suspicion was strengthened by my hearing that both Stephen and Ruben had deliberately destroyed work that had been deemed acceptable by their Creative Arts and Maths teachers.

Peta

Peta was in a first-year-out teacher’s English class during the year, and while she had stopped giving him outright cheek and deliberate resistance, she had not produced any homework or assignments. On the pretext of redressing unevenness in class numbers I, as English Coordinator, reshuffled English classes, taking Peta into my year 9 English class. At no time during the remainder of the year did Peta in any way use the relationship that we had in our philosophy group to her advantage in class. Several weeks after her entrance into my English class, I gave the students an assignment. I took the opportunity to say to her privately: ‘I know what sound and rational thinking you are capable of, and I realise that your written skills are lagging behind your thinking ability. Therefore I want you to know that I will not see your assignment as representing your intelligence. What I am hoping for is that you will put real effort into your assignment so that the practice of doing it will lessen the distance between your written work and your thinking level.’
Perhaps a confusion that she felt had been explained or crystallised for her. I gave the class two separate periods in which to gather information towards this assignment and during this time she used me as a resource and also worked fairly rigorously. I was fairly hopeful that I would see a finished piece of work.

During session 13 a certain frustration emerged relating to the difficulty of throwing off established perceptions. Tito, in particular, felt this and one comment that he made was the following: ‘In my last English lesson, I sat at the back of the class and I didn’t talk to anyone – just worked. [Here names teacher] said to me at the end of the lesson, “What’s wrong with you today?” ’ He then appealed to the group with the question, ‘How can you become better?’

Session 21 - Issues of Pedagogical Justice

Date: 2.9.98 4 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.

Participants’ self assessment

At the conclusion of the session, the participants spent some time discussing the quality of their interactions and how they had or had not, demonstrated thinking skills. The participants believed that they had:

* Taken turns to speak
* Had initially shown respect for each other’s opinions, but then Pace admitted that he had teased Tito. This acknowledgement led to the other participants admitting that they too had not always shown respect towards each other. They wanted it recorded that while at times they had been ‘silly’ that they had still gained knowledge through their discussion. They were relatively pleased about the way they had ‘pulled some ideas apart’ in order to gain understanding.
The small number of participants at this session was due to the Year Tens being on work experience and Peta being at home sick – or possibly finishing an English assignment that I had set and which was due that day. The intimate numbers in this session seemed to promote an atmosphere where the Year Nine participants wanted to talk about dismissal from the school, but interestingly enough, not about Zac himself, or the reason for his being asked to leave. The four participants stated in conversation that they were going to make sure that it never happened to them.

**Tito, Pace, Allan and Tony**

During the first 15 or so minutes of our meeting together, the participants spoke about their frustration over recent assignment results. Tito, Pace, Allan and Tony all complained about low marks they had received in spite of their putting in significant efforts. On receiving their English assignments, both Tito and Allan had screwed them up and put them in the class bin. Their English teacher had recovered the assignments from the bin and returned them (Allan and Tito are in the same English class). Tito showed me his assignment and asked me to grade it. At his insistence, I read it but explained that I could not, for professional reasons, assign it a hypothetical grade. It would seem that these four students are making real efforts to improve the standard of their work, but there appears to be an impatience on their part for results and recognition of their efforts by teachers. The screwing up of their English assignments because they were not happy with the results, was the same action carried out by Stephen and Ruben when they received ‘a satisfactory mark’ in their Creative Arts and Mathematics assignments and which was discussed in data of the 1st September.
These indignant students, particularly Tito, Pace and Allan, complained about teachers always referring to the work and ideas of high achievers. ‘We have ideas too,’ they stated. I was prompted to ask myself if this recognition of their own ability to generate ideas, and also their resentment at not being asked to contribute to the pool of knowledge within a classroom, had been stimulated by our philosophy sessions. A driving force underlying the facilitation of Philosophy for Children is, after all, recognition of the value of all individual contributions. And these individual efforts all contribute to the understanding of the issue under examination.

They also complained about:

* teachers specifically asking the high achieving students questions and soliciting their opinions
* teachers always choosing the high achievers to answer questions and ‘ignoring students like us.’
* teachers using a complicated vocabulary when giving instructions, and then when explanations were asked for, students being told ‘next time listen’.
* being constantly seen in the light of past bad behaviour.

One teacher, according to Allan, called his art work rubbish, and this, after he had expended considerable time on it at home. He resisted her judgement by saying: ‘Well I like it.’ This self-confident response was promising. While it can be assumed that the four participants are probably neglecting to state the endorsements they do receive, this perception of teacher intolerance on the part of these students, in what is recognised as a just and caring school, is a concern.

My response to these emotionally-charged complaints was to defuse the situation. I did not pass any comments on what teachers had supposedly said, but simply tried to encourage the students to continue trying. I endeavoured to build up their self-esteem so that they could cope with judgements made about their work in the future without loss of self-confidence. We also discussed the idea referred to in data of the 1st
September, that there is a significant gap between the quality of their thinking and experience, and the school-based products that they produce. They were encouraged to think that consistent efforts and time would bridge this gap.

**Teacher explanations**

The complaint that teachers were using a complicated vocabulary when giving instructions, and then when explanations are asked of them, responding with, ‘Next time listen,’ is interesting. There is a “practice” in teaching to develop student vocabulary that I have both used and observed others using. This “practice” involves using extended and specific language to give an instruction or explain a concept, and then backing it up surreptitiously with a more general “student-friendly” explanation so that the more complicated words are understood in context. An example of this practice would occur when a teacher says something like: ‘Take this concept and in a written discussion text type, extend it out to its logical conclusion. Yes, take this idea and write about it at length, perhaps for two pages or so until you have talked about all the main points. Do you think two or three pages will be enough space for you to really explore the different sides of this idea?’ The simple back-up repetition of the original, more concise but complicated, instruction, followed by the question inviting student responses and additional explanations, enables the teacher to:

* extend the students’ vocabulary;
* avoid patronising by overtly explaining the meaning of words;
* invite students to ask for further explanation; and,
* give students ownership of the task.

Perhaps this “practice” is not as widespread as I thought, or conversely, these four students were not picking up on the cues. If teaching cues were present, the students may have missed them because of their status as second phase English learners, or simply because there are gaps in their acquisition of mainstream cultural capital (Bourdieu 1993).
It was obvious during this session particularly without the Year Tens being present, how Tito is a disruptive element in the group although his peers take it upon themselves to try to keep him in order. It would appear that the participants were much more aware of the procedures that are necessary for a successful dialogue. Tito, however, did not appear to have that knowledge at this stage, or if he did, he appeared to value it less than the fun that he could derive from stirring his peers. Tito never missed a session so there were no comparisons to be made with a session that he had not attended.

The following extracts taken from this session would seem to the researcher to be representative examples of its general tone and content. The major philosophic concern of the dialogue was to grapple with definitions of honour and courage.

Extracts from session 21

**R** What is he talking about when he says ‘my honour is at stake’ - what does he mean by honour. Have you got honour?

**Pace** Everyone has honour - except for a bad bad thing.

**R** Have you got honour? [addressing Tony].

**Tony** I’ve got honour.

**R** You’re very conscious of your family honour aren’t you?

**Tony** Yeah.

**R** Nobody could say anything about your family without you being very upset because you care about the family’s honour - what does that mean then?

**Tony** Honour is like respect or umph thingie. Say I honour you it is probably just like thingie.

**R** What does thingie mean - try and work it out.

*Multiple interjections*

**R** Hang on. What does honour mean - what does honour mean. Tony is trying to work it out.

**Tony** He’s [King Arthur] probably talking about umph thingie. Honour is his will to fight for his freedom.

**R** Honour is related to freedom?

**Tony** Yeah.

**R** Freedom to what?

**Pace** Choose.
Tony Choose for yourself.
Pace For your own freedom.
R What internally or ....
Pace Yeah.

What follows is a charming incident in which these four so-called ‘troublesome’ young men were very enthusiastic about the beauty of an early Spring day. There is also evidence of social sensibilities and, on the part of Tony, Pace and Allan, a concern to keep Tito in line. While I was reading the narrative, Pace said with a great deal of expression:

Pace Miss isn’t it a beautiful day today [it was the beginning of Spring].
Tito Pace was daydreaming [laughingly].
Tony Shut up man [to Tito].
R It is a beautiful day today - today is just magic.
Allan For once [there had been extended periods of rain].
Tito And twice.
Tony Miss it’s like yesterday. Yesterday was beautiful.
Tito Saturday - Sunday and today.
R Magic days.
Tony Yesterday was my niece’s first communion.
R Was it good - a good family day?
Tony Yeah - big time.
R Big time family day.
Tony Yeah.
R Was there sort of honour there? [relating our conversation to the concern of the narrative].
Tony Oh yeah.
R Was that to honour her? [first communicant].
Tony To honour her. I think that was good because - she got to know people that she didn’t know.
Pace How old is she? (This appeared to be a genuine inquiry, an encouragement of Tony, rather than a question related to sexual interest in the age of the girl).
Tony Eleven. She got to know family that she didn’t know.
R Tito sit down please mate [Tito had started to walk around the room].
Pace You always have to bloody....[referring to Tito].
Allan Ooy [calling on Tito to sit down - and respect Tony’s communication?]
Tony And they came - Tito man [correcting Tito].
R Put the top on that thing - right OK? [referring to Tito].
Tony Miss I think that they came to honour her - to respect her and not only that
R And her parents too?
Tony And her parents too.
R To give honour to the family?
Tony Yeah.
OK. Well - here he says - [going back to the narrative] what about innocence and hope - I mean who says that the old lady who was looking so dreadful - who says that she’s not innocent?

Pace  So is he judging her by the way she looks?
R  Yeah I think so.
Pace  Shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.

I continued reading the narrative until the words ‘prayed that the young man’s courage would not desert him.’

Why courage here - why courage?

Tony.  So he can stand up - stand up.
R  Stand up?
Pace  Courage is like being brave or something - something like that.
R  Is there a difference between courage and bravery?
Pace  No because - they actually mean the same thing. Brave brave - courage courage.
R.  Tito - Tito [calling on Tito to settle].
Pace  Stop mucking around [to Tito].
R  Put that bloody thing down [ laughingly to Tito]. He’s talking about courage and bravery - listen to what he is saying. That’s how bad a teacher I am - I’m swearing. Come on [appealing to Tito].
R  Courage and bravery are the same thing?
Pace  I reckon.
R.  But why should he need courage?
Pace  Courage is....
Tony  To strengthen himself.
Tony  That’s what courage is - to stand up and to strengthen yourself - and to fight.
Pace  And we need courage to stand up to the teachers.
Tito  Do you know what courage is for a white fella - to walk up to a black fella and ....
R  Aha come on Tito - we will not be distracted by that [here is an unstated reference to session 4 where there was a lot of ill feeling about race conflict] - no no we will not be distracted by that.
Tony  What are you saying - what are you saying?
R  We were talking about courage and suddenly you’ve got us off the track.
Here Tito laughs
Tony  Better watch yourself after school.
Allan  You’re gonna get your head bashed in one day.
Tony  Miss let’s continue.
R  OK. [reading] Gawain looked stunned but his spirit never faltered – his spirit never faltered. Take me to....
Pace  What does that mean? [addressing the whole group].
R  Yeah what does that mean?
Tony  See what I mean - see what I mean? Courage is his spirit which strengthens him. Probably he looked stunned but his spirit never came down on him. So he believes.
R  His spirit was strong?
Tony  Yeah - see.
Pace  That is courage - yeah.
R So courage is related to your spirit?
Tony Yes - and yourself. Anyway - back to it [the story].

Reflection/analysis

The students’ effort to explain their perceptions of honour and courage was both interesting and stimulating. Pace interrupted the flow of a text that he was enjoying to seek clarification of the expression ‘his spirit never faltered’. This request for clarification was addressed to the whole group. Tony was particularly involved in the story and was keen to demonstrate his idea that courage, spirit and personality (?) are all integrated when he says:

Tony See what I mean - see what I mean? Courage is his spirit which strengthens him. Probably he looked stunned but his spirit never came down on him. So he believes.
R His spirit was strong?
Tony Yeah - see.
Pace That is courage - yeah.
R So courage is related to your spirit?
Tony Yes - and yourself. Anyway - back to it [the story].

Towards the end of the session as a group we recognised and discussed the fact that Tito baits Pace, and Pace in turn insults Tito. Having recognised this situation together and with some encouragement from us three, they resolved to try and avoid similar behaviour next session.

Pace

Pace stayed on after the other participants had left in order to help me clear things away. We spoke about Tito and he thought that he might be lonely as he ‘tries to break into different groups on the playground, Miss, he hasn’t got a group of his own.’
Pace appeared to be significantly less hostile and less prone to lash out at real or imagined injustices. It would have been desirable if such subjects as physical appearance could have been left out of our discussions, but appearances are very important to young people and this topic was often alluded to. Pace himself was recognised throughout the school as being good looking and athletic. In session 16 when Pace referred to Micha’s ‘good looks’, I caught his eye and he immediately understood that he ought to say something praiseworthy about the other girl in the group, and without fuss he said: ‘Peta you have beautiful eyes.’ This comment appeared natural and was received with quiet grace by Peta. Pace appeared to be becoming more attuned to the feelings of others. In this session Pace makes the statement that someone should not be judged according to how they look:

R   OK. Well - here he says - [going back to the narrative] what about innocence and hope - I mean who says that the old lady who was looking so dreadful - who says that she’s not innocent?

