




Early Childhood Matters

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Critical thinking

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Cover and inside cover: Isaan Bright Child Programme, Thailand
Photo: Courtesy MAYA

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Editorial

Critical thinking is the theme of this edition, something that seldom appears as the sole focus of work with young children and indeed is not always overtly articulated or highlighted within programmes. Yet the ability to think critically is actually widely fostered as part of the holistic development of young children. This can be seen in many project activities, for example, those that require children to engage in looking, understanding, reflecting, judging and making choices. These kinds of almost mechanical processes, and similarly mechanical notions such as cause, effect and consequence, are important in encouraging children to learn how to think critically. But they are a means to something much more exciting, the internalisation of critical thinking and its transformation into an ability that, often unobtrusively, will guide children through the many dilemmas, decisions and choices they will have to face in life. And the greater that ability, the better the consequences for children, their families, their communities and their societies. To underpin practice that has such aims, a review of strategies and teaching methods is offered on page 5. This also includes a review of the extent to which the youngest children are considered capable of critical reflection.

How does this look in practice in programmes that do have an overt focus on critical thinking? The Isaan Bright Child Programme (see page 11) is a creative and participatory programme that is transforming the nature of preschool, kindergarten and early primary education in Thailand by supporting teachers as they help young children to develop critical thinking skills. The Programme has three central aspects: supporting young children in developing these skills; local curriculum development that is appropriate to the specific culture and language; and teacher training and networking. One of the many interesting aspects of the programme is that it is rooted in Buddhist

perspectives and understandings and therefore moves towards its objectives through typically Buddhist approaches. Yet, in many ways, it has similarities with what might be called a 'Western' approach to critical thinking as exemplified by 'Philosophy for Children' that is introduced on page 26. Central to Philosophy for Children is the idea of the excitement of discovery, reflection and analysis, as young children are helped to create what is called 'a community of enquiry' that allows them to explore and better understand their world, other people, and themselves. The programme is based on age-specific sets of stories about everyday happenings in the lives of children. Storylines raise philosophical questions in the children's normal language, and in the ways that children might talk about issues and ideas. An exploration of a programme centred on Philosophy for Children starts on page 24.

Just as critical thinking can so often to be found across a range of activities in early childhood development work, it also shares commonalities with other human abilities or capacity that are the subject of attention in programmes for young children. One example of this is explored in the article on page 28. This deals with resilience – the capacity to thrive despite adversity. The author observes that understanding reality is an important element in the development of resilience in children; and is fundamental in enabling them to transform and overcome adversities. In the same way, critical thinking begins with understanding reality and has the objective of enabling children to respond appropriately. In both cases, children understand what they are living, and how they link up to other actors around them. This overlap and complementarity strengthens abilities or capacity.

But the ability of young children to think critically is not always acknowledged by adults, nor is critical thinking by young children always welcome. For example, as children move from early childhood



KIWAKUKU, Tanzania
Photo: © Bernard van Leer Foundation/Jim Holmes

Children are often expected to reduce their critical thinking ability to simple problem solving

programmes into the formal education system, they may find that they are not encouraged to think too widely, and instead are expected to reduce their critical thinking ability to simple problem solving. The consequence is that valuable contributions to discussions and understandings are lost. Beyond restating the fact that young children can, will and should be encouraged to think critically, it is useful to remember that the 'right' to think critically is upheld by international conventions and agreements. (see page 19).

In the section entitled 'Insights from the field' we show examples of projects that put principles of critical thinking into practice with young children. Although they may not be seen as such, they present clear models of how to promote the capacity of young children for critical thinking, always adapted

to the children's context and the issues that concern them (see page 30).

This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* also introduces a new section called 'Resources', which includes materials and a bibliography that covers both theory and practice on the theme of the edition. This time, the resources are for those who wish to go deeper into critical thinking, and who want to know which other organisations are also working on this theme (see page 38).

Jim Smale, Teresa Moreno
Editors

Critical thinking

A brief overview of practice and theory

Krisjon Olson

Krisjon Olson is a PhD Candidate in the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Berkeley. Following two years as a Hart fellow in Guatemala with the Foundation-supported 'Refugiados del Mundo' project, she was a 'Colleague-in-residence' at the Bernard van Leer Foundation from October 2003 to April 2004, with support from the Fulbright-Hays Program. She is currently in Guatemala, continuing her research on children and genocide. This article maps out the efforts of various scholars and educators to establish strategies and teaching methods to cultivate critical thinking in young people. It also examines the extent to which a young child is capable of critical reflection.

The idea that schools should do more than require the rote memorisation of facts and figures has been particularly fashionable over the past 20 years. Children must also learn to analyse and evaluate information and concepts and thereby deal more effectively with everyday life. They need to be able to solve problems and act in creative ways to confront an ever-changing world.

Philosophers and psychologists have provided lengthy deliberations on the subject.¹ Philosophers emphasise the importance of children's exposure to causality and logic, while psychologists focus on the educational process as it relates to each child's physical and emotional development.

According to some of these perspectives, the improvement in children's cognition allows them to produce new ideas and confront problems by reasoning through them. This 'critical thinking' allows children to explore their own concepts, derive conclusions and dispute the reasoning of others. Children might also be encouraged to assess their

thoughts and devise certain kinds of arguments about these thoughts. This sometimes lends itself to an interpretation of critical thinking as a simple enterprise involving rational choice.

However, critical thinking should properly also encompass additional elements, such as the recognition that belief systems – social, ethical, religious, political – affect our consideration of even the simplest issues. Thus, in *How We Think*, John Dewey, already in 1910, called for a child education that also focuses on 'reflective thought'. This would allow for the dynamic, ongoing exploration of any belief or form of knowledge 'in the light of the grounds that support it' and within an endeavour to understand the implications contained in that belief or piece of knowledge. Dewey rejected the knowledge-transmission model and held to a pragmatic theory of inquiry that requires certain skills and a disposition on the part of the child to use these skills.

Critical thinking therefore involves two resources: knowledge and performance. It is a way of thinking that is invested within a way of acting in the world. Critical thinking is not necessarily natural or easy, in Dewey's view, so teaching is essential if one wants to accomplish more than merely pass along received knowledge. This understanding of critical thinking continues to yield significant influence today.

Is knowledge the same as thinking?

In general, when one says 'I know', one doesn't know, one believes. (Marcel Duchamp)

Why should we bother with children's thinking at all? Isn't it enough if they learn to 'know'? Those who promote critical thinking argue that, of course,

knowing is not enough.² Critical thinking is also important. It allows children to understand the facts and the figures, and it provides a space for questioning. Ultimately, it allows children to make better choices, lead better lives and become better citizens.

In the early 1960s, the writings of Robert Ennis swayed the debate with regard to the pedagogy of critical thinking. It was Ennis who first conceived of critical thinking as the correct assessment of statements. Correctness, in this case, means more than academic proficiency. According to Ennis, critical thought is 'dispositional', rather than 'incidental'. By this, he means that it requires a personal investment and good intentions. An educational agenda that contains critical thinking at the core asks children to engage their own beliefs rather than obliging them to provide only correct answers. It requires that children 'care about "getting it right"' so as to come up with the best, most unbiased answer possible in the given circumstances. Critical thinking, Ennis argues, is necessary for the existence of creativity, democracy and modernity in society.