Pace  So is he judging her by the way she looks?
R   Yeah I think so.
Pace  Shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.

3rd September: Peta

Peta, who had recently moved into my English class (see data of the 1st September), approached me in class on this day to ask when the assignment that she had handed in on the day before would be given back. This indicated to me that she was interested and involved in the piece of work. It may also have indicated that our conversation together about not equating her intellectual level with the product that she would submit, had motivated her to stronger effort.

4th September: Peta

Peta’s critique of the film, *Housekeeping*, reached the requested length of 1,000 words; more importantly, however, it was an attempt at crafting a piece of writing,
springing from what I have suspected for some time from the nature of her discussion input, a strong feminist perspective. She appears to be concerned to explore her own thoughts about life choices in this film review. I believe that the word “values” might better have served Peta’s purposes rather than the word “moral”. Certainly the notion that she was grappling with in the early part of this extract was ethics-related. This is of particular interest since ‘An awareness of, and consideration of ethics’ on the Student Support Group questionnaire received a ‘Seldom’ response. This begs the questions:

* have our philosophic discussions heightened Peta’s sense of ethics? or,
* why has Peta’s concern with ethics not been apparent before?

Perhaps what was described in the same questionnaire as a ‘surly negative manner’ which ‘appears to be gaining momentum’ may have been the result of frustration at not being able to enunciate her strong individual opinions, values and ethics.

A section of the essay is reproduced below as she wrote it – without any alteration – bearing witness, I believe, to this young person’s insight, and also challenging school-based perceptions of her academic ability.

Luciel is played by Andrea Burchill; Ruth is played by Sara Walker, Sylvie is played by Christen Lahti these three main characters have brilliantly recreated the story written by a great author who has inspired this movie to be made. This movie is set out acted and produced excellently by these people to show that women do matter and should be treated as equals, this film has changed the way I look at things and hopefully has changed the way other people look at things.

I like this film as it is one of the very few films with a feminist perspective and gives us women justice, it shows how women’s friendship can uphold almost any given situation, however it also shows how women’s morals also matter very much and in this film Luciel’s morals could not be supported by her friendship so she left. This would have hurt her very much but she couldn’t live that way ignoring her morals and being unhappy. This way both girls are happy and they will always remember the good times.
The camera angles Bill Forsyth used throughout this film capture the warmth and happiness felt by the characters. The angles Bill Forsyth takes highlights the surrounding nature. And also how Sylvie enjoys it. I feel that this is proof that while men are well and good life goes beyond that, its about friendship, freedom to explore everything. Before you decide on one particular thing, a man could be for you but they are not necessary for a good life. As this movie brilliantly shows, you have to go beyond the story to see the points its trying to get across and the director has done a good job at getting the points across without straying away from the main story line.

I think one of the main messages in this film is - Better to have nothing and something in friendship than something materialistically and no friendship.

The director Bill Forsyth uses many different methods to promote “women for nature”. One example of this is when Sylvia’s house was flooded a mouse was floating around on a piece of board and Ruth picks it up and puts it on dry ground. Another example of this is when Sylvie is walking down the street the dogs attack her the only reason I can think of for this is that these are not wild dogs they’re tame not really a part of nature.

Session 22 - Seeking Understanding of Human Needs

Date: 7.9.98 8 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: As the Year Tens have returned from work experience, we spent 15 minutes or so, revisiting the ending of Sir Gawain and The Loathly Lady as retold by Hastings (1985) which the Year Nines had finished in session 21. The Lorax by Dr. Seuss (1972), however, was the narrative that constituted the main discussion stimulus of the day. The children’s book, The Lorax, was chosen as a stimulus because it has often proved successful in promoting discussion on environmental ethics. The two main characters are the Lorax who is responsible for environmental harmony and the Onceler who is symbolic of irresponsible industrial development.

Participants’ self assessment

There was more aggravation during the time set aside for an evaluation than at any other time during the session. The evaluation seemed to open penned-up frustration, particularly against Tito. There was a mixed perception as to how the session had gone that day. Carlo led the group that thought the session had gone well, while Pace and three other participants thought that it had gone poorly. Pace in answer to how we could improve said:
Pace  Kick Tito out.
R  No - I don’t want anybody kicked out - listen listen from my point of view as an adult I am very - I want everybody in.
Ruben  Maybe you can make Pace and Tito kiss and make up [laughing].
R  By the same token everybody - sometimes he has to stand alone [referring to Tito].
Pace  Miss if he didn’t [indecipherable] we wouldn’t have to hit back.

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Tito

Tito appeared to be isolated. He also appeared not to realise that his continual baiting of peers, particularly Pace, placed him in a position of disfavour with his companions.

He became, at this stage, more and more the focus of the group’s criticism in spite of my trying to subtly defend him. Towards the end of this session, Tito put his head on his arm which was resting on the table, perhaps registering his isolation. The Year Tens had to leave the Learning Centre for 20 minutes to go to a Year Ten meeting. During this time I shared with the Year Nines my (ideal) personal strategy for overcoming problems in difficult relationships: that of promoting what I perceive to be the positive points in the other person rather than concentrating on what I perceive to be their faults. I was at a loss as to how to deter Tito from baiting his peers, particularly Pace. I was also at a loss as to how his isolation might be addressed.

What is pleasing in the following transcript is the general involvement of participants.

Extracts from session 22

Carlo  [To the group in general] What do you think is stronger - love or happiness?
Ruben  Happiness is part of love.
R  Happiness is part of love?
Ruben  Yeah.
R  Love is the greater? Happiness is a component of love - and love is the greater?
Ruben  Yeah.
Pace  Why couldn’t you say - What did Ruben say about love? [to researcher].
R  Ask him [meaning Ruben].
Pace  What did you say about happiness - it goes with love?
Ruben  Happiness is a part of love.
Pace  Why couldn’t you say it the other way around?
R  Why couldn’t you say it the other way around Ruben?
Ruben  Because love is greater than happiness.
Pace  I couldn’t say that.

Multiple interjections
R  Micha - Stephen - come on - can we not have peripheral conversations
    [about the topic]
Pace  When you are in love you are happy - when you are happy you are in love.
R  What about a little kid - he can be happy and not in love. Remember - ‘in
    love’ is not the only form of love is it?
Carlo  ....you’re playing a video game and you’re having fun.
Stephen  You’re in love with the game.
Carlo  You’re not in love - there’s no love - how could a game love you?
Pace  Yeah but you could be in love [with the game].
Micha  That’s just like saying - would you rather your sight or hearing [making a
    like distinction about which is greater].

The following extract deals with trying to understand what ‘needs’ are essential to
human existence
R  Are gloves and hats and shirts and socks a real need? [referring to concept
    of creating a ‘thneed’ in the Lorax].
Tito  No.
Pace  Yeah.
Ruben  We need them.
R  Is there a balance - do we need gloves though?
Pace  You can live without them but you need them.
R  Well what’s a real need? [something you can’t live without]
Carlo  Yeah?
R  Is meat a need for us?
Allan  Yeah - blood.
Carlo  Yeah. Actually it is.
Ruben  What about vegetarians?
R  Could we live without meat? Will we have to live without meat in a
    couple of hundred years down the track?
Allan  No we will eat meat like crazy.
Carlo  It will be different to now I reckon because like eating meat for eighteen
    [centuries?] and stuff like that.... I could live without it for a while but
    after generations - that need will start going a bit.
R  Now hang on - haven’t we evolved - I mean we used to have big canine
    teeth for tearing at raw meat.
Carlo  Exactly. Now we have only got small ones - we hardly eat any meat as
    we evolve - we won’t have hardly any meat at all.
Ruben  No.
Micha  Miss we were made to eat grass you know.
Pace & Carlo  Eat What?
Micha  Grass - that’s what our appendix was for. You know how cows eat grass -
    they get more appendix.
Pace  Would you eat grass? [addressed to Micha].
Micha  We don’t use our appendix.
R  What function has an appendix?
**Multiple interjections**

Micha: It’s true - I didn’t know that but....

Stephen: I’ve heard that too.

Micha: That’s why cows have more because they eat extra grass and we only have one because it’s of no use because we don’t eat grass.

**Multiple interjections**

Pace: We’re doing that when we eat lettuce.

R: So can we change? There were two interesting points that I heard there - Ruben and what Pace said was interesting too.

Ruben: I was saying that in the future instead of killing cows and that you will have vegetarians. I reckon that they will clone heaps and heaps of meat too and then - it will make it easier for packaging and all that.

R: Cloning - like that sheep?

Stephen: How will cloning have to do with packaging?

Ruben: Because they can clone - they are getting to the stage where they can clone even individual things like an arm or just a leg by itself. So if they like clone a thigh - a thigh so you won’t have to separate a thigh from a cow.

R: They will fabricate different parts of animals? What did you say Pace?

Ruben: Without a brain though - so you don’t have to kill an animal.

Pace: Lettuce - because lettuce grows on the ground.

Allan: Cats grow on the ground (Allan’s use of ‘cats’ here is not able to be explained by the researcher).

Pace: Yeah well then - it doesn’t matter.

Carlo & Micha: What about grass?

R: Hang on he’s got a good point so listen to what it is - go on [to Pace].

Pace: It’s all the same source - same group of thing you know - carrot - grass - lettuce - everything that grows on the ground - it’s the same category.

**Reflection/analysis**

In the first and second extract there are cooperative efforts to explore, by making distinctions, the complicated concepts of love and need. In the third extract Pace grasped the idea of wider class or genus, which he believed tied together carrots, grass and lettuce. These three things he identified as growing out of the ground. Allan was the consistent hunter with his protestation that as a species, we will always need ‘blood’ in our diet! Ruben with his hypotheses about cloning sections of animals for human consumption, posited that since these sections of animals will be independent of a brain, there will be no killing involved. Ruben, therefore, equated life with the operation of a brain. All of these ideas demonstrated greater and lesser degrees of cooperative thinking endeavours. In the case of Carlo in the second extract, there is
an indication that he has been scaffolded into inquiry when he responded to the question, 'Well what's a real need?', with his own endorsement of the question, 'Yeah?'

11th September: Micha

I chanced to walk through the playground with Micha on this day and the conversation turned to how she liked to dress up and go into Mount Druitt and how her friends teased her about this.

Micha I don't want to work in a dress shop all my life (Micha has a part time job in a dress shop which she got as a result of school based work experience). I want to work in an office in the city - hey but I talk Mt. Druitt, don't I miss.

R If you are not satisfied with the way you speak - you can change it to whatever way you want to speak.

Micha I don't swear anymore - I've given up swearing.

R Maybe you could work on your speech as a learning centre project - what do you think?

Micha Could you work on it with me?

My learning centre allotments were all booked up but I had some subject preparation times and we were able to agree on a weekly time together. I believe that I would have done as much for any student who requested any form of mentoring. Further, it is a common practice for many other teachers at Emeritus to respond to a student's request for individual help. I was even more motivated in this instance, however, by having overheard a teacher say some time back that: 'poor Micha she can hardly put a sentence together'. While I had never taught Micha, I felt indignant and wanted to attest to her quick wit and intelligence, but to do so would have been a deviation from the methodology of the study. I did have a niggling fear, however, that in some way I may have contributed to Micha's dissatisfaction with herself. There were both positive and negative things to be anticipated from such a scenario.
Session 23 - Indicators of Improved Racial Tolerance

Date: 14.9.1998  8 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: A continuation of *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss (1972).

Participants’ self assessment

The participants and the researcher were involved in a great deal of robust fun at the end of this session so it was difficult to get the participants to concentrate on evaluating the discussion. On the whole they agreed that they were fairly happy with the way the discussion had gone, but they thought that they still needed to be both careful and more logical in regard to the danger of making racist comments.

Ruben

I had noted over time that Ruben had a definite calming effect on the group’s proceedings; and that he often led the group into high levels of thinking. Ruben was not present at this meeting, as he had to help his mother with some family business.

Stephen

It had also been noticeable for some sessions that Stephen no longer seemed to be compelled to inject the cynical comments into a discussion, although he has not ceased this practice altogether.

There was a happy and good atmosphere in this session. After we had finished reading *The Lorax*, we moved into the subject of different languages and cultures. From here we moved into an area that we had previously covered in session 5, 12 and 13: race relations.
Extract from session 23

Pace If someone else comes here and they start speaking Australian and they forget their language they break the whole thing. That’s stupid you can’t...[the continuity of their racial and cultural heritage].

Tony I think it’s umph....
R We’re coming to you mate - sorry - I’m sorry [Tony had interrupted Pace].
Tony It’s all right - it’s all right - keep talking [to Pace].
Pace Even White people say I shouldn’t forget my own language.
R Can I say that too?
Pace Yeah you can say that if you like.
R Never forget your own language.
Pace Why should you like stop speaking it just because you are....[to Stephen].
Stephen You shouldn’t - you shouldn’t.
R I think he’s saying you shouldn’t.
Stephen You shouldn’t stop it - like even if you’re born here and your parents can’t speak English at home. If you want to learn a different language you should. It’s up to yourself. If you want to stop speaking it - stop speaking it.

Multiple comments
Pace [To Tony] Would you stop speaking your own language because a white person entered your house or you were with a white person? Come on would you?
Tony What?
Pace Would you stop speaking your language to your dad if your dad ... if there was a white person listening?
Tony Nope.
Stephen I know somebody who does but. I’ve got a couple of people who live near my house Miss and they’ll go home and they’ll speak English but their parents are speaking in their language. Like the kids know how to speak and everything and understand it and all that - but they don’t.
Tito Cause they know it’s rude.

Multiple interjections protesting that it would not be rude

Reflection/analysis

Tony

While the above extract does not highlight contributions by Tony, the tape as a whole does reveal Tony to be responsible for a great deal of the positive tone that was injected into the hitherto difficult racial material of sessions 5, 12 and 13. Tony tended to adopt a neutral role in this area of strong feeling particularly in regard to Pace and the other participants, in spite of his being dark-skinned himself. He projected a young person of balance who both valued his racial and ethnic
background, along with a genuine feeling of good will towards his adopted country. Tony, along with Peta and Allan, has been the least articulate of the group members. To this point his contributions had been strongest in session 9, when he saw the possibility of defining all things in terms of mathematics; session 19, when he became involved in exploring the origins and nature of the soul; and session 21 when the Year Tens were on work experience and our discussion group was only four in number. Session 21, with its emphasis on honour and courage was a topic that appeared to be very important to him. I surmised that the prolonged nature of his responses in session 21 might have further increased his confidence, or inclination, to make contributions. In this session Tony demonstrated consideration and appreciation of Pace’s argument when he virtually apologised for having interrupted him by telling him ‘It’s all right - it’s all right - keep talking.’

While there is nothing specific to suggest that Tony had become a more reasonable member of the school community, I was nevertheless reassured on this matter because he had not been in any sort of school-based trouble during the course of our sessions. The primary reason for Tony’s inclusion in this project was concern by the Student Support Group that his behaviour at school was deteriorating and it was hoped that this apparent downward spiral could be circumvented (see Tony’s student profile in chapter 4 under ‘Profiles of Participants’).

During session 4 when the group had discussed our different racial and cultural backgrounds, the tone of the discussion had been bitter and abrasive, and at times reached points where menace was evident. I personally had felt helpless during session 4; and exhausted after it. Session 12 and 13 had been more acceptable, and although Tito had tried to provoke strong feelings again, the group had been more
inclined to skirt around the edge of the subject. During session 23, however, the participants did revisit the material of session 4 without skirting around the issues. On this occasion, there was no bitterness. The time that we spent together was loud and raucous; what the session lacked in reflectiveness it made up for in fun and goodwill; we simply enjoyed ourselves. I suspect that we experienced a sense of relief at being able to approach a topic that had previously been fraught with misunderstanding, but was now different because of our knowledge of each other’s worth, and the consequent empathy that we felt for each other’s position.

Stephen admitted that he had moved from his position of intolerance towards new settlers to Australia [from Asia, Africa and the Middle East] which he had maintained in session 4; and Pace also agreed that he had moved from his position of bitterness against white Australians in general. The session did not follow any logical path, yet in its spirit of goodwill, and in the restatement of positions, particularly Stephen and Pace’s positions, this 23rd meeting together could be perceived as something of a significant breakthrough.

17th September: Allan

Allan approached me before school on this day and asked for assistance with a speech that he had to give in commerce the following week. We arranged a time, and met in the School Learning Centre in the afternoon.

It was pleasing to see that Allan had already researched his topic so that it was simply a case of arranging and expanding his material, and coaching him in a few public speaking strategies.
At first he was extremely reticent to put any expression into his voice. I explained that I knew he feared the whole process of speaking to a group – it took Allan several philosophy sessions before he was able to make an extended contribution to the group discussion. Allan is inclined to favour ‘tough no nonsense speech’, and in this he may be projecting the values of his family who earn their living through hard manual work, and who for recreation, are involved in hunting and fishing. As in my conversation with Peta prior to her embarking on her English assignment – recorded in this dissertation under data dated the 1st. September – I spoke to Allan about his school-based products not bearing witness to his life experience, his thinking ability as demonstrated in our philosophy meetings, and his solid practical knowledge and skills. This commerce assignment, therefore, afforded him the opportunity to work at lessening the distance between his school products and his actual abilities. These statements appeared to motivate him into taking risks in oral expression, at least in front of me. Allan delivered his speech the following week to both his, and his teacher’s, satisfaction.

Session 24 - A Community of Inquiry

Date: 24.9.98 7 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: Initially we endeavoured to use The Burnt Stick (1997) by Anthony Hill. This narrative did not sustain a long discussion. A vibrant discussion emerged, however, over some sugar which had been spilt on our table. The discussion dealt with the superstition associated with spilt sugar and the nature of superstition in general.

Participants’ self assessment

The participants were progressively evaluating their time together by means of a discussion rather than direct questions. The seven participants present agreed that this session was the most successful to date. They believed that they had been open to
various opinions and stories; and that they showed respect for each other. They recorded the comment that 'this is the first time that Tito and Pace have not teased each other.' At the conclusion of the session, the participants requested that 'we go on talking about what we have talked about at our next meeting together.'

On this day the school timetable was altered to accommodate a visiting speaker. As a result of this change our two periods together were split so that we had one session at 9 am and another at 11 am. This suited our purposes as we were able to strive for discussion in the first session and allow the second session to be a celebration. The celebration was something of a farewell party due to the fact that Pace announced the previous week that his family would be moving over the holidays and he would be attending another school from the beginning of term four.

While this meeting was shorter than usual, it was surely a significant session in terms of achieving long stretches of dialogue among all participants present. In this session there was, particularly due to the cooperation between Pace and Tito, a strong sense of community and for that reason a significant number of extracts are included.

After an initial attempt at using The Burnt Stick (1997) as a means of entering discussion, the participants asked me to put aside the narrative so that we could have a less contrived entrance into a discussion. I then posed the following question to Pace:

Extract from session 24

R Can I ask you what you Pace - what you hoped to get out of these sessions? Can we talk about what your expectations were - what you hoped to get out of these sessions? Have you got anything?

Pace [laughingly] To bash Tito.

R Have you got anything out of these talks?

Pace Yeah it was good.
R What have you got?
Pace I learned more about things I didn’t know about....
R Did you learn things about yourself? Your own thinking?
Pace Yeah I didn’t - think - things that came back....
Carlo What you first believed in - now are sort of different? [addressed to Pace].
Tito I’m pretty human and stuff like that? [addressed to Pace].
R How is it different? What? Give us an example. [Here the researcher asks Tito and Micha to put a spell checker away]. Pace is giving us some wisdom here and we’re not going to have him much longer - go on - it’s like you’re dying or something [laughing]. Go on.
Pace Yeah - naw - because like when we were talking about that life thing - when we were apes - before we were humans - that was....
R It changed the way you thought a little bit?
Pace Yeah. And that man in a wheelchair - what ever his name is? [Pace here refers to Stephens Hawkings in session 10]
Tito Bob Mallie [trying to make him laugh].
Allan I remember that man in a wheelchair.
R Stephen Hawkings. Yeah. The fact that he could have a life - I remember you talking about it - he could have a life.

Here Tito pours out a cup of coffee that nearly flows over and which causes a minor disturbance.

R I remember you saying that if you couldn’t run you wouldn’t want to live - yet you saw this man in a wheelchair who could have this strong intellectual life - and that was the most important thing to him.
Pace No - I said that if I couldn’t do anything like run or do anything by myself...
R Do you feel the same after seeing Stephen Hawkings? Do you feel that you could live now?
Pace Yeah [with conviction].
Micha You could?

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Micha I think it’s good all the stuff we’re learnt like that movie umph....
Pace Contact?
Micha Contact - that really made me think. Every time I go outside now and there’s stars I just think.

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At one point in our meeting some sugar was spilt on the table.

R You know if you spill sugar - there is an old Irish superstition – three times you have to lick it with your finger.

This lead Carlo to say:

Carlo I told my little cousin - he was at my house - he was being a bit stupid - you know the roses having thorns? You break them you’ll have bad luck. I told him about four years ago - I haven’t thought about this and the other day like I was breaking them myself and he goes ‘that’s bad luck’. I said ‘Who told you that?’ he goes ‘you did’. He still remembered it and he wouldn’t do it again and I made it up.

R Did you?
Carlo: Yeah and in his mind he thinks that if you break a thorn now - he's about twelve or something like that - and he still thinks that if you break a thorn.

R: And you made that up?

Carlo: Yeah and if one day this comes back to you like in many years - you'll think Carlo started that - and my cousin could have told someone and so - and it comes to you or something.

R: And you started it?

Carlo: Like cause I just made it up.

R: Well did somebody start that - if you put your finger on sugar and suck it three times - it brings you joy?

Micha: Yep.

Carlo: I would say probably.

R: Why do I do it then? I'm a reasonably intelligent person why do I do that?

Pace: It would have to be - it would have to be [started like that].

Micha: Just in case - it would be better wouldn't it than not? What can you lose?

R: Can I lose? I think I can lose something - I'm losing some sort of balance....

Pace: You can't really even get good luck it's just all about you.

Tito: You're not losing it you're gaining your sugar.

*General laughter*

R: Perhaps that could have been the reason that it was started - not to waste? This is a good topic - superstition.

Carlo: What about salt Miss? You know when you spill salt you just get a pinch and throw it over your back.

R: Where did that come from?

Carlo: Well is it the same like as sugar - wasted - to stop waste?

R: You're actually wasting it though aren't you?

Micha: To clear the table?

Pace: My sister said that you get bad luck if you cut your hair - someone's hair at night time - so she doesn't want you to cut your hair.

*Some more discussion ensued in regard to the origin of superstition and then the discussion moved to the notion of a white lie.*

Pace: It was interesting when we were watching that movie for English - and the lady goes 'Do you know what a white lie is? it's when somebody - says something to someone when they don't mean it - or something to make them feel better.

Carlo: Like when that person says you look great in that dress.

R: But a white lie can also be told to get you out of trouble - is there such a thing as a white lie?

Allan: No.

Carlo: It's a name.

R: A name for what?

Carlo: It's like white -- if you go back to kinda black right? It's the bad stuff.

Pace: Yes that's a lie [agreeing with Carlo].

Carlo: Right.

Tito: Like a black cat.

Carlo: White - you think of a dove - you think of - God. Like you think of you know - snow - nice things.

.Tito: Like Happy Gilmore. You know Happy Gilmore where he gets the sad things - the black....
General agreement with Tito

R [Addressed to Pace] How does that affect you - do you get angry about that?

Pace About what?

R The fact that people associate white with goodness. Isn’t that just culture because if you go to Korea - they celebrate a death by wearing white and they celebrate a birth by wearing black.

This led into a discussion on how colour is perceived and the difficulty of knowing if there is any consistency of colour perception. From there the discussion went back to the nature of superstition and I shared with the group a thought that I have had regarding why I sometimes inadvertently subscribed to superstition; I had not previously shared this idea with anyone before. It related to when I was an unruly six year old, and the death of my twenty year old brother who sometimes assisted our mother in her efforts to control me. Tito then relayed the following:

Tito That’s like with me and my brother like when he moved out before he died - I was p’ed off with him because he took my bed to take to his place and I had to sleep on the floor in me bedroom. And then he came in - and I was like - he knew I was awake but I was pretending to be asleep. He said ‘Hi’ to me - he said ‘you little shit’ [laughing] - he wanted me to say ‘Hi’ and then I didn’t say ‘hi’ to him.

R And it worried you like it worried me.

Tito Yeah - because I was fed up then and when he died I was heaps worried.

R I think that’s why I touch wood - I don’t believe touching wood – or having sugar really works - but because of that one experience I suppose it’s at the back of my mind - of course it’s not true - my brother had a bad heart - I loved him - but I did have that thought (before he got sick) that out of my brothers and sister that he was the one I could do without most easily.

Pace [Pace says something that is indistinguishable]

R Yeah [agreeing with Pace] and he was the one who died and somehow maybe -maybe - that’s influenced me into believing in superstition - maybe that happens to everyone or something like that - that makes you think these things work - of course they don’t - my brother had a bad heart - the same as your brother - you know hey.

Micha It’s just like you don’t realise things until they’re gone....

Pace Yeah.

Micha You didn’t realise that he was trying to help you....

R I haven’t actually thought - much about that till a couple of years ago but it must have been like that little bloke that said if you break a thorn it’s bad luck - those things stick in your mind - maybe they come back?

Pace My mother’s brothers died on her back. She was carrying them on her back.

Here the R responds to questions as to why the babies would be on a woman’s back.
R  They both died?
Pace Yes they both died - like they were both sick and my mum was carrying them.
R  And that’s worried her?
Pace Yes she still talks about it.