Confronting the actual task of teaching children to think critically generates a host of questions. Should critical thinking be taught as a basic skill? Does it require particular knowledge that is specific to each subject area? And so on.

Two of the main approaches to teaching critical thinking have arisen from such questions. The first is the skills-based approach advanced by Ennis in his book *Critical Thinking* (1996). The approach involves mastering thinking through exercises and then applying it in all aspects of education. The alternative, sometimes known as the 'infusion approach', consists in teaching critical thought in certain domains of the curriculum, but not teaching it as a generalisable skill. This method is proposed by Canadian philosopher John McPeck in *Critical Thinking and Education* (1981).

Thus, for some theorists, critical thinking should occur in any and every situation. For others, reflective thinking and judgement are more circumscribed.

A skills-based approach

Skills are important to critical thinking because, once internalised and enacted, these contribute to one's well-being and capacities. Ennis summarises as follows:

Critical thinking is a process, the goal of which is to make reasonable decisions about what to believe and what to do. Because we all are continually making such decisions, critical thinking is important to us in personal and vocational, as well as civic, aspects of our lives.

Critical thinking, then, is important in every aspect of our lives. Ennis elaborates six essential 'elements' for critical thinking. These are 'focus', 'reasons', 'inference', 'situation', 'clarity' and 'overview'. Each of these is a discrete reasoning skill that allows a student to evaluate and judge certain arguments. The student accomplishes this by way of various formal logic tests, credibility criteria, observation, deduction and experimentation. In the end, thinking that is reasonable and reflective is concerned with judging the accuracy and intent of statements, beliefs and actions.

Ennis elaborates six essential 'elements' for critical thinking. These are 'focus', 'reasons', 'inference', 'situation', 'clarity' and 'overview'.

Ennis tells us that our ability to make a good, reasonable decision, no matter what the situation, can be improved if we are willing to follow certain guidelines (his six elements). However, for all of us who have faced tough choices – whether to continue in school, opt for a day job, take a risk, or play it safe – the ability to make critical calculations in moments of indecision, passion, or indifference might seem elusive. Being reasonable isn't easy, after all.

The skills-based approach championed by Ennis has thus drawn criticism. Notable among the critiques is that developed by John McPeck in his book *Teaching Critical Thinking* (1990).

An infusion approach

McPeck argues that there is no significant body of general skills in critical thinking that can be taught.

'We have not, to my knowledge, recently discovered any new miracle cure for the long-standing frailty of human judgement,' he writes. He suggests that the subject-specific forms of inquiry in which we engage have too little common ground for us to extract a single logic that can be gainfully taught as a subject in its own right, a set of thinking skills that must be learned. Instead, he asks us to consider for whom and for what we are interested in developing an educational programme with a critical thinking agenda. He maintains that critical thinking is most efficaciously taught through traditional academic disciplines. He wishes to direct our attention away from generic processes of reasoning toward content-driven thought.

... if you conceive of critical thinking (as I do) as subject-specific, ... when you introduce such a programme is determined in large measure by what you are introducing. Since critical thinking, in my view, is parasitic upon the disciplines, it follows that you should not introduce it until students know something about the disciplines. Anything worthy of the name 'critical thinking' cannot exist in a subject-matter vacuum.

For McPeck, good reasoning on one topic is not necessarily indicative of critical thinking abilities in general. Failure to make a good decision, in his framework, is most often attributable to poor information, not to faulty judgement. It would be difficult to think critically about something such as stem-cell research if one has no knowledge of the subject. In fact, McPeck maintains, for most situations, common sense is sufficient, and no special skills are required. A certain 'reasoned

According to academicians, critical thinking is important in every aspect of our lives



PACOS, Malaysia
Photo: Courtesy PACOS

scepticism' can only be developed on the basis of subject-specific principles and skills.

McPeck and Ennis do seem to agree that students need to learn how, not what, to think. The disagreement, then, is over the way to go about this task most effectively. They also seem to suggest that critical thinking is the domain of adolescents and adults. Indeed, learning programmes that explicitly incorporate critical thinking are most often found at universities or in adult education. So, it is appropriate to consider the critical capabilities of children, especially young children, for our purposes. Are young children able to think critically about problems?

McPeck and Ennis do seem to agree that students need to learn how, not what to think.

In dialogue with children

In a series of eloquent essays compiled in *Philosophy and the Young Child* (1980) and *The Philosophy of Childhood* (1994), Gareth Matthews articulates a clear case for the 'thoughtfulness' of children. Through careful documentation of his own conversations with children, Matthews explores puzzlement, play and reasoning in the youngest minds. In his serious attempts to understand children's struggles with language, meaning and logic, he discovers ways to challenge widely accepted assumptions about cognitive development.

'[T]here is impressive evidence of persistence and continuity in the thinking of [children] as some of the fruits of relatively sustained reflection and inquiry', Matthews concludes in his analysis of everyday anecdotes involving children and justice, rights and memories. Thus, according to Matthews, any concept that rules, on solely theoretical grounds, that children cannot think critically because their thinking is immature and inconsequential is certainly misguided. Children test and check, question and probe on a regular basis in order to understand and engage with the world around them. They narrate stories, and they act.

Most analyses of critical thinking, including the philosophy of childhood advanced by Matthews, focus on cerebral processes and mental capacities. Often, this focus comes at the expense of attention to social and economic conditions and other contextual considerations.

In her study *Traditional Healers and Childhood in Zimbabwe* (1996), anthropologist Pamela Reynolds describes ways in which knowledge can be transmitted across generations, and investigates how children develop knowledge about themselves. She demonstrates that children as young as six can acquire technical comprehension of medical materials, as well as an understanding of themselves, through their relationship with traditional healers in their families.

Reynolds tells the story of a trip she took with a healer to hunt for medicinal herbs. They were accompanied by the healer's two young granddaughters. She describes how the children followed their elderly grandmother through the woods.

Once, when [the young girl] admitted to forgetting the name of a bush, her grandmother said, 'How can you keep forgetting? I am going to die soon.' The girl laughed shyly and repeated the name [of the bush] after her grandmother.

The repetition – of names, of rituals, of incantations – became an exercise that reinforced critical knowledge among the children. Reynolds shows that, as the traditional healing is applied to and by children, it produces inquisitiveness and expertise. Her detailed ethnography suggests that a comprehensive understanding of critical thinking must account for more than cognitive capacity; it must also consider beliefs, customs and rituals.

Thinking in practice

The purpose of this article is to stimulate dialogue about the facets of critical thinking, but these are ultimately most easily understood in action. Academic debates on the topic of critical thinking too often succumb to disagreement and discord. Nonetheless, the concept has inspired pedagogic advances and good practices in all parts of the world.



The repetition of names, rituals, incantations may become an exercise that reinforces critical knowledge among children

Two projects designed to stimulate critical thinking in children are worth mentioning. The first, reviewed in this issue of *Early Childhood Matters*, is the Maya Isaan Bright Child Project in Thailand. In an effort to move away from the 'chalk-and-talk' approach to schooling that dominates in the Thai system, the project employs critical and creative thinking, touch and performance so as to balance the physical and emotional needs of children. Critical thinking is one element in a wide range of skills that the child develops. Critical thinking, in the Thai context, is understood by way of the Buddhist metaphor of suffering. To know your own suffering, you must identify it and analyse it. You take responsibility for addressing your suffering and initiating action. The Maya-Isaan staff have found that children are adept at combining thinking and practice, while incorporating their own beliefs as they progress.