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Reflection/analysis

Ontological unity with the child

David Kennedy (1998) challenges the notion that is abroad, that childhood is now being lost to contemporary young people. Strongly influenced by Lloyd deMause (1974), Kennedy sees the polarisation that exists between adults and children as having possibilities of diminishment. Kennedy postulates that the adult who acknowledges the child within himself also recognises his ‘ontological unity with the child and is aware that the adult-child continuum is present in each epoch of the life cycle’ (Kennedy 1998, p.35). This runs true with modern psychoanalytic theory that sees development as not ceasing with the onset of adulthood, but as being a life-long process. Such thinking also negates such theories which would project the child in terms of ‘raw material’ to be fashioned, or as a ‘deficit model’ to be formed. Gareth Matthews (1994) would also endorse a lessening of the polarisation of childhood and adulthood.

Kennedy, like Foucault (1979), perceives modern society as biased towards repression, and the child as being ‘living reminders of the adult’s own repressed impulses’ (1998, p.33). Improvements in relationships between children and adults are dependent on adults affirming and nurturing children. This relational advance is dependent, according to Kennedy, on adults being able to regress to childhood in order to approach the anxieties that children feel, and which they themselves once felt as children. It is then possible, he maintains, to deal with these anxieties and fears in
these second encounters, in a more informed and capable manner. The accomplishment of what Kennedy – borrowing from deMause (1974) – refers to as ‘regression in the service of the child’ involves identification with the young person’s needs while at the same time maintaining an adult emotional distance from the child’s anxiety. Kennedy quotes deMause’s words in describing the process as a regression ‘to the level of the child’s need and correctly identify it without an admixture of [his] own projections’, and then ‘maintain enough distance from the need in order to be able to satisfy it.’ At this point the adult awakens to the voice of the child and this awakening recognises the child as a repository for adult self-understanding (Kennedy 1998, p.34). Thus the relational benefits are mutual. The child is assisted by the adult in coping with anxieties and fears, and the adult, in turn, as well as assisting the child is given opportunities to handle in a more balanced way, the anxieties of their own childhood.

This day’s session provided an example of this lessening of the polarisation of an adult-child relationship. Aware of the amount of sibling deaths within this group of young people, and within the appropriate discussion topic of superstition, I trusted these young people enough to regress to an anxiety that I had had in my own childhood regarding the death of a brother. I am uncertain as to whether the ‘remembering’ of this event was triggered by the content of the session or whether there was some intuitive awareness that acknowledgement of this anxiety might be helpful, particularly to Tito. The relayed acknowledgement, however, was immediately taken up by Tito as he in turn admitted to a regret that concerned him greatly, that he has regarding his own dead brother. The anxieties were discussed openly and it is hoped I was able to bring adult knowledge and balance to the re-
examination of Tito's fear. Pace's concern for his mother's anxiety over the death of
his two baby uncles may also have been addressed.

This session was perceptively different. While there was the occasional distraction
which interrupted our discussion, on the whole all the participants appeared to be
quietly dedicated to cooperation, appreciating the contributions of others and
searching for meaning together. This cooperation was recognised by the participants
themselves in their assessment. All listened to what Pace had to say with particular
care, even Tito. There were long stretches of dialogue in which participants, including
the researcher, shared thoughts that had for a long time perplexed them.

Session 25 - A Community Celebrates

Date: 24.9.1998  8 participants present. Session is in part recorded on audio tape.

Participants' self assessment

Because of the celebratory nature of this session, a student evaluation was
inappropriate.

As well as being Pace's farewell, we also on this date celebrated Stephen's 16th
birthday. Micha mentioned that it was also another friend's birthday; this boy is
considerably height challenged. We spoke about this boy's popularity and I said to
Stephen:

Extract from session 25

R Remember how you used to tease Josh by putting things up high so he
couldn't get them? (Stephen had been in considerable trouble over four
years because of this practice).

Stephen I do that to everyone but - not just to Josh. I do that to Micha - I do that to
Carlo.
Micha Miss I admire Josh because Miss - I’ll tell you why - I admire him because you know how he’s a dwarf - he doesn’t care he just acts - I admire him he doesn’t have no shame or - he doesn’t feel sorry for himself or nothing he’s so good.

R Do you think it could be the climate of the school too a little bit? He’s had mates?

Micha We’re all his mates - he’s got heaps.

Stephen Miss I used to get in trouble off [the Assistant Principal] for what I done to Josh but I used to do that to everyone else as well. I used to treat him sorta like he was normal.

Micha The same as every one. He is normal I know.

R So maybe you were doing something good for him?

Pace You know he’s a basketballer - he likes to do that.

Micha His team came first in basketball cause he plays basketball.

Carlo Yeah.

R Yeah I know that - I’ve watched you over the years - I know that. Therefore I couldn’t understand. Now I can understand why you did it. [addressed to Stephen in reference to why he held things out of the reach of Josh].

Stephen Yeah.

Tito He can throw the ball in the ring.

Stephen Miss we went to the same pre-school and everything - after I got kicked out of one.

Micha Me too. Me, Stephen and Josh have been together all our lives.

R You got kicked out of two pre-schools? [laughing].

Reflection/analysis

Stephen

The above discussion of Stephen’s relationship with Joshua is interesting. Stephen has in the past been in trouble for the way he treats Josh. He often takes Josh’s cap and holds it above his head so that he cannot reach it, yet he maintains in this extract that he has a teasing relationship with all his friends [Stephen is about 6’2” tall]. He further maintains that to treat Joshua differently from his other friends would be to exclude him from true mateship. It could be argued, however, that Stephen’s use of height as a means of teasing his friends is socially inappropriate anyway. Teachers have found this practice – particularly in regard to Joshua – very disconcerting.
The tone of this meeting was entirely devoted to good will and fun; we were concerned to celebrate Stephen’s birthday and say goodbye to Pace. We did not really try to have a philosophic discussion and after ten minutes the students asked if we could turn off the tape recorder and I agreed.

**Micha**

During the course of this day, students were called to have group photographs taken for the school year book. Micha was absent from ‘our party’ at one stage having a sporting group photograph taken, when the school principal and deputy arrived in the Learning Centre. Their point in visiting us was to tell Micha that the entry that she had made on behalf of the school had won the ‘Year of The Ocean’ international competition. Her fellow participants were delighted by this announcement and insisted on leaving the Learning Centre to find Micha in order to both congratulate her and share her pleasure. There was a sense of Micha’s victory as being theirs too. The prize is a plaque for the school and also involves a measure of media exposure.

Micha made a point of thanking me for my assistance in helping her to formulate her entry (see session 11 on the 12th June 1998). I trusted that my scaffolding was not too strong! While I wrestled with my conscience on this score, I was consoled by the apparent reality ‘that success breeds success’ because comments abounded in the staffroom relative to how teachers had noticed Micha’s overall improved academic achievements. This change of teacher perception further appeared to reinforce Micha’s improved self-image.
25th September

The principal announced Micha’s success at briefing this morning with the rider, ‘Yes Maureen, Philosophy for Children does work’

Pace

Pace made a point of finding me on his last day at school to say goodbye in a semi-formal yet friendly way. My response was also semi-formal and friendly. The manner of his saying goodbye was pleasing in itself. It was socially appropriate in its goodwill and recognition of the valuable time that we had shared together. It was also appropriate in the independent and courteous manner in which this young person recognised the need for closure.

On the same day I issued to the Students’ Support Group the post-study questionnaire for them to fill out in regard to Pace’s progress in ‘reasonableness’ over the past three terms.

Session 26 - A Community feeling the loss of a Member?

Date: 15.10.98 7 Participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.

Participants’ self assessment

The participants, after approximately five minutes of discussion regarding the day’s session, arrived at the following comment which they inscribed in their journal: ‘While we were respectful of each other and we allowed each other to speak pretty well without interruption, yet what we talked about was not deep or philosophically valuable.’
Reflection/analysis.

After the depth of the discussion of session 24, and the friendly nature of our farewell to Pace in session 25, this day's discussion was something of a let-down. Much of the time was taken up by my explanation of what was involved in the simile of the cave. The participants were interested and recognised that someone who previously only had access to a shadow world, would endure both physical and mental pain if they were forced to leave that world in order to gain knowledge of the objects and people casting those shadows. They further recognised the stress involved in that person being made to emerge into the sunlight outside the cave, and the consequent pressure associated with gaining additional illuminations about the nature of reality. The participants appreciated that such a person returning to his fellows in the cave would suffer at their hands for his contradiction of their perception of reality. They were able, after some considerable explanation, to equate this analogy to someone who was dedicated to philosophy and truth in the context of our western existence.

On listening to the tape, however, I became aware of the students' cooperation and silence while I read from The Republic, and this in spite of the reality that the text must have been difficult for them. My anticipation of their cooperativeness was justified, but my choice of stimulus material did not promote spontaneous and free discussion.

21st October

School principal's endorsement for project

The school principal was walking through the staffroom with the man who is to replace her as principal next year. She made a special point of locating me in order to
introduce him to me. After the introduction she made the following comment:

‘Maureen is working with some difficult students in an innovative way. You know, the sort of students who are always being sent to the office. She is using philosophic discussion in order to help them become more reasonable, and the good thing is that we are not seeing nearly so much of them in the office anymore.’

I see this comment as possibly having two aspects. The principal sees value in the research project and by her endorsement is relaying a message to the incoming principal that a similar project “should” run next year. Secondly, it was an official recognition that the project was helping some young people to improve the quality of their lives. This official recognition was unlike the good-natured recognitions that occurred on the day of session 13 and recorded in the reflection following that session. It was reinforced also by the announcement to the staff of Micha’s success in ‘The Year of the Ocean Competition’ which is recorded in the data of session 25. The Principal, on yet another occasion, stated the following: ‘At least a quarter of my pastoral care time was taken up last year (1997) with interviewing or talking to Micha.’

**Session 27 - Settling Into a New Community Dynamic - Concerning Micha and Tim**

Date: 22.10.98 8 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape. Stimulus: First Light (1993) by G. Crew. First Light was chosen as stimulus material because it is a story that deals with parental expectations of children, and such expectations constitute an issue with most young people.

**Participants’ self assessment**

The students agreed, after a time of general consideration, that they did not find the material of today’s session particularly stimulating. They recorded the following
comment in their journal: ‘Our discussion together was not all that good. Perhaps we now have a higher standard for our discussions and we are not always happy with them. One good thing, however, is that we now share the discussion more fairly. We think that the material that has most helped us to talk well is videos, particularly the movie Contact.’

Reflection/analysis

I surmise that while we were still recovering from Pace’s absence from the group, we were settling into a new dynamic. I further suspect that Tito in particular, was missing Pace. Tito appeared to settle down more after our discussion in session 25, when we attempted to logically work through the worry that he carried relevant to his dead brother. The other participants were certainly not concerned to tease him as much, although they quickly pulled him into line on one occasion this session.

During this session the participants were cooperative. We discussed the issue of whether perfection is ever possible. We also revisited an area that we have touched on before: responsible pet ownership within the context of Australian wild life. Stimulated by the narrative First Light we discussed parent expectation that children will value the same things and experiences that they have valued. The narrative also gave rise to the idea that others may fear what we do not fear and the consequent need therefore to recognise and appreciate difference.

23rd October: Micha

The way Micha had changed her way of speaking is worthy of note. Her sentence construction with its occasional ‘heys’ and ‘buts’ at the beginnings and conclusions
remained the same, however, and it was sometimes difficult to determine whether she was making a statement or asking a question. I never brought this to her attention. She also appeared to be making quite distinct efforts to pronounce the ‘ings’ of word endings, for example the words ‘anything’ or ‘something’.

She was, on the whole, speaking more slowly and she appeared to have overcome a problem with words beginning with ‘w’ such as ‘with’ and substitution of the letters ‘th’ with ‘f’. Just as importantly, she undoubtedly was becoming a more confident reader when reading aloud. I am constantly astounded at how, with a little scaffolding, a student can pick things up if they are committed to doing so. This came home to me again when I explained to Micha without the aid of a board or writing materials, some difficult concepts in regard to language. At another time she was able to use the same concepts to substantiate a point she was making. I said, ‘So you understood what I meant before.’ ‘Of course’ was her reply, ‘you explained it to me.’

2nd November: Tim

Tim visited the school on this day. Tim, an original participant, was told to find another school between the fourth and fifth sessions of the research project, and he received some help from the school administration to do so. Tim asked to see me on the 2nd November, and after our mutually friendly greetings and conversation, Tim asked if I could help him get back into the school for Year Ten. He was currently not attending school at all as he had been asked to leave his last school too. He stated that he was both bored and lonely. While I said that I would be very happy to act as an intermediary, I could not say for certain that the school administration would accept him back. I offered to begin negotiations immediately but he said that he would first
have to ask his mother if he could come back. He promised to contact me again, but he has not done so to this point.

**Session 28 - Community Closure**

Date: 5.11.98 7 participants present. Session recorded on audio tape.
Stimulus: Popular song supplied by Micha entitled: 'It’s the memories that die'. Micha had chosen our last stimulus for discussion, which was a popular song, called ‘It’s the memories that die’. She had said during the preceding session that ‘I question so many things now - like I listened to a song the other day and I questioned what the singer said. My boyfriend said to me ‘can’t you just listen to the music’ and I said ‘no I can’t just do that anymore’. The participants had agreed to Micha’s choice of stimulus material.

**Participants’ self assessment**

Ruben was missing from this session because he was at home sick with a heavy cold.

The nature of this session’s evaluation revolved around the sessions as a whole. The participants were positive, even nostalgic. Our final session began with an unexpected formal presentation. The participants had all contributed some money and bought me a bunch of carnations, a box of chocolates and a picture frame which they suggested I might like to use to frame a picture of the group. Stephen also remarked that he had tried to buy roses but that they had been ‘wilted looking’ so he had got this bunch of flowers instead. Micha acted as spokesperson for the group and the presentation was made in the following semi-formal manner:

**Micha**

This is to say thank you for being our philosophy teacher and letting us learn all this stuff.

**R**

What have I got for you guys?

**Micha**

You’ve given us everything.

**Micha**

Sometimes we may muck around but this is our real selves - nice and kind.

**R**

I know that.
Extract from transcript and integrated reflection/analysis

After listening to the song Micha commented: 'Songs like this have got meaning.'

There was a short reflective time, then the participants made a few comments about the song but a prolonged discussion about the words did not eventuate.

In this session we were restricted to one hour because of School Certificate trials, but for the most part it was philosophic. At times the dialogue did deal with participant expectations of the future but even here there was evidence of peer care and concern. A discussion emerged in which we spoke about how we thought that matter could never be lost, just changed in composition. Carlo gave an example to support this idea which involved the breaking down of a dinosaur's corpse. He said that the dinosaur's body would have been absorbed into the soil, and the soil over the centuries would have in turn nourished trees, which could be turned into tables. He pointed out the possible relationship between a dinosaur living a million years ago and the table around which we were sitting. This led into a discussion about the disposal of the dead. We were interested in the fact that we were discussing death at our last session.

Stephen

Death is important because it's the death of our life.

Carlo

The first lesson that you didn't lead or nothing was about death. (Here I think that Carlo is referring to session 5).

This appeared to be a statement on his part that justified death as a topic because they, the student participants, wanted to talk about it.

Again we touched upon whether the soul - or the personality as Stephen thought, or the spirit as Tony preferred to think of it - survived in some way the death of the
body. The participants all thought that it was possible to believe in the existence of some form of soul even if you did not believe in the existence of god.

In recognition of it being our last session there was a certain rush to revisit topics that we had discussed before, this included their opinions about different teachers. While this subject was not philosophic in nature, their handling of it was gentle, differing greatly from session 4.

After some discussion of student/teacher relationships, we moved on to talk about our expectations for the future: Stephen’s possible apprenticeship; Years Eleven and Twelve at other schools for Ruben, Micha, Carlo; and the plan that Allan, Peta, Tony and Tito would be successful as Year Tens in 1999. At this point Stephen leant over and tapped the microphone to ensure that it was on. This was an interesting gesture because the microphone has always been ignored except for when the participants sometimes played around at the conclusion of a session, or when they wanted it turned off. It subsequently turned out that Stephen wanted to make a statement regarding what he believed to be his school-based academic reality. This is what he wanted me to accept.

**Stephen’s statement**

**Stephen** The reason I have trouble with all my assignments is during primary school:::

**Tito** No one helped us hey.

**Stephen.** Like I never really got taught how to do it - I had trouble doing it – and because I had trouble instead of asking I mucked up and then I’d get kicked out.

**Encouragement of Tito**

Tito then told us that three weeks before he had come close to accepting a job from a member of his family but that he had decided to stay at school. He was generally
encouraged by his fellow group members to stay and complete Year Ten the following year and obtain his School Certificate. The group’s encouragement of Tito was very pleasing as likewise was his listening seriously to what they had to say. Session 28 ended with all participants present expressing regret that our time together was over.

On the same day I gave the post-study questionnaire forms relating to the student participants to the chairperson of the Students’ Support Group to be filled out as soon as possible.
CHAPTER 7
INCREASED REASONABLENESS: SO WHAT?

This chapter engages in critical evaluation of the research project. It is concerned to: qualitatively analyse the post-study questionnaire; to look at the relationship of the researcher with the participants in the project; to establish whether the participants were involved in philosophic discourse; whether community developed and whether a community of inquiry emerged. Following the examination of the above, chapter 7 focuses on the two research areas seeking to evaluate progress of participants in reasonableness and also variations in the research project from Lipman's paradigm of doing Philosophy for Children.

Introduction

The whole process of evaluation is problematic. The researcher\(^1\) made every attempt to be objective throughout the project. A committee to which the researcher did not belong made the selection of participants. Assessments of the discussion were made not just by the researcher but also by the participants through their journal entries. The Students’ Support Group, the group which selected the participants to be part of the study, filled out pre- and post-study questionnaires regarding their perceived levels of participant reasonableness. Throughout the process, the researcher has endeavoured to illuminate biases. This includes transcription extracts that reveal bids for control on her part, when a major objective of this project has been for the facilitator to relinquish control in an endeavour to create an egalitarian community.

In terms of the presentation of data, the researcher continually questioned herself as to which transcription extract to select. There has been an easing of concern about the choices made in the selection of data, however, stemming from the growing awareness that subjectivity may be taken as 'virtuous' rather than 'an affliction' (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). Glesne and Peshkin perceive subjectivity as the basis for

\(^1\) From the beginning of chapter 7 the text will revert from 1st to 3rd person narration.
the story that the researcher has to tell. It is, they maintain, the strength on which the project is built, allowing the insights and perspectives of the researcher to serve in the interests of the research. Peshkin states:

In short, the subjectivity that I originally had taken as an affliction, something to bear because it could not be foregone, could, to the contrary, be taken as "virtuous". My subjectivity is the basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is the strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person and as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as a researcher, from the selection of topic clear through to the emphases I make in my writing... Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalise on rather than to exorcise (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, p.104).

While the researcher has been the recipient of participant complaints against the school administration and other teachers, there was a strong effort to remain neutral by not taking sides. As the project advanced, however, the researcher felt a great rapport with these young people and sympathy for the confusion and constraints of their school circumstances. While they may have appeared to many to relish their school-based image of being uncooperative and rebellious, they were in reality pained by the negative expectations that their school community had of them. A comment made by Tito in session 13 demonstrates such frustration: 'Last English lesson I sat down the back and didn't talk to anyone, just got on with my work. The teacher said to me at the end of the lesson, "What's the matter with you today? Are you sick or something?"' Further, when Micha was making her thank you presentation on behalf of the group at the last session she said, 'Sometimes we may muck around but this is our real selves - nice and kind.'

**Relationship between researcher and student participants**

Of significant interest has been the type of relationship that developed between the researcher and the participants. The role adopted with this group of Year Nine and
Ten students was very different from the one involved in teaching conventional Year Nine or Ten classes. Due to the necessity of covering curriculum requirements, conventional classes conducted by the researcher are regrettably more formal and teacher-directed. This difference has seen a growing patience and easy manner of facilitation that resulted in the students being more active in running the agenda. Initially the researcher was seen perhaps as a representative of a ‘teacher class’, a representative who was in a somewhat vulnerable position regarding their comments and frustrations. Gradually the role became dualistic in that the researcher/participant became also something of a trusted counsellor and adviser.

Peshkin and Glesne point out that the extent to which a researcher may ethically modify his or her behaviour in a research project is problematic. They ask: ‘Where are the boundaries of integrity? Where does adaptation go too far?’ (Peshkin and Glesne 1992, p.56). The researcher is at ease on this point, for while friendly and trusting relationships developed, particularly after session 4, there was always an appropriate respectful distance between the researcher/participant and the student participants. The researcher, on occasions, was given information in the ‘context of friendship rather than in her role as a researcher’ (Peshkin and Glesne 1992, p.116). The researcher was aware that the revelation of such information might have been legally troublesome for the participants, so there has been care not to reveal it.

The invitation issued to the group to call the researcher by her first name at the outset of the meetings, while initially being taken up by the participants, was rejected by them as early as session 6. After this session the student participants referred to the writer as ‘Miss’, or ‘Mrs. Mac’. Certainly the student participants were always respectful, particularly after session 4. Over time they were keen to perform little
courtesies for the researcher such as making her a cup of coffee and ensuring that they helped to put things away after meetings without being asked to do so. They shared sweets and drinks; in Tito’s case, he took a scythe home after session 12 to restore it. None of the participants ever tried to take advantage, either in the playground, in the classroom or elsewhere in the school, of the relationship of trust that existed in the philosophy meetings. In session 24, Pace pulled himself up before he fully stated the word ‘stupid’ in relation to the researcher’s comment that ‘beauty could be found on the inside’ (see session 24). This retraction did not occur out of any student ‘fear’ of a teacher, for these young people were not fearful about speaking their minds to anyone, it was quite simply a slip up in courtesy which Pace immediately sought to rectify.

Horowitz (1986) interestingly points out that the role of the researcher is formed via the continuing interaction between the researcher and the participants in the research project:

Together the qualities and attributes of the fieldworker interact with those of the setting and its members to shape, if not create, an emergent role for the researcher (1986, p.410).

The researcher’s role formulated by the interactions of the group appears to have been that of an adviser, a counsellor, or even a group elder. And the reality is that the researcher has been at ease in this role of a senior cultural member rather than a subject teacher. That is not to say that this role would necessarily be appropriate to her conventional Year Nine or Ten classes, but it has been appropriate to this group of young people and their needs within the context of their school life. It has also been appropriate for the researcher as a participant observer looking at the need of these student participants to gain greater levels of reasonableness so that they could function more harmoniously in their personal and social realities. As a teacher in their
school, the writer is optimistic that the style of interaction has encouraged and nurtured growth in reasonableness.

Students' Support Group’s final evaluation

In turning now to the assessment of the Students’ Support Group, it must be remembered that the roles of the members of this group within the school context were that of educators and administrators – not researchers. The view that led members to the conclusion at the outset of the project that the twelve young people were bordering on being unsuitable for retention within the school, was based on conventional educational values.

Likewise, their reappraisals in the additional comment section were always bound to be expressed in conventional terms so that examples of development are seen as ‘ladylike’ or ‘gentlemanly’ characteristics. These terms are lay approximations to the more refined notions of reasonableness used in this study.

Post-study Questionnaires: Students’ Support Group’s Observation and Comments

Carlo
Appears to value and practice logical thinking ................................................. Usually
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others .......................... Usually
Is sensitive to the opinions of others .......................................................... Usually
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others .......................... Usually
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way ........................................... Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way ............................................... Usually
Can wait for attention .................................................................................. Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism ............................................................... Usually
An awareness of, and consideration for ethics ........................................ Seldom
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness ................ Seldom

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Carlo were as follows: Carlo is far more likely now to discuss a situation that is affecting him. His attitude towards disagreements is far more acceptable. We believe Carlo can further develop in the area of social appropriateness particularly in the area of sexuality.
Pace
Appears to value and practice logical thinking...........................................Usually
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others..............................Usually
Is sensitive to the opinions of others......................................................Almost Always
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others.................................................................Usually
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way..............................................Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way..................................................Almost Always
Can wait for attention..................................................................................Almost Always
Is able to accept positive criticism..................................................................Almost Always
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics..................................................Usually
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness............................Usually

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Pace were as follows:
Pace has developed the skill of considering the point of view of others. He values the opportunity to discuss a situation and consider both sides of an argument. He is less likely to act inappropriately to a situation. He now takes time to reflect.

Micha
Appears to value and practice logical thinking...........................................Almost Always
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others..............................Almost Always
Is sensitive to the opinion of others......................................................Almost Always
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others.................................................................Almost Always
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way..............................................Almost Always
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way..................................................Almost Always
Can wait for attention..................................................................................Almost Always
Is able to accept positive criticism..................................................................Almost Always
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics..................................................Almost Always
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness............................Almost Always

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Micha were as follows:
Micha has developed into a mature young lady who is motivated to do well. She has developed the skill of being able to make appropriate plans of action and carry them out. She has taken the opportunities given to her and set both short and long term goals. She is now a lady with dignity and direction.

Tito
Appears to value and practice logical thinking...........................................Almost Always
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others..............................Almost Always
Is sensitive to the opinion of others......................................................Seldom
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others.................................................................Seldom
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way..............................................Almost Always
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way..................................................Seldom
Can wait for attention..................................................................................Seldom
Is able to accept positive criticism..................................................................Usually
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics..................................................Almost Always
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness............................Usually

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comment re Tito were as follows:
Tito has significantly improved in the way he relates to teachers. He is more open and friendly and will listen to constructive and positive comments. His peer relations are still strained in that he often will “stir” students and responds that they have no sense of humour when they react. He is however, involved in fewer situations of conflict with his peers. Outwardly he looks happier and more confident.
Ruben
Appears to value and practice logical thinking............................................Usually
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others...........................Usually
Is sensitive to the opinions of others.......................................................Usually
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of
the good thinking of others......................................................................Usually
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way.............................................Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way................................................Usually
Can wait for attention................................................................................Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism............................................................Seldom
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics.........................................Usually
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness..................Usually

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Ruben were as follows:
Ruben can be a rational and logical thinker but he can lose this rational approach if he is criticised.