The second project is based on an interactive computer programme, *The Six Pillars of Character*, which is produced by David Elkind, Kristin McGinn, and Mike Thompson.³ The project aimed to give young people the opportunity to learn, reflect, and act. The programme deals explicitly with six aspects of character: respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship, and trustworthiness; and presents them with a rich visual and audio environment from which they can choose a variety of activities. On offer in the six-CD package are a number of short documentary films, essays, vignettes, current events, interviews, and moderated discussions between teenagers. Many of the items feature young people as protagonists.

For example the programme on 'responsibility' shows a young woman named Lateefah from a poor neighbourhood, who is putting herself through medical school by working in the Center for Young

Women's Development. In the course of listening to Lateefah's story we discover that, at a very young age, she had a child. Now she is struggling to educate herself, hold a job, and care for her tiny daughter. A teenager using the computer programme can hear Lateefah's words and watch her in a small apartment with her child. They can enter a journal, which is part of the programme, to reflect upon Lateefah's choices and the ways in which she now chooses to live her life. The presentation challenges many commonly held assumptions about what constitutes responsible behaviour, and asks young people to make their own judgements.

The programme also offers up present-day problems, such as the legal case against the tobacco industry in the United States and the fairness of generic drug production in South Africa. The user is encouraged to navigate the programme freely, writing, listening, and watching at will. The problems portrayed demand consideration based on thoughtfulness and contemplation.

In practice there is no simple correct response, no fixed answer. Instead children are offered the opportunity to reflect upon their own beliefs, prejudices, knowledge, interests, and aspirations. They might come to realise that many people, like themselves, make hard choices each day; and perhaps they will also come to confront their own difficulties in a new way. Although aimed at older children, the programme closely parallels approaches held to be appropriate for younger children too.

Notes

1. See, for example, the work of psychologist Robert Coles on the moral, political, and religious lives of children; or the work of philosophers Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida on thinking and action.
2. In the literature on critical thinking important issues surface about what kind of knowledge we produce and whether any knowledge, in the process of its creation, is dependent upon one's position and interests.
3. See 'Character Counts' at www.charactercounts.org

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The Isaan Bright Child Programme

Teaching young children to ask why and discover how

Human beings, children or adults, are able to protect themselves by their own capable thinking. Only if we encourage children to think, or provide them a chance to develop their critical thinking skills then they can protect themselves. And it is not only our belief; it is the truth.

Santi Chitrachinda, Artistic Director, MAYA

The Isaan Bright Child Programme is a creative and participatory programme that is transforming the nature of preschool, kindergarten and early primary education in Thailand. The programme promotes an entirely new approach to teaching and learning, which allows preschool teachers to help young children to develop critical thinking skills. The programme focuses on teachers and schools in the Northeast (Isaan) and the North of Thailand, two of the least developed regions in the country.

The programme involves more than just a methodology; it also provides teachers with tools to work with and an institutional structure through which they can support each other and reach out to others. It helps preschool teachers to develop the capacity to make their own lesson plans and to actively participate in networks of teachers. These teachers' networks are the driving forces behind the success of this programme. For instance, the network in the Isaan region, where the programme initially started, is now playing an active role in the process of mobilising the Northern teachers' network.

The Programme has three central aspects: supporting young children in developing their critical thinking skills; local curriculum development that is appropriate to the specific culture and language; and teacher training and networking.

In this interview, MAYA's Programme Director Somsak Kanha and its Artistic Director Santi Chitrachinda respond to questions about how MAYA

works with teachers and local communities to help give preschool children a better start, and how it has applied the concept of critical thinking in the specific context of education in Thailand. And, as they do so, they bring out the complexity of MAYA's work and all that underpins it.

ECM: The Isaan Bright Child Programme has its roots in the Bright Child 2000 Programme, which MAYA set up with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the slum areas of Bangkok. Why did MAYA choose to extend the Bright Child Programme to Isaan and to the Northern region, and what new challenges did this present?

MAYA: We decided to extend Bright Child to Isaan because it is one of the poorest areas in Thailand and many of the slum dwellers in Bangkok originally came from there. Isaan is a large open area where distances are much greater than in the crowded slums of Bangkok. It also meant dealing directly with the Ministry of Education, rather than the municipal authorities. And we had to address a different group of people. In the slum areas, there are few trained teachers, especially at preschool level. Very often mothers take it upon themselves to look after groups of children. In Isaan, we were working with formally trained teachers, so our approach was slightly different. But, in effect, we were faced with similar problems in both cases: we had to convince people that they were capable of taking effective action themselves to improve the prospects of preschool children.

Despite the challenges of the new context, the programme in Isaan moved forward more quickly than we expected. We originally planned to try it out in one province for the first year and then extend it to the other 19 provinces in the region in the second and third years. We actually completed that in two years, so – because teachers in the North had heard about the programme and wanted to know why it wasn't being implemented in their region, too – we

decided to expand it to the Northern region in the third year. That meant modifying the model again, but at least we had a better understanding of the situation after working in Isaan for two years. The Isaan model was not perfect and there are certain areas in which we are still unsure what to do, but we are learning all the time.

ECM: How does MAYA go about setting up a programme in a new area?

MAYA: When we first go into an area, we organise a theatre performance to open up an issue that children have shown concerns them, and then we ask the people what they think about it. For many of them, it is the first time they have discussed children's problems publicly and it is hard to convince them that they can do anything structural to solve them. We tell them it is not as difficult as it seems and ask them what they want the children to be like in the future. They say they would like them to be clever and have useful skills, and not be naïve so that people cannot take advantage of them. Then we develop a curriculum that responds to these needs. This is what happened in Bangkok and Isaan, and later in the Northern region. At preschool level, children are prepared through experiential learning not just to deal with the present but also for the future.

Once we have got the initial message across, we encourage people to organise and work together so that they can support each other, raise money and negotiate with the authorities from a position of strength. In Bangkok, the teachers organised themselves into a committee and negotiated with the municipal authorities for a 100% pay rise, from 2,000 to 4,000 Baht per month (USD50 to USD100). That is still not much, but it was a significant achievement. In Isaan and the Northern region, with our assistance, the teachers have set up their own networks and meet each other at seminars and workshops to learn from each other. We also organise other mobilisation activities, such as asking local primary schools to provide support for the programme.

ECM: The Bright Child Programme seems to have been a great success, achieving the support of teachers, local communities and the authorities with very little

resistance. Yet it must have required quite a change in culture. How do you explain the way the programme appears to have been accepted so easily?

MAYA: Well, it is certainly not just because of us. We believe that MAYA's work has set an example for teachers in particular to develop their own ideas. Some have been teaching for a long time, and they no longer stop and think why they became a teacher in the first place. So in our workshops, we ask them to remember how they felt on their first day as a teacher and to list three things they have done for the children that have made them happy, and three bad things that they have done. Many of them become emotional when they remember this. Teaching is a profession with an ethic, not just way of earning money. We believe that it is compassion for the children, together with what they have experienced in the workshop, that has given the teachers the strength to go from where they were to where they are now.