Peta
Appears to value and practice logical thinking............................................Usually
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others...........................Usually
Is sensitive to the opinions of others.......................................................Usually
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of
the good thinking of others......................................................................Usually
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way.............................................Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way................................................Usually
Can wait for attention................................................................................Usually
Is able to accept positive criticism............................................................Usually
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics.........................................Usually
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness..................Usually

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Peta were as follows:
Peta has improved in her relations with teachers, with occasional lapses. While she has also improved
in regard to accepting criticism and assistance, she can on occasions be defensive in the area of
criticism.
Despite one incident last term [term 3] Peta’s attitude has improved; she seems less apathetic and
more interested and involved. There is still trouble in regard to her coming to class prepared and we
are hoping Peta will take more pride in her work in the future.

Stephen
Appears to value and practice logical thinking............................................Almost Always
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others...........................Almost Always
Is sensitive to the opinions of others.......................................................Usually
Is willing to change or modify and opinion because of
the good thinking of others......................................................................Usually
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way.............................................Usually
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way................................................Usually
Can wait for attention................................................................................Almost Always
Is able to accept positive criticism............................................................Almost Always
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics.........................................Usually
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness..................Almost Always

The Students’ Support Group’s additional comments re Stephen were as follows:
Stephen has developed the skill of reflecting upon situations in his life. He understands and
appreciates the good things people do for him. He has positive motivation to do well. He is developing
into a gentleman. The times when he now reacts inappropriately towards a situation are far less in
both number and degree.
Allan

Appears to value and practice logical thinking .................................................. Almost Always
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others .................................. Almost Always
Is sensitive to the opinions of others ................................................................. Almost Always
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others ................................................................. Usually
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way ...................................................... Almost Always
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way .......................................................... Usually
Can wait for attention ......................................................................................... Almost Always
Is able to accept positive criticism ...................................................................... Usually
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics ..................................................... Usually
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness ............................. Almost Always

The Students' Support Group's additional comments re Allan were as follows:
Allan has developed into a young man with a pleasant disposition. He is now keen to do the correct thing. He has learnt to talk about those things which trouble him. He must continue to understand that he does not need to always be the centre of attention, and he is now realising that he does not need to stress out if he is not the most popular person.

Tony

Appears to value and practice logical thinking .................................................. Usually
Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others .................................. Usually
Is sensitive to the opinions of others ................................................................. Almost Always
Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others ................................................................. Usually
Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way ...................................................... Almost Always
Relates to peers in a friendly positive way .......................................................... Almost Always
Can wait for attention ......................................................................................... Almost Always
Is able to accept positive criticism ...................................................................... Usually
An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics ..................................................... Usually
An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness ............................. Usually

The Students' Support Group's additional comments re Tony were as follows:
Tony has demonstrated a change from sport being an overruling aspect of his life to where he now accepts other aspects of life in harmony with this interest.

Overall move to the more positive columns

The post-study questionnaire reflects an overall movement from the Not at all and Seldom columns of the pre-questionnaire to the Usually and Almost Always columns. The Additional Comments in these post-study questionnaires are, overall, briefer and significantly more positive in content. A synthesis of the post-study questionnaire follows.
Table 7.1 Synthesis of Post-study Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Questionnaire</th>
<th>Carlo</th>
<th>Zac</th>
<th>Pete</th>
<th>Micha</th>
<th>Tilo</th>
<th>Ruben</th>
<th>Tim</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>Peta</th>
<th>Stephen</th>
<th>Allan</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values own logical thinking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to opinions of others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to modify opinion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates to teachers in friendly way</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates to peers in friendly way</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can wait for attention</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to accept positive criticism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and appreciation for ethics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and appreciation of social appropriateness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY: 1 = Not at All  
2 = Seldom  
3 = Usually  
4 = Almost Always

While the overall results of the post-study questionnaire are encouraging in terms of the positive changes in the Students’ Support Group’s perception of the student participants of the project, the researcher has come to realise the following. The questionnaire issued to the Students’ Support Group might have been better serviced by the inclusion of a fifth column which would have allowed for a ‘not known’ registration. This is a personal observation and was never articulated by the Students’ Support Group. Further, the initial number of students invited to participate in the project was twelve. Pre-study questionnaires were filled out by the Students’ Support Group for all twelve students, but post-study questionnaires were filled out for the nine students who lasted to the final stages of the project.
As stated earlier in this dissertation, one student, Gary, only attended the orientation session as following certain events within the school, his parents were requested to place him elsewhere within one week of the research project beginning. Between the fourth and fifth session, Tim’s parents were also asked to find him another school. Following a drug-related incident in the week of session twenty, Zac was suspended and subsequently lost his position in the school.

An orientation session attended by Gary, and four sessions attended by Tim cannot be considered enough exposure to the practice of philosophy to nurture any significant modifications in the behaviour of these two students within the school context. A question arises for the researcher in regard to Zac as he was a participant in the project for twenty sessions. The Students’ Support Group declined to fill out a post-study questionnaire for Zac. A spokesperson for the group (the Assistant Principal) relayed the following remark to the researcher: ‘We wish Zac all the best for the future, but we feel a sense of disappointment at what has happened. We see no purpose in filling out your post-study questionnaire since he is no longer one of our students.’ The researcher did not push the issue. A post-study questionnaire in regard to Zac would have been of value, however.

Was it philosophy?

Turgeon (1998,) in discussing the ideas of Berrie Heesen, proposes that rather than being concerned about whether children’s discussion constitutes philosophy or not, there should be a focus on the liveliness of the ensuing discussion.’

One goal of philosophy in the classroom should be the creation of an atmosphere of openness, acceptance and encouragement of expression. A second more rigorous meaning would be the formal activity of
stimulating children to think together about each other’s thoughts and ideas in dialogic form (Turgeon 1998, p.15).

Undoubtedly, the sessions together constituted such dynamic and open examination by the students of each other’s thoughts and ideas in an atmosphere of encouragement of expression. While Palsson (1988) pushes for strong procedural techniques in doing philosophy with children, he also acknowledges that there is a significant place for spontaneity, which actually ‘transcends applications of pure techniques’ (p.295).

In examining the features of a philosophic discussion, Splitter and Sharp (1996, pp.128-133) adopt a rigorous approach in their identification of three indicators which attest to philosophic discussion taking place: reasoning and inquiry, concept formation and meaning making. They maintain that the presence of ‘reasoning and inquiry’ is evident by the use of such vocabulary as would seek to make distinctions, recognise relationships, supply analogies, demand logic, make inferences, recognise assumptions, and give examples.

The extracts taken from session 19 and included in this dissertation under the notes of that session, appear to the researcher to provide examples of the type of discourse that was apparent in almost every session, particularly from the middle to latter parts of the project. Thus when Ruben sought to know the origins of desire – when he sought to know if desires were based in physical or mental realms – he was endeavouring to make a *distinction*. Stephen in his effort to test the truth of the statement, ‘The eyes are the windows of the soul,’ found an exception and thus he believed the statement to be disproved. In an unwieldy way he used inductive reasoning, going from the particular to the general, to disprove this statement under community scrutiny.
Further on in the same discussion Carlo asks: ‘But where did the soul originate from?’ Stephen offers to his companions the idea that the soul might be an individual’s personality; but then almost immediately sees a difficulty in his own hypothetical example because of the existence of people with multiple personalities. Ruben, after some further discussion of the nature of the soul, uses the analogy of a computer shutting down to describe his ideas about death. Tony takes up Ruben’s idea to question the assumption that he and others have had about life after death. He seeks to know if such concepts have been humanly constructed. Pace follows Tony’s question up to ask one of his own. ‘Why would people make up such things as heaven and hell?’ Tito follows through with an extension to Pace’s question which seeks to have proof: ‘How do people know that there is a heaven and a hell?’ Further on again when the subject arose as to why calamities happen to good people, the statement was made that two people known to the school community had died because ‘God wanted them.’ Ruben responded with the rejoinder that to say ‘God wanted them’ is to infer that God did not want us. At the conclusion of this session, following on from Pace’s concern about a man, who under the influence of liquor had been badly treated by some youths, Micha demonstrates empathy, or at least sensitivity towards those with disabilities. She stated that she now no longer laughed with her friends at people with disabilities and as a result suffered disapproval from her friends.

In regard to concept formation Splitter and Sharp (1996) maintain that asking questions about such things as cause, space, time, hypothesis, theory and law is different from asking questions about how, in fact, the world functions in accordance with these concepts. Continuing with session 19 as the source of examples, this session did indeed see the exploration of concepts as the participants wrestled with
such ideas as 'the nature of desire', 'the nature of the soul', 'the possibility of life after death', and 'the nature of guilt'.

In regard to meaning making, Splitter and Sharp include under this heading 'all those strategies which the community of inquiry employs in its ongoing quest to make sense of that which is puzzling, confusing, ambiguous, vague or in other ways problematic' (p.130). In summary of this 'meaning making' indicator, Splitter and Sharp posit that meaning making occurs when there are in the dialogue: 'questions and statements which reveal a search for the connections that make meaning' (p.131).

The most evident example of 'meaning making' within session 19 is the segment in which the participants explored their puzzlement over the recent death in their school community of a father and son in a boating accident. In their discussion they recognise the basic goodness of the family involved, particularly the good nature of the father. The problem for all of the participants is one that has puzzled millions of human beings before them: Why do “bad” things happen to “good” people? They were concerned to examine what has come to be called ‘the problem of evil.’

The researcher suggests, therefore, that the participants did demonstrate the indicators of Splitter and Sharp’s requirements of a philosophic discussion, that is, there were examples of reasoning and inquiry, concept formation, and meaning making. The students did engage in philosophical discourse – not always, and not with any great linguistic polish – but philosophical discourse did occur in what appeared to the researcher to be, with one or two moderate regressions, increasing commitment.
Was community achieved?

As discussed in the literature review under the heading *Group processes*, considerations of ‘community’ in the present study alternate between the linked philosophical and sociological meanings of the term. The philosophical sense of community attaches to the shared intellectual exploration of ideas on the agreed upon basis that respect will be extended to propositions independent of their authors. This form of community stemming from intellectual tolerance can be matched by another form of community based on the social cohesion of a group, deriving from its common purpose and sense of *we-ness*. The intellectual tolerance desired in a philosophical community can be strengthened by its sociological counterpart and vice versa. The two concepts of community while being conceptually distinguishable, may be mutually reinforcing. It is recognised by the researcher that examples of community given in the following section of this dissertation are both philosophically and sociologically reinforcing.

The large extract taken from the transcript of session 4 and which is included in this dissertation under the record of that session, was a particularly virulent example of the workings of the group in the early stages of the project. This sample reveals animosity towards peer opinions; examples of put-down; intolerance of racial and ethnic difference; covert threats of violence; and general procedural uncooperativeness. Violence against someone of another colour was held by Stephen, Pace, Zac, Tito, Tim and to a certain extent Allan, as being acceptable. This early session was singularly lacking in any semblance of logic or desire to objectively explore in the interests of truth, areas of “difference”. Pace stated in this session a determination to return to his motherland once he was old enough, and several of the participants expressed in one way or another, their hope that he would do exactly that!
Session 12 saw a revisiting of the subject of racism, only this time the members of the group, including Pace, referred to themselves as ‘us Australians’. Session 23 again saw the subject of racism emerge and there appeared to be some additional growth in community as the participants genuinely recognised the cultural and linguistic needs of ethnic and racial groups within the Australian context. Tito was something of an exception here, for while he recognised the needs of cultural and ethnic groups, he did not agree with persons speaking their own language in front of non-speakers of that language. Even this deviation from the group opinion was not put in a dogmatic way, however. In this session Pace also stated that his position of bitterness towards all white people had changed. Stephen also recognised that he had moved away from his position of intolerance towards new settlers to Australia (from Asia, Africa and the Middle East) to one of tolerance.

Another example of the participants' growth in community was in session 24. After weekly evaluations that progressively demonstrated that they were adopting, for the most part, higher procedural and substantive standards, the participants gave themselves an endorsement by recognising their community growth, in their journal entry. It took 24 sessions before Tito and Pace were able to go through a whole session without some form of – albeit minor – altercation. Tito’s isolation from the group was rectified in this session, the researcher would argue, by the ensuing dialogue which explored the nature of superstition and which constructively touched upon the regrets and worries he felt surrounding his brother’s death.

Community of these diverse young people was further demonstrated by their reaction and delight in Micha’s success in *The Year of the Ocean* International Competition, as outlined in session 25. There were perceptible illustrations of how each member of
the group wished her well and shared in her success. The presentation made to me by the participants at the beginning of session 28 – our last meeting – indicated a communal cohesiveness and good will that had grown over the course of the sessions.

The researcher would argue – in spite of some lapses particularly by Tito, Zac and Stephen – that there were “snatches” of community from session 5 onwards. The researcher would also posit that, with some regressions, these snatches increased in number and length of time over the flow of the project. Community was demonstrated, for example, as early as session 5 in the empathy that was shown towards Tito when he revealed the tragic nature of his uncle and brother’s deaths. Community awareness was also apparent in the student participants’ willingness and efforts to explore concepts in poetry, a medium previously, by their own admission, not held to be important to them (session 14). Even their efforts to obtain reassurance about the sincerity of my care towards them as a group, demonstrated their awareness of themselves as a community (session 16).

Was a community of inquiry achieved?

Hreinn Palsson (1987), in his thesis entitled *Educational Saga: Doing Philosophy for Children in Iceland*, posits that: ‘A [philosophical] community of inquiry is not necessary to improve students’ reasoning when working with the Philosophy for Children program’ (p.295). Palsson, in this research, registered qualitative improvements in children’s reasoning over time without the development of a philosophical community of inquiry. The participants of this research project, however, did on many occasions engage in philosophical discussion, which did allow a community of philosophical inquiry to emerge, particularly in sessions, 20, 21, 23, 24, 27 and 28. The statement that a community of philosophical inquiry did emerge is
not to claim that the emergence of such a community lasted for whole sessions. However, sessions 24 and 28 are good examples of prolonged philosophical discussion and the emergence of community. In session 24, as previously discussed in the reflection/analysis of that session, all participants expressed pleasure at the way that the dialogue had gone. They agreed that they had been open to each other’s opinion, and that there had been an atmosphere of mutual respect. Further they recorded in their assessment that, for the first time, the whole session had passed without Tito and Pace teasing each other. On this date the level of their dialogical/community engagement is registered by their journal entry: ‘that we go on talking about what we have talked about at our next meeting.’

Session 28 registers many examples of inquiring together, particularly in the discussion that dealt with the nature of matter. Courtesy, respect, and goodwill, particularly, marked this last session. Enunciation of the above three interrelational qualities naturally leads into the discussion of the two research areas, particularly the first research area: The encouragement of “reasonableness” through the practice of philosophy with high school students at risk.

The first research area: The encouragement of “reasonableness” through the practice of philosophy with high school students at risk.

At the beginning of the project there were 12 participants all proclaimed by the Students’ Support Group to be at risk through their behaviour of being asked to leave the school. Between session 2 and 3, Gary’s parents were asked by the school administration to locate him at another school. Between the 4th and 5th session, Tim’s parents were also requested to find him another school. There were no further exclusions from the school until Zac was asked to leave after session 20. That three
participants had to leave that caring and student-centred school was extremely regrettable; for the researcher, their departure, particularly Zac’s, constituted sad events.

In spite of the forced exits from the school of Tim, Gary and Zac, there remains the possibility that attempts to become more rational through the practice of philosophy sessions – limited though they might have been – may assist Tim (4 sessions) and Zac (19 sessions), towards a more reasoned and even existence. On balance, there was extreme satisfaction gained from the school’s retention of the nine other participants. This satisfaction was further added to by the diminishing profile of the participants in regard to anti-social, unethical and non-cooperative behaviour (see Feedback from Students’ Support Group session 13, and School Principal’s endorsement session 26). There are also data to suggest that association and interaction with the group may have academically motivated individual participants. Examples ‘demonstrating academic motivation’ are found in regard to Peta, in regard to Allan, and in regard to Micha. These examples show – for whatever reason – these students actively engaged in seeking adult support in academic pursuits.

At the school presentation evening at the conclusion of term four, Micha was the recipient of three prizes. One of these prizes was for sporting achievements and such an award was not unusual for Micha. The other prizes were for tutor class spirit and the formal presentation of the environmental plaque alluded to in sessions 11 and 25. Micha, prior to this evening, had not won any awards except for sport. The researcher congratulated Micha on a ‘successful evening’. She responded with ‘Thank you Mrs. Mac, but there are no school work prizes there.’ The researcher answered, ‘You keep
trying and they will come.’ ‘Do you think so?’ said Micha. It was the researcher’s impression in this encounter that Micha valued academic success.

The comments registered by the Students’ Support Group at the base of the post-study questionnaires issued to them (see ‘Post-study Questionnaire: Students’ Support Group’s Observation and Comments’) further attest to their improved perceptions of the participants. Towards the latter part of the project, anecdotal comments made by teachers and auxiliary staff encouraged the researcher to believe that the participants had grown in reasonableness. Further, in the case of Carlo, Micha, Peta, Allan, Tony, Pace, and to a limited extent Tito, anecdotal comments were made by teachers that indicated an increase in commitment and application to their schoolwork. This was further endorsed by the repeated comment by teachers that the researcher should take into her group certain other students who were gaining a reputation for unreasonableness. Splitter and Sharp (1995), in Teaching For Better Thinking, state that if teachers assert that philosophy improves children’s school-based skills and knowledge, ‘then their collective opinion should be taken seriously’ (p.151).

The initial identification and recommendation of participants by the Students’ Support Group via the pre-study questionnaires has captured an important practitioner benchmark of cumulative student behavioural and attitudinal problems. The feedback on participants via anecdotal comments and the post-study questionnaires were equally valuable indicators of progress, or lack of it, in reasonableness. However, from the point of view of carefully weighed reflection, the consensual post-ratings of the members of the school’s Students’ Support Group commend greater attention. It will be recalled that the group comprises a majority of seven teachers (in their capacities of school house co-ordinators or classroom teachers) and also include
a Deputy Principal (also an active teacher) as well as a School Counsellor. In a setting more accustomed to educational research, it would have been possible to obtain individual graded assessments of students from each member of the Students’ Support Group. This was not possible in the present circumstances, the group preferring to render consensual opinion on the ten aspects of the questionnaire. Those consensual results show selective variation from the pre-program results testifying to the attention given to the responses of the group. The writer also recognises that there might be considerable advantage in some future project that seeks to assess Philosophy for Children as a means of encouraging more reasonable behaviour, if the research design allowed for anonymity of participants.

So what?
As stated in the research design, participants’ assessment of their own procedural practices and observation of the quality of their substantive material, are also recognised as constituting data for the research project. The participants, as the sequential flow of their assessment comments tend to show, were unaware at the earlier stages of the project of the requirements of cooperative discursive behaviour. Time and practice, along with their gradual discarding of specific questions in order to evaluate the quality of the sessions, in favour of ‘discussion about their discussion’, reformed and heightened both their individual and community standards of satisfactory processes of reasoning and tolerance of varying points of view. As Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) state, ‘The interest of the individual in the improved management of his (sic) own life must be acknowledged to have priority, for we can have no better incentive [by doing philosophy] than to see our lives improve upon thinking them through’ (p.xiv). And further on page 66 of the same text, their thinking can be seen to link in with Vygotsky’s theory of ‘The Zone of
Proximal Development', when they assert that student judgment and sensitivity are enhanced by involvement in a community of inquiry:

It may well be that the program has served not simply to accelerate children’s growth but to enlarge their capacity for growth.... Under proper educational conditions this process of re-enforcement can generate in children a mutually reinforcing set of intellectual and emotional activities that can pull them beyond where they would have been had these factors been developed in isolation from one another (p.66).

The choice of participants for this research project revolved around their being at risk of being asked to find another school because of their school behaviour. For three participants this became a reality. Such an occurrence brings pain to the young persons involved, their caregivers and family; the relationships with school peers and friends are also adversely affected. On a school level, the whole process also pains administrators and teachers. The evaluative “so what?” should take into account, therefore, that for nine students their participation in this project most likely contributed to the retention of these young people within the school community. The retention of these nine participants within the community has avoided the pain that would have resulted from their exclusion. The central role which education plays in the health and wellbeing of people is becoming increasingly more recognised, indeed ‘education consistently emerges as one of the most important determinants of an individual’s perception of wellbeing’ (Vinson 1999, p. 15). Given this central role of education, it would not be going too far to say that the retention of the nine participants will in all probability contribute to their achieving greater life fulfilment and avoiding anti-social development.

The three dimensions of reasonableness in the context of this study – the intellectual, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal – were centred on five criteria as outlined in
chapter one. These five criteria were given concrete expression in the ten questions of the pre- and post- study questionnaires. Increased subscription to any or all of these five criteria of reasonableness is valuable in the lives of the participants themselves. It can also be said, that to become more reasonable is to enhance the lives of those who surround us by increasing the logic, sensitivity, respectful awareness, ethics and social appropriateness of our relations with them.

The second research area: What adaptations of Matthew Lipman’s paradigm for practising Philosophy with Children were beneficial in the context of this research project?

Facilitator’s prominent role

The original intention at the outset of this project was to try to follow Lipman’s paradigm for Philosophy for Children as closely as possible. Of particular concern was the encouragement of a situation where the researcher’s role as facilitator decreased to such an extent that it would be indistinguishable from that of any other member of the group. Such a diminishment would have been in keeping with Lipman’s paradigm. This in fact did not happen. The researcher’s role as facilitator remained prominent. Nevertheless, in no way did the participants ever seek to use the group relationship outside of philosophy meetings to their advantage, although they did approach the researcher from time to time for assistance with academic projects in other subject areas.

Analysis of the audio-tapes of the early sessions demonstrated that much of the two-hour sessions was extremely unruly. A great deal of the time was spent in the students ‘getting off track’, and the researcher attempting to get them back on. In the early sessions the talk was semi-philosophical ‘in the sense that the issues were really
philosophical, but they were not worked in a philosophical spirit' (Palsson 1988, p.299). The student participants, again particularly in the early sessions, often succeeded in turning these semi or prospective philosophical discussions into therapeutic sessions in which they aired grievances and resentments. Lipman's theory and stated procedures recommend avoidance of such therapeutic happenings. Further, this direction was contrary to the researcher's past experience with children's philosophy groups, where after the presentation of narrative stimuli, entry into a philosophic discussion occurred with a certain natural ease.

**Therapeutic value**

In and around the session 7, attempts to air grievances diminished and when they did occur the researcher did not resist them as she had in the earlier sessions. The change in attitude was due to a realisation that these grievances were extremely significant to the participants and therefore a worthwhile and relevant topic of discussion. Further, the researcher had come to realise that the discussion of problems often opened up different perspectives on an issue, and in so doing encouraged reasonableness. An example of this occurred in session 2 when the power of parents over their children was first perceived almost totally in negative terms. Through the ensuing discussion, however, the students themselves recognised that in the majority of cases, parents were concerned to choose what they believed was best for their children. A certain recognition relating to the acquired wisdom of parents through life experience also emerged in this discussion.

It is possible that the airing of many grievances related to the student participants' notions of adult authority. Discussion allowed these students to explore past situations where they believed they had been right but their opinions had been negated
by parents and teachers on the basis that they were ‘back-chatting’. These students simply did not know how to use language ‘calmly’ and effectively in order to make a point. Their efforts at negotiation with parents and teachers were highly volatile and as such were ineffectual. Session 10, which occurred in the library and in which the group experienced relational difficulties with the librarian, demonstrated that the students at that stage were not prepared to let ‘anything slide’; any injustice or appearance of injustice had to be responded to passionately and immediately. The researcher’s emerging role as “counsellor” or “group elder”, enabled her to both orally explain reasons for behaving less vehemently and also to model the process (see reflection in session 10). While Lipman’s paradigm recognises the function of the teacher as facilitator and model, it does not encourage the teacher to have a strong counsellor role.

The early sessions were sometimes bitter in nature; session 4 is a particularly relevant example of caustic exchanges as students in this session exchanged bitter resentment about how they were in one way or another suffering from Australia’s multicultural composition. While the school endeavoured to address multicultural needs, particularly through its ESL programs, and move towards the inclusive curriculum first advocated in the 1980s, the reality was that the curriculum in place was Anglocentric. With all the good will in the world, ingredients for tension and resentment are difficult to avoid if cultural, economic and social issues are not addressed other than in a tokenistic way (Singh 1998). This, the researcher suggests, applies to all sections of the Australian multicultural population including the Anglo-Saxon component. Yet by session 12 it became apparent that the members of this culturally diverse group perceived themselves as being united as “Australians”.

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The gradual disappearance of bitterness from the group may also be explained by the following. There was, among this group of students, a mistrust and resentment against adults in authority, particularly mistrust of such organisations as the police service and educational authority. The resentment against the police service is understandable in that it is a common attitude in the outer western regions of metropolitan Sydney; the writer has even heard derogatory and sneering comments made by ‘exemplary’ students when visiting police persons have walked through the school playground.

The participants on the whole, appeared to have a similar attitude towards teachers who operated with any air of authority. There was a great deal of resentment and confusion in these young people, and perhaps they needed the earlier sessions to work through their bitterness. Included in the working through of this bitterness were tests of patience and loyalty for the researcher. These tests included the obscure elliptical language which tended to exclude the researcher in the earlier sessions; the persistent ignoring of the rule that called for one person to speak at a time; the gradual revelation of facts and details that would have exposed them to expulsion from the school. ‘Have you got a membership card?’ Pace asked the researcher in a firm but not unkind way, in session 4. The researcher countered with the statement that membership would come when she was treated as an equal member of the group. In many ways as Pace’s statement testifies, the group, in spite of animosities between students, was owned by them from the outset. Although the researcher facilitated the group’s existence, she was the one who had to win membership. Over time, the researcher came to realise that, as Horowitz (1986) maintains, it is the interactions of all the participants that determines the role of the participant observer. Interactions within the group formulated for the writer a role wherein she was a trustworthy and caring adult link with the educational – sometimes “hostile” – world of school (Bruner 1996).
The needs of these young people in the context of the early sessions demanded the recognition, not only of their individual differences, but also involved their need to express their confusion and resentment regarding their school-based realities. Bohm (1998) states that in order to make meaning within a discussion group, it is first necessary to recognise differences. Coherent shared meaning, he argues, comes about as a result of working through difference. As cited in the reflection of session 4 in support of the therapeutic nature of these first sessions - and elements of some subsequent sessions as for example, session 21 - the working through of these differences allowed the cup to be empty so that it was free to hold other things (Bohm 1998, p.5).