And, of course, the success of the programme has a lot to do with the context within which we work. In Thailand, we had a Western-style education system for a long time, but it was not very successful, because of a lack of good quality teaching materials. Then, in the late 1990s, there was the economic crisis, when many things that people had always believed in no longer worked. Since they had nothing to lose, they were more prepared to try something else. And although it did require a culture change, it was a change back to something that many people recognised. The programme makes use of local knowledge and local resources, much of which is traditional and rooted in our culture.

So the education system was in a mess, and we came along with some simple and recognisable solutions. We saw teachers with 30 or 40 children and no materials to teach them with. We asked them: what is the simplest way to solve this problem in the classroom? And we came up with what we call the Experiential Activities Planner (EAP). In EAP, you have an introduction, content and conclusion just as you find in every learning situation: it's nothing new. But the teachers did not know how to deal with the content. So we worked with them to develop four steps to generate the content: identifying a problem; exploring the problem; group work to

share and refine what has been discovered; and then communicating the results with the other groups. Together with the warm-up (introduction) and the debriefing (conclusion), this makes a learning unit of six steps in all. In practice, the point is for teachers to produce content that stimulates and enables children to think critically, not to simply tell them what to think. That means that the teachers don't necessarily have to write much: a learning unit might only need a few lines to do the job.

The project has been a success, not because of us, but because it has helped the teachers to come to a new understanding of who they are and why they are doing this work.

When we explained this to the teachers, they saw that it can be understood in terms of Thai tradition. A central element of Buddhism, our main religion, is suffering. The first step is to know your suffering. In modern terms, that means identifying it, understanding it and analysing it. The second step is to know the causes of your suffering. And then Buddhism asks: why are you still suffering? Why do you not do something about it? So you imagine what it is like not to have the problem – that is the third step. The fourth step is working out how to get to the situation of not having the problem. Then you make a plan. In Buddhism the plan has eight elements, starting with having the right theory to achieve what you need to do. If your theory is wrong, your actions will be wrong. The second element is about having the right focus, about focusing not on pleasure, or hatred but just on love and how to solve the problem. Buddhism is a very scientific religion – and existentialist. There is no God, only man. You are responsible for your own actions.

ECM: This all sounds a little abstract when we are talking about small children of preschool age. Are young children capable of grasping such complex concepts? How does the method work in practice, in the classroom?



Photo: Angela Ernst

Oscar van Leer Award 2003

On 20 November 2003, at the Nieuwe Kerk in The Hague, The Netherlands, the Oscar van Leer Award 2003 was presented to MAYA: the Art and Cultural Institute for Development, for its Isaan Bright Child Programme in the Northeast (Isaan) and North of Thailand. The Oscar van Leer Award is presented every two years to a Foundation-supported project 'for excellence in enabling parents and communities to help young children realise their full potential'.

MAYA: the Art and Cultural Institute for Development is a non-profit organisation founded in Bangkok in 1981. MAYA (which means 'illusion' or 'the irresistible beauty' in Thai) provides technical assistance in social development, with a focus on disadvantaged communities. It specialises in preschool education, children and youth development, education of parents, health promotion and environmental education. MAYA has made its name with internationally recognised and ground-breaking theatre performances and outstanding professional children's theatre. Its theatre groups have been invited to perform in various countries and to present their thinking in academic forums about education in theatre and critical thinking development. In 1982 the organisation was awarded The Best Mobile Folk Theatre for Central Region by the National Youth Bureau of the Office of the Prime Minister.

The partnership between MAYA and the Bernard van Leer Foundation started in 1992 and the award-winning Isaan Bright Child Programme started in 1999. In addition to their early childhood work, MAYA is also engaged in a Healthy School Curriculum project, and a programme called Children in the Know which is a production about the dangers of television propaganda. MAYA views each of these activities as pieces of a jigsaw, which, fitted together, can span the whole range of education from preschool to primary and high school level. In this way, MAYA puts into practice its belief in taking a holistic approach to educational reform.

MAYA: In the old system of 'chalk and talk', teachers told children what they believed they needed to know rather than letting them experience it or construct it themselves. EAP training aims to show children how to connect different perceptions and understandings for a specific purpose. For example, the teacher may ask the children: how can we make our village happier? The children will then go to the village and ask the people the same question. When they come back, they discuss the answers, make drawings and discuss them in the group. Then the teacher asks them to choose the best one answer. That is very difficult, but when they have finally chosen one, the teacher asks the whole class to work together on a theatre presentation for the people of the village.

Performing in this way helps the children to understand the problem. It is also a form of feedback to themselves, to their peer group, to the teachers

and to the community. And the children can do it. It takes time, and they have to put it in their own words, but if the issue is clear, they can be very focused – more so than adults. After some time, we try to make the issue a little more complex. Not so much that they become frustrated and lose the desire to learn, but just to stimulate them.

The important thing is that the information that children receive is structured in such a way that they can understand it. For example, we use a parable we were told as children about how the salt came into the sea. It was about a fisherman who had a magic grinder which provided him with anything he wanted. One day, a bad man stole the boat and asked the grinder to produce a lot of salt, which was very precious at that time. But he did not know the magic word to stop it and it just kept on producing salt. Eventually, the boat sank to the bottom of the sea, but the grinder went on churning out salt.

Children participating in the Isaan Bright Child Programme



Stories like this one teach lessons – in this case about moral behaviour and about cause and effect; and it also offers an explanation about why the sea is salty. It isn't the right explanation but it shows there are explanations for many things. Later, when they are capable of greater understanding, children learn the real explanation. Using stories like this is very common.

We use a similar approach in introducing HIV/AIDS. Children may not understand HIV but stories like fables and parables can make it possible to work with the idea of how the AIDS virus makes people very sick, how we can look after them, how to deal with someone dying. After that, you can tell them more about the nature of the disease. They may not understand it all, but they will know that it involves such things as prejudices and relationships and sadness and sorrow. It may seem that we are dealing with issues that are too difficult for children, but if we structure it right, they can understand it. That is how EAP works.

ECM: How does your interpretation of critical thinking compare to the way the concept is used in the West?

MAYA: Critical thinking can be looked at from different perspectives. You can look at it holistically or separate it into different elements. In the West, many academics specialise in a certain subject because they think there is a gap in knowledge in that area. That kind of curiosity is important, but if you don't have that knowledge, it doesn't mean that you don't know anything. We believe that there is a large enough body of knowledge in our country, although things we knew in the past may now have been forgotten: there is nothing really new. However, we can't just repeat the same questions, and make the same mistakes that Aristotle did; we should concentrate on the present and ask ourselves what actions we can take.

Many people, especially in the West, see critical thinking as very structured, or as a skills-development technique. But you can also work on critical thinking by referring to context, by giving it an element of social reality, with the aim of finding alternative solutions to social problems. Both approaches are necessary. At this stage, preschool children need to develop skills, so they are given

exercises. But skills are not an end in themselves, they are a means to an end. And that end is how to make a better life, a better society, a better world.

For us, critical thinking is just one element in developing thinking skills. Creative thinking is another and they all work dynamically together. When we introduced the notion of critical thinking into Thai education, we used knowledge from the West and the East and looked at it holistically. With EAP, the children develop a whole range of thinking skills: they learn to analyse problems, develop their own points of view, respect other viewpoints, and try to make others understand theirs. There is a synthesis of critical and creative thinking to produce something that makes sense to others. With critical thinking you make sense of what you are experiencing right now and creative thinking helps you to make sense of what you should be moving towards in the future. According to Western thinking, children's creative abilities are developed most during the early years. So it is a good time to introduce critical thinking to stimulate their creative skills even more.

But you can also work on critical thinking by referring to context, by giving it an element of social reality, with the aim of finding alternative solutions to social problems.

ECM: Particularly in its first years, MAYA was criticised for devoting too much attention to the development of thinking skills and neglecting the child's physical development. Was that a fair criticism?

MAYA: We take a holistic view. Of course physical development is important and it is very much a part of the programme. EAP includes elements that enhance fine-motor movement. Drawing, for example, and dance. Classical Thai dancing uses the fingers a lot and is good training for writing and other skills involving delicate finger movement. Children learn by touching and feeling, but you don't need classical ballet training or Montessori

toys. You can use things that are on hand in the local situation. In Thailand, children improve their balance and coordination by threading string through two half coconut shells and walking on them. In this way, we combine traditional practices and 'modern' – or rediscovered – concepts to help the child's all-round development.

... skills are not an end in themselves, they are a means to an end. And that end is how to make a better life, a better society, a better world.

ECM: Is it difficult to achieve a balance in the classroom between this holistic approach, which allows the child a lot of freedom, and the need to provide direction?

MAYA: We let the children explore things themselves, but at the same time, we offer direction. They are free to take that direction or not, and we hope that they will eventually find their own direction. So we might suggest one thing, but it will not be the only option. The child may suggest an alternative. It doesn't matter what, as long as the child can explain how the two are connected. All children are different and everyone has the right to develop their own potential. So the starting point and the end point may be different but the process is very similar. It's like eating. Everyone has to eat, and we all gather around the dining table. Some will eat more quickly than others. Some will not eat at all, but they will still be at the table. Others will not come to the table at all, and that is fine too as long as they have a good reason. But they will always be welcome at the table. This is the Eastern way: to control without controlling, and to know that your aim when controlling is to make control unnecessary.

ECM: Do you think that the Bright Child Programme will have a lasting beneficial effect on the development of the children?

MAYA: The programme hasn't been running long enough yet to be able to say whether it has had a

lasting beneficial effect. We are, however, convinced that it will have a positive impact on the children in the long run.

ECM: What do you hope today's preschool children will be like in ten years' time?

MAYA: Happy. In the sense that they will have had a good start in doing the things they want to do, rather than what they have been forced to do. Secondly, they should have learned that this world contains good and bad, and that they have the power to choose whether to do something good for other people or something bad. Cleverness itself is not important. It's their skills that are important, their ability to think, their ability to solve problems and to look out for each other, their ability to make the most of their potential. Children need know what potential they have so that they can choose how to use it.

ECM: Apart from the effect on the children, are there other ways of measuring the programme's effectiveness?

MAYA: We have learning units for the teachers, that they work with after they have attended the workshop. Some do it better than others, but the important thing is that they are still thinking about the method. We assist them by editing what they have written and sending it back to them. And we have a scale to measure the teachers' performance, similar to the scale used nationwide by the government but less extensive. It shows that many of the teachers have improved since they started using the method. Some have been given awards, including 'National Teacher'. The government, too, is very positive about the method and the results it has achieved.

ECM: What are the reasons for the growth and success of the Bright Child Programme?

MAYA: We have a regular staff of eleven including documentalists, and are supported by a large number of loyal volunteers. Many are highly skilled and remain in this work for many years. The mobile team has workshops every day, around the country, including Sundays. To achieve a critical mass, you need to move quickly. Once the teachers have set up networks and can help other teachers, it achieves its



MAYA combines traditional practices and 'modern' concepts to help the child's all-round development

own momentum. We support that with facilitating activities. There is a national seminar every year, which gives the teachers something to look forward to and helps them focus on the objective. When we organised the Isaan Bright Child Seminar in the second year, we expected about 200 people, and about eight or nine hundred came. Primary school teachers receive little respect in Thailand, compared with secondary school or university teachers. This was the first time they could say what they think. With our help, they set up the first network, and then organised the national seminar. They were surprised at what they could achieve – it was a process of empowerment. In the third year, when the programme had expanded to the Northern region, the national seminar was held there. We expected 1,000 people and 3,000 turned up! The teachers from Isaan wanted to come and greet the newcomers while the newcomers for their part wanted to receive the pioneers from Issan. The

Prime Minister attended that seminar. The teachers asked him straightforward, simple questions about his childhood and his own time at school, and about how his policy was going to support early childhood development in Thailand. He gave very honest answers and shortly after the seminar he called for the government's policy on free basic education to be revised to include preschool, and indeed the policy is going to be changed. So the teachers are very happy because it shows that, if they get organised, their voice can have an impact.

ECM: The Bright Child Programme seems like a continuing success story, but you must have some worries.

MAYA: The programme has moved very fast and we sometimes worry about whether quality and quantity are still in balance. But we cannot wait to see what happens. We have to move forward, or

we will miss the train. So we get on the train, and see what we can do as we are going along. That is a weak point, but it is better than just standing still. The project's aim is to embed the concept and then try to spread it out as much as possible in order to achieve that critical mass. It is a choice you make: to remain small and exclusive or to cover as wide an area as possible. We chose the latter. So we work with all teachers, good or bad, those who welcome the project and those who don't. Often teachers who are not happy about the project at first become our closest allies once they have seen the value of the method.

ECM: What direction would you like the programme to take in the coming years?

MAYA: We would like to see a national network. At the moment, there are networks in two regions, but they are not yet developed enough. Because things are moving so fast, we have to allow Isaan and the Northern region to grow on the basis of their own local circumstances. We are now preparing to move into the Southern and Central regions. If we can establish networks there, too, we can work to strengthen all of them and help them to grow and learn and form a countrywide network. But that is a long way in the future.

We would also like to expand the programme beyond preschool, to primary schools, high schools, even universities, where the teaching is still very traditional. The professor reads something out and the students listen. But young people today are different than they used to be. They are more visual, and communicate in many other ways than just with language. So we need to develop other methods in higher education. That doesn't mean it should be easier: with EAP you study harder, but in a way that is more closely linked to your own reality.

ECM: Do you think that the MAYA method can be applied outside Thailand, in other parts of the world?

MAYA: The method has been adopted on a trial basis in Malaysia but not, as yet, elsewhere. But perhaps the potential for reaching out internationally lies not in exporting the MAYA method as such, but in tapping into what we see as an emerging 'synthesis of thinking' between East and West. We believe there

are many points of contact between the Western and Eastern approaches to concepts such as critical thinking. The differences are in the details, the way shared concepts are interpreted in the local situation. The point is to take a holistic approach, to gather together a wide range of scattered objectives into a single aim. Then you can work together with partners around the world, on the basis of a shared understanding, while preserving your own roots. And because that local interpretation makes use of existing and traditional practices, teachers and communities recognise it and can accept it.

We believe there are many points of contact between the Western and Eastern approaches to concepts such as critical thinking.