**Flexibility of discussion stimulus material**

In further discussion of the role that emerged for the researcher/facilitator, there was often a strong awareness of the thinking of Vygotsky (1934), Shor and Freire (1987) and Bruner (1996). In recognising the students' need for specific adult guidance, the researcher was conscious of Vygotsky's premise that it is the people in a child's world who promote development. There was also an awareness of his assertion that the only worthwhile learning occurs when a child is drawn on beyond where they would be without intervention, their zone of proximal development. In spite of the students' appearance of self-assuredness, it became increasingly more apparent that their self-confidence was most in need of scaffolding. Part of the facilitator's strategy in this regard was in minor opposition to Lipman's ideas surrounding the choice of stimulus material for promoting discussion. In recognition of their individual and corporate life experience, the group was allowed to turn away from the narratives that had been
specifically written for philosophic discussion and to choose stimuli that were more relevant to their context and interests. As the sessions progressed, the group members showed a marked preference for video as stimulus material.

The thinking of Shor and Freire (1990), Bruner (1993) and Gardner (1983) also influenced the researcher’s approach in regard to flexibility of stimuli for learning. They recommend that a proposed course of pedagogy be creatively adjusted to the needs of the students who are involved. As previously stated in the reflection following session 7, Freire in particular perceived the teacher’s role as: 'a helper of the students in their process of formation, of their growing up' (ibid, p.118). He also perceived this process as being an ‘artistic one’, where the teacher is sensitive to the students’ needs at a particular point in their formation, assisting them with whatever help they need in their process of self-shaping.

The difficult social and economic contexts of the majority of these young people’s lives were in all probability the reason that excluded them from finding meaning in the specially written philosophic texts. The participants in the program generally shared socially disadvantaged backgrounds in the sense of having grown up in an environment of cumulative economic, educational, health and mainstream cultural deprivation (WHO-Europe 1998; Vinson 1999; Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994). The circumstances of their daily lives, and the topics and modes of discussion with which they were familiar, often bore little resemblance to the scenarios prepared for discussion in Philosophy for Children. These philosophic texts, however, have been useful with other communities of inquiry that the researcher has facilitated within the school.
In pursuit of relevant stimulus material, this group turned to contemporary Australian short story anthologies, to video film stimuli such as *Contact*, and to documentary material such as the video *Stephen Hawking's Universe*. On several occasions the group, guided by the facilitator, turned to ‘the canon of literature’ taking extracts from Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and Hemingway’s *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. Extracts from the classics were tried because they encompass genuine and striking examples of human experience; and these young people were particularly demanding in their notions of the genuine. “Classical” children’s stories were also used – classical in the sense that they appeal not only to young people but also to the child in the adult – and these young people because of their life experiences, were inclined to reject any stimulus that was not located partly in the adult world. Such children’s stories were *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss (1988), and *Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady* retold by S. Hastings (1985). Poetry, and on one occasion a contemporary song, were also used successfully.

In contrast to other groups facilitated by the researcher and in contrast to the usual operations of a community of inquiry according to Lipman’s model, there was a constant need for the researcher to be with the group. In previous philosophy groups in the Learning Centre of Emeritus High, it was possible for the facilitator to leave these groups for limited periods of time and return to find them still engaged in dialogue. This was not the case with the participants in this study. At various times during the project I was called away to attend to school needs. On return I always found the participants behaving in a way that was unacceptably loud and disruptive of other educational interests within the school. The researcher’s presence was desirable at all times. As a positive counter to this negative point, however, it is restated that
the reality of these young people’s experience demanded more ‘sophisticated’ adult stimulus for the substance of their discussion.

The ratio of ten boys to two girls should also be commented on. In discussing research in the area of classroom disruption, Ellen Jordan (1995) states that children who cause discipline problems within the school community are predominantly boys. Ruth Goodenough further contends that these disruptive classroom tendencies on the part of boys often emerge as group action in primary school years. She has observed, in her own research, boys covering their ears when girls spoke at news time. Peta’s reluctance to bid for opportunities to speak during discussions (in spite of her obvious interest) may be explained by a process of socialisation in the past by “unruly” boys.

**History of philosophy**

As cited in the introduction and literature review of this dissertation, Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) emphasise that it is inappropriate to highlight the history of philosophical thought with children because to do so is to indicate that the most relevant questions have already been explored by adult expert thinkers. To include an historical approach when dealing with young people is, according to the proponents of Philosophy for Children, to signal that philosophy is taught rather than practised. The researcher’s experience in the context of this school site is that the student clientele appears to value philosophical discussion more because of its long and interesting history. They perceive philosophy as being valuable because it is long established. The researcher, therefore, both in the orientation session and throughout the project, referred to the Western tradition of philosophy. Recognising the multicultural composition of the participant group and of the population of Australia in general, the researcher also alluded at times to the philosophic traditions of other cultures. This
acknowledgement of the philosophic wealth of other traditions seemed also to have been appreciated by the students.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 8 seeks to draw conclusions from the research findings and to formulate appropriate recommendations.

Journey towards reasonableness

The words ‘towards reasonableness’ encapsulate the essence of what the group experienced together. There was never an arrival at ‘a state of reasonableness’; but can ever such a claim be made? As a group – and ever increasingly as a community – there was a strong endeavour to move in that direction, although at times, particularly in the beginning, progress was often thwarted by personal differences and prejudices. At first the researcher was “discouraged” by lack of sustained philosophic discussion. Then an appreciation began to form that the context of the group was not dissimilar to teachers and professionals working with children in Special Education; what may be considered a small step in conventional pedagogical terms often constitutes a big step within the confines of Special Education (Westwood 1993; Lovitt 1991; Cole and Chan 1990; Rogers 1983).

It is owned by the researcher that she had often to intervene in order to repair or redirect the discussion, so that it not break down under the weight of personal differences. The happy reality is, however, that discussion took place. In between these personal differences, and in spite of the banter and rowdiness involved in the sessions of these dynamic young people – particularly the early sessions – there were increasingly longer stretches of meaningful dialogue. These stretches of dialogue saw the participants
challenging not the personalities of their peers but the arguments of their peers. On these occasions, they were interested in the principles of reasoning and inquiry; they were interested in the formulation of concepts and in the making of meaning (Splitter and Sharp 1995, p.131).

The student participants did walk a distance down the road towards reasonableness, becoming more adept, as they progressed, at forming logical thoughts and bringing them to articulation, or modifying them as a result of the ideas and contributions of their fellow group members. Improved reasonable behaviour of the nine remaining participants in the project was attested to by:

- teacher and auxiliary staff comments about demonstrable changes in the behaviour of the student participants;
- the responses to the ten questions of the post-study questionnaire;
- the written comments made by the Students' Support Group at the base of the post-study questionnaire;
- retention of nine participants at the school site;
- the observations by the participant researcher of demonstrable 'reasonable' behaviour; and,
- the evaluations of the student participants themselves.

Limitations of study and future research

It is always possible that the foregoing improvements may have been influenced by factors other than the practice of Philosophy. These factors may have included natural maturation processes, although it must be remembered that the project took place within a single school year and, in all but one case (Tony), followed several years of troubled existence at school. In some cases, there were instances of academic and pastoral care by other staff members. One such example was cited in the reflection of session 11, and related to a teacher appreciating and pinning up on the wall in the staffroom a painting
discarded by Tito. Again, however, these gestures of support had co-existed with maladaptive behaviour in the past and were not distinct potent influences on the behaviour of the students in question.

Perhaps the genuine and regularly demonstrated interest of an adult in the lives of these young people influenced things for the better. Who among us is not positively influenced by having someone we can trust listen to our ideas, our grievances and concerns? Pace’s question supported by the interest of the group in session 16, asked if the researcher genuinely cared for them, and the participants appeared to be pleased by an answer in the affirmative.

One obvious area in which the appraisal of philosophy in engendering reasonableness could also be improved is in shielding assessors (in this case, primarily the Students’ Support Group) from awareness of who has, or who has not been, included in the philosophy group. In the present instance, the retention by school administrators of these young people in the school community at the outset of 1998, was influenced by the fact that the researcher, a foundation member of the school, would work with these troublesome young people. In future, a study design which allowed similarly troubled students access to a philosophy group without the executive being confident as to who had been chosen as participants, could strengthen the conviction that philosophy is a big element in bringing about an increase in reasonableness.
Who might the study be recommended to?

Over recent times, there has been a strong call for the introduction of civics into the curriculum of many western countries. The early sessions of the project, particularly session 4, demonstrated strong racial and ethnic tensions in the multicultural composition of the research group. The multicultural nature of the research group loosely mirrored the larger composition of the wider school population of Emeritus High. Philosophy for Children, with its emphasis on democratic and egalitarian principles and its concern with ethics and good thinking generally, would seem an ideal resource to be employed in the exploration of what it is to be a good citizen. Research into the relevance of Philosophy as a tool in the study of civics and citizenship, particularly in the context of a multicultural school population, is therefore recommended.

The researcher accepts that many interrelated factors may have influenced the behaviour of these young people for the better. However, there appears to be enough evidence cited in this dissertation to suggest that the practice of philosophy in and around these young people did help them grow in reasonableness. This study is recommended to my colleagues, practising teachers who deal with high school students considered by their school-based communities to be at risk by virtue of their unreasonable behaviour. It is offered as being one way of encouraging reasonableness with its related intellectual, interpersonal and intrapersonal components. It is one teacher’s experience of adapting Matthew Lipman’s paradigm for practising Philosophy for Children to the needs of a particular group of young people, and as such it has been of value.
REFERENCES


REFERENCE LIST OF TEXTS USED AS STIMULUS MATERIAL IN PHILOSOPHY SESSIONS.


Poems:


**Videos:**

Appendices
Appendix 1 – Questionnaire
Students’ Support Group’s Observations and Comments

Student’s Name: ________________________________

Please answer all questions. Beside each item below, indicate with a tick the degree to which it occurs.

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<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
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<tr>
<td>Appears to value and practice logical thinking</td>
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<td>Appears to value the practice of logical thinking in others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is sensitive to the opinion of others</td>
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<td>Is willing to change or modify an opinion because of the good thinking of others</td>
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<td>Relates to teachers in a friendly positive way</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relates to peers in a friendly positive way</td>
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<td>Can wait for attention</td>
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<td>Is able to accept positive criticism</td>
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<td>An awareness of, and consideration for, ethics</td>
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<td>An awareness of, and appreciation for, social appropriateness</td>
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Additional Comments:

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2 - Parent/caregiver’s letter

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Dear......................,

My name is Maureen McDermott and I have been a teacher at Emeritus High since its commencement in 1994. I am currently in my fourth year of study for a doctorate in education at the University of Wollongong. The field of research that I have chosen in partial fulfilment of this degree, is in the practice of philosophy with children.

I invite your daughter/son to be part of a group of twelve students who will meet once a week in the School Learning Centre for two hours to discuss issues and questions arising out of stimulus material that we will read together.

The purpose of this project using Philosophy for Children is twofold:
1) to obtain data for research into whether the practice of philosophy encourages growth in reasonable behaviour in children who have a history of difficulty in this area, and
2) to offer your child the benefit of a Learning Centre Project.

Your daughter/son may withdraw from the philosophy group at any time that she/he wishes. I will record group discussions on audio equipment so that I may study the response of the students more thoroughly than the dynamics of a discussion situation will allow; the only other people who may listen to these tapes would be university academics, and you and your child if you wish.

I enclose a letter of endorsement of the research project from the school principal.............................. Please contact me on 9411 4407, or my supervisor Dr. Christine Fox, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong on 042 213882 should you have any further queries. If you have any enquiries regarding the conduct of the research please contact the Secretary of the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee on 042 42214457.

Yours faithfully,

Maureen McDermott.
Appendix 3 - Student letter

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Dear..............................,

You are invited to join a group of twelve other students who will meet each week for the equivalent of two periods in the School Learning Centre in order to discuss matters of interest which will arise out of stimulus material that we will read together. This group will be practising philosophy and will be called a community of inquiry.

This community of inquiry will have two purposes:
1) To provide me with some data about the encouragement of reasonable behaviour through the practise of philosophy with children who have a difficulty in this area.
2) To offer you the benefits of a Learning Centre Project.

I will record on audio tape the discussions of the group. The only people who might listen to these tapes are university academics - and you and your parents if you wish. You may withdraw from the community of inquiry at any time.

Yours faithfully,

Maureen McDermott.