We believe that the specialised way of thinking we see as typical of the West is only a temporary phenomenon, imposed by the 'scientific' method. There is now a tendency in the West towards more holistic thinking. This is a natural swing away from the scientific method and a return to something from long ago. Western science has created its own mentality, but we do not believe that people in the West will continue in that direction. Because all human beings are very creative and take things holistically. If we listen enough and learn from each other, we will find a way forward.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Fostering critical thinking as an aim of education

Jaap Doek

Jaap Doek is chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. He is Professor of Family and Juvenile Law and Director of the Office of International Relations at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He is also a deputy juvenile court judge at the District Court in The Hague. Professor Doek is a distinguished member of the European Law Faculties Association and founding member of Defence for Children International (Geneva) and the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse. In this article, he discusses the processes that help to translate the right to education as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into holistic and inclusive education that aims to realise the potential in all children. Within that broad vision, he shows how quality education that includes critical thinking can be argued for, using the various instruments that have been developed to support the implementation of the CRC.

Education has been recognised as a right in numerous human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These instruments clarify the nature and the aims of the education that is the object of this right; and one aim of education thus defined is to foster among children the ability to think critically.

Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child confirms that every child has the right to education and that this right should be progressively achieved through, among other means, compulsory and free primary schooling.¹

A World Fit for Children, the outcome document of the United Nations General Assembly Special

Session on Children, held in New York on 8-10 May 2002, builds on this. Thus, paragraph 7(5) of the Declaration that opens the document contains the affirmation that 'All girls and boys must have access to and complete primary education that is free, compulsory and of good quality as a cornerstone of an inclusive basic education.'²

The document refers to education more than 60 times as a right of children, a duty of states, a means of escaping poverty and gaining a viable livelihood, a way of acquiring essential life skills and so on. The core of the document is a Plan of Action that resulted from more than two years of consensus-building.

A world fit for children is one in which all children get the best possible start in life and have access to a quality basic education... and in which all children, including adolescents, have ample opportunity to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment. We [the 'States parties'] will promote the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive and cultural development of children as a matter of national and global priority. (*A World Fit for Children*)

The Plan of Action lays out four key priorities for children, one of which is the provision of 'quality education'. Clarification on the nature of this quality education can be found in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Within the Convention, Article 29 represents the central record of the aims of education recognised by the States parties. It declares that the education of the child should be 'directed' to:

- * the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- * the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms ... ;
- * the development of respect for the child's ... cultural identity, language and values ... and for civilisations different from his or her own;
- * the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- * the development of respect for the natural environment.

These aims have been further elucidated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations treaty-monitoring body for the Convention. In 2001, the Committee adopted General Comment No. 1 on the Convention³ which elaborates in paragraph 2 on the aims of education as enshrined in Article 29, which

... insists upon the need for education to be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering ... The education to which every child has a right is one designed to provide the child with life skills, to strengthen the child's capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and to promote a culture which is infused by appropriate human rights values. The goal is to empower the child by developing her or his skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence. 'Education' in this context goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society.

Paragraph 3 of the General Comment amplifies on the content of the education to which every child has a right.

The child's right to education is not only a matter of access [Article 28] but also of content. An education with its contents firmly rooted in the values of Article 29 (1) is for every child an

indispensable tool for her or his efforts to achieve in the course of her or his life a balanced, human rights-friendly response to ... challenges ...

Children are confronted with many challenges in life. According to paragraph 3:

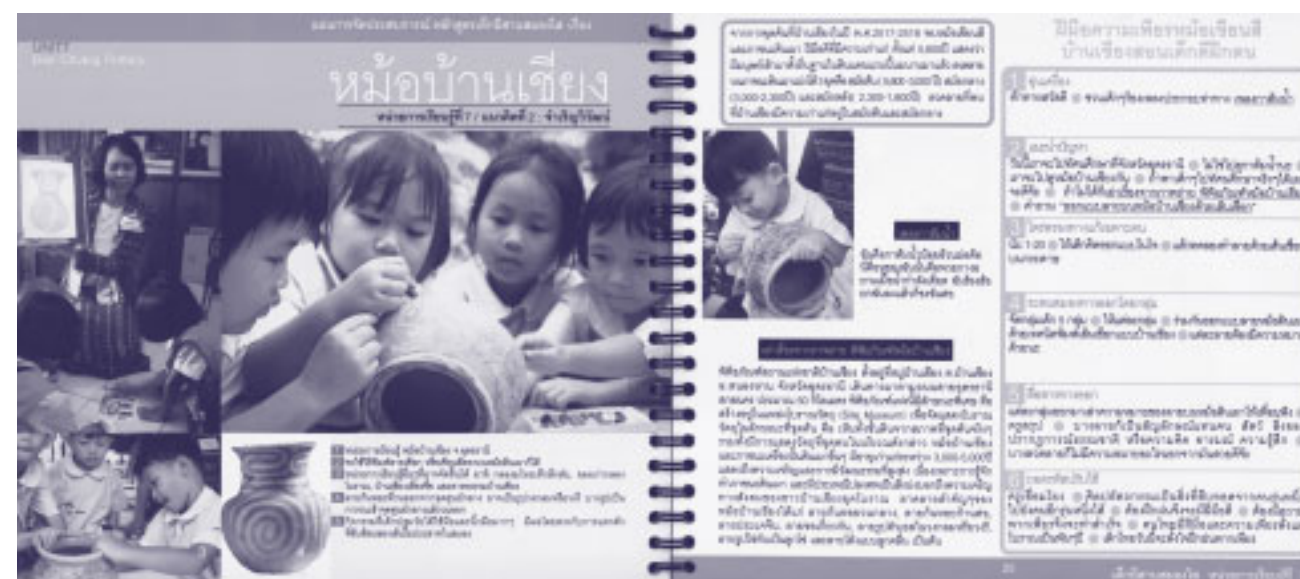
Such challenges include the tensions between ... the global and the local; the individual and the collective; tradition and modernity; long- and short-term considerations; competition and equality of opportunity; the expansion of knowledge and the capacity to assimilate it; and the spiritual and the material.

These messages are confirmed and expanded in paragraph 9:

Education must also be aimed at ensuring that essential life skills are learnt by every child and that no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life. Basic skills include not only literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as the ability to make well-balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner; and to develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, creative talents, and other abilities which give children the tools needed to pursue their options in life.

One aim of education, within the sense of the Convention as interpreted through General Comment No. 1, is therefore to support children in dealing with the 'challenges' they face by helping them develop 'life skills' so that they can 'pursue their options in life'. These skills include 'the ability to make well-balanced decisions', 'critical thinking' and 'creative talents'. Through education, young children should be enabled to learn to think creatively and acquire the reasoning skills they need so they can make judicious choices about the issues that are important in their lives. The ultimate goal is to assist the child in achieving the experience of 'a full and satisfying life within society'.

General Comments are widely regarded as useful contributions to the understanding of the relevant human rights instruments and as authoritative



Education should aim at promoting a set of skills in children such as self-esteem, assertiveness and problem resolution

interpretations of the rights in question. Indeed, they have been employed by non-governmental organisations and rights advocates in litigation in the national courts of States parties, and tribunals in many countries have acknowledged their juridical value as evidence of the intentions and meanings of the instruments.⁴

In addition to General Comment No. 1, there are other instruments that could be brought to bear to argue for the existence of a linkage between the right to education and a duty to supply children with instruction that fosters life skills and the ability to think critically.

Besides providing authoritative interpretations of the articles of the Convention, the independent experts who compose the Committee on the Rights of the Child also review the progress and monitor the compliance of States parties with regard to their obligations under the Convention. To accomplish this, the Committee employs a human rights monitoring system based on a periodic reporting procedure and the use of relevant information available through UN agencies and other sources. This sort of system is common to all UN human rights treaty bodies.

In the case of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 44 set forth the responsibilities involved in the reporting system, as follows:

1. States parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognised herein and on the progress made on the enjoyment of those rights: (a) Within two years of the entry into force of the Convention for the State party concerned; (b) Thereafter every five years.
2. Reports made under the present article [Article 44] shall indicate factors and difficulties, if any, affecting the degree of fulfilment of the obligations under the present Convention. Reports shall also contain sufficient information to provide the Committee with a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Convention in the country concerned.

For states, the preparation of the initial and periodic reports should, in theory, represent an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review of national law, policy and practice, and make improvements where necessary, as shown in the following examples.⁵

The State Party Report of Canada (28 July 1994):

The development of the child's full potential is the goal of Saskatchewan's Core Curriculum... which emphasise[s] general skills, values and attitudes which apply to all areas. These include such subjects as communication, numeracy, technological knowledge, independent learning, social skills and creative and critical thinking. (paragraph 578)

The State Party Report of Trinidad and Tobago (17 June 1996):

The major objectives identified in the 1985-1990 Educational Plan are to: (a) Encourage mature and critical thinking; ... (c) Encourage responsible and self-generated action ... (paragraph 132)

The State Party Report of South Africa (22 May 1999):

Curriculum 2005 will be phased in between 1998 and 2005. It makes provision for eight learning areas... Life Skills Education is aimed at

promoting self-esteem, assertiveness, decision-making, problem solving, conflict resolution and negotiation skills in children. These are intended to empower children to deal with, inter alia, issues of sexuality, substance abuse, stress management, discrimination and health and safe living. Curriculum 2005 follows an outcomes-based approach which implies, amongst other things, that learners should also give evidence of what they are able to do, and not only of what they know, and to make use of their rights to freedom of expression and thought. (paragraph 407)

The Committee and government representatives of each of the States parties consider the relevant reports at Committee sessions. Based on this dialogue, the Committee publishes 'concluding observations' on each report and specific references to critical thinking can be found. For the Committee, the examination of the reports represents an opportunity to highlight non-compliance with treaty obligations, and the resulting exposure should encourage the states to inaugurate change. The following example was applied in substantially the same form across a number of States Party Reports:

The Committee recommends that the State party, taking into account the Committee's General Comment No. 1 on the aims of education: (a) Undertake a process of curriculum and teaching methodology reform – with the full participation of children – which stresses the importance of critical thinking and problem-solving skills development; (b) Direct education towards the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential ...

Critical thinking and quality education: the way forward

Education, as understood in the instruments discussed here, means 'quality education'. By that is meant holistic and inclusive education that aims to develop the potential in every child to the full. Within this, one objective is – as already mentioned – to support children in dealing with the challenges they face by helping them

develop skills such as critical thinking and the ability to make well-balanced decisions.

For its part, the Committee on the Rights of the Child uses General Comments to inform, mobilise and remind governments of their obligations under Article 29 of the Convention. But the comments of the Committee often suggest that there is a need to raise the awareness of teachers, parents, education authorities, government policy-makers and others likely to play a role in improving an education system. As this article should have made clear, the instruments provide a great deal of supportive material to help in that task; and, given that states attach great importance to education, it ought to be possible to advocate for an education that fosters critical thinking among children beginning at an early age.

Early childhood development programmes can gainfully use Article 29 and General Comment No 1 on the aims of education as a guide to establish a system of education that enhances the development of a child's talents and abilities to the fullest, so that the child is prepared to lead a responsible life in a free society. Such development is at the very heart of a child's right to education. As enunciated in General Comment No 1, paragraph 12:

... Article 29 (1) insists upon a holistic approach to education which ensures that the educational opportunities made available reflect an appropriate balance between promoting the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional aspects of education, the intellectual, social and practical dimensions, and the childhood and lifelong aspects. The overall objective of education is to maximise the child's ability and opportunity to participate fully and responsibly in a free society.

Notes

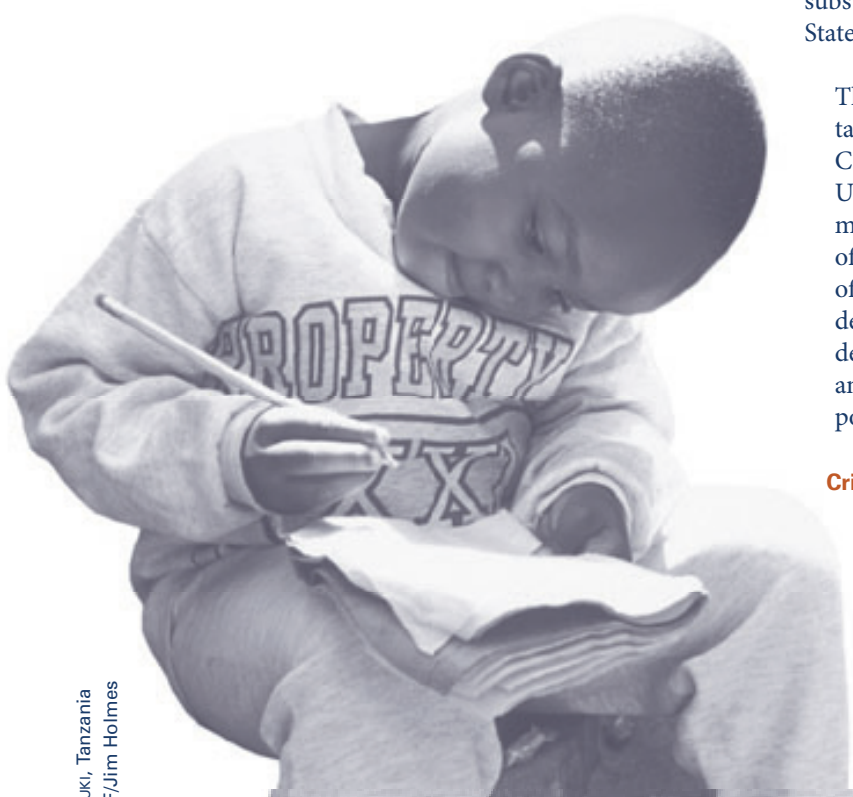
1. The Convention, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989, has been ratified by 192 States parties, making it the most widely ratified of the international human rights instruments.
2. *A World Fit for Children*, approved at the special session on 10 May 2002, was adopted by 180 nations.
3. A General Comment is a formal statement in which a treaty body (in this case, the Committee on

the Rights of the Child) explains and interprets the specific content of an instrument.

4. A particularly rich example is offered by the 'General Comments of the Human Rights Committee under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights'. National court decisions citing the interpretations contained in these General Comments are numerous throughout the world.
5. The reports and concluding observations mentioned here and following can be examined on the Treaty Body Database of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf.

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Education should enhance the development of a child's talents and abilities to the fullest

Philosophy for Children in action

Iceland

Ingibjörg Sigurthórsdóttir

For the last six years, Foldaborg preschool in Reykjavik, Iceland, has been operating a two year programme for young children up to six years, based on the 'Philosophy for Children' ideas of Dr Matthew Lipman (see page 26). The programme was designed to help young children to exercise and develop their ability to engage in investigations, debates and discussions. Its original point was to provide young children with the means to resolve conflicts amongst themselves; and specific goals included: increasing children's respect for each other, thereby lowering the risk of persecution later on; developing better relations between children; increasing creative and critical thought among them; increasing their understanding of themselves and their own thoughts; and increasing their respect for the opinions of others. This article reports on the introduction of the programme, its operation and development, and some of its outcomes.

Preparing the staff and parents

When we started working with the idea of Philosophy for Children, we decided to use a whole year to prepare the staff because we needed to know more about philosophy and methods of introducing philosophy to children and about working with them in philosophical ways. At the personal level, we also needed to open our own minds and to become more capable of communicating in a philosophical way. Last but not least, we needed to practise leading discussion groups with children. In all of this we worked with a philosopher called Sigurdur Bjornsson who was just as excited as we were. Right from the start we decided that we did not want to depend only on the discussion groups, although these are very important. Instead we wanted to change the whole environment of our daily work in Foldaborg and base it on the philosophical approach. This meant that everyone had to be aware of how to talk with children, how to handle conflicts, how to encourage the children to seek answers

for themselves and how to ensure that everybody respects each other's opinions.

When the preparation time was over, and before starting the work with the children, we introduced the project properly to the parents. They were excited and have remained very enthusiastic throughout. In the beginning I was concerned that they would find it hard to deal with their children asking them the kinds of questions that necessarily arise in the Philosophy for Children approach – for example, questions about reasons and justifications for what they should do and should not do. But I never heard a parent express any negative reactions to the programme or to Philosophy for Children. On the contrary, parents often came to me to say how pleased they were with the progress that their children were making.

The discussion groups with children

Initially, every child from three to six years old participated four times a week for 30 minutes each time, working in groups of between eight and ten children, with a teacher and an observer. We thought it was very important that they stayed in the same groups with the same adults because it would increase their comfort, trust and sense of security. There are certain rules such as raising a hand when they wanted to make a contribution, sitting still, listening to other children, waiting their turn and concentrating; and there are also rules to keep the discussion on course.

Every discussion time starts the same way and ends the same way. The children sit in a circle along with the teacher, and they hold hands and say something like 'Welcome to discussion time' (the actual welcome varies from group to group). Then the teacher introduces the topic for the discussion, usually one drawn from a story called Bullukolla. This was written by Sigurdur Bjornsson for the

project, and it is built up along the lines developed by Matthew Lipman in his series of books for the Philosophy for Children programme in the USA. It tells a story in a way that highlights situations, events, problems and so on, and allows them to be analysed and discussed by children so that they can develop their powers of critical thinking, bringing in their own experiences and ideas as they do so.

The session starts by reading a chapter to the children. Then we ask them if they find anything strange or funny in it and if they have a question to ask. Each question is written on a board on the wall along with the name of the child who 'owns' the question. When everyone has asked the questions they want to, we start to work on each question, trying to get every child to express to the others what is in their mind: what interests them; how it relates to their own experiences; what questions it provokes in them; and so on. As this happens, other children comment on what is said, and, with the help of the teacher, a discussion develops. As well as Bullukolla we also use pictures, plays, things that had happened in the school or in their homes. Each session ends with the teachers helping the children to sum up what they have said.

More recently, the work with three year olds has been dropped because it was felt that they were not benefiting. At the same time, the number of formal discussion groups was reduced to one per week for the four year olds, and two per week for the five/six year olds. The main focus now is on daily informal discussions that are complemented by encouraging children to think in a philosophical way in all of their work. This is in line with what we wanted from the outset: a Philosophy for Children programme that is integrated into the life of the school.

The children have asked many hundreds of questions over the years, including:

- Is it possible not to know anything?
- Is there something that never changes?
- Is it possible to know if one really exists?
- What is it that controls us?
- What is living?

We get the children to think about the question, to form an opinion and argue their case. The

children can disagree – we are not searching for one particular answer – and they also learn both to accept a valid argument and protest at a weak one, and to accept the right of others to have their own opinions.

Outcomes

The progress of all children is monitored and we have found that they show great progress in areas such as participation in discussions; arguing their case; keeping to the rules; and being more secure in asking their own questions. We have assembled our overall conclusions about the effects of the project on children under the different headings set out below.

The children improve their skills in asking questions

The ability to ask relevant questions is a very important skill in the comprehension of every subject. In a philosophical discussion, children are encouraged to ask questions and are helped to formulate their questions by the teachers and their peers if they have problems. This questioning process appears to be fruitful because by the end of their first year in the programme, the children can express their doubts in direct questions that are much more easily comprehended by their peers. In the beginning it always takes some time to figure out what the children were really asking.

The children state their opinions much more easily

Most of the children put their shyness behind them and become very competent at saying what they think. Some are very shy in the beginning and do not want to participate but get to enjoy the discussions by the end.

The children improve their ability to find reasons

Reasons are the cornerstones of philosophical discussion. In the beginning the children had difficulties in finding reasons but after the philosophical training they improved their ability to support their judgements with reasons.

They disagree with each other

In the philosophical discussion we put emphasis on the interrelations between the children themselves. The idea is to move from child-teacher to child-child discussions. Therefore the children are encouraged to speak directly to the one they agree or disagree

Philosophy for Children

Critical thinking is important if we are to have a reflective citizenry in a democracy. I don't think you would like to have a soggy mass of citizens who just accept what they're told without reflection, you want them to judge what they are told in a critical way, not be uncritical, that's a terrible notion, a non-critical citizenry. But conventional education is not delivering this reflective citizenry.

Dr Matthew Lipman

Are young children really capable of making any kind of profound contribution to areas such as the conceptualisation and evaluation of early childhood development (ECD) programmes? Do they have the powers of investigation, perception, reflection and analysis that seem necessary? Can their obvious creativity be employed usefully? Dr Matthew Lipman believes that the answer to questions like these is 'Yes!' and, for the last 25 years, he has been showing how these capacities and powers can be developed.

He takes the view that education should produce individuals who are intellectually flexible, resourceful and judicious, and who have the concepts and thinking skills that could be identified as being most likely to develop a democratic citizenry. If it is to do so, it must start with young children. Lipman therefore produced the 'Philosophy for Children' programme, designed to help children from preschool age upwards to engage in critical enquiry, and creative and caring thinking. The programme emphasises the excitement of discovery, reflection and analysis through helping the children to create what he calls 'a community of enquiry' that allows children to explore and better understand their world, other people, and themselves.

The programme is based on age-specific sets of stories about everyday happenings in the lives of children. Storylines raise philosophical questions in the children's

with. After a while, this kind of communication happens frequently and the children start to settle their disagreements by themselves.

They start being able to correct themselves

One of the main characteristics of critical thinking is that it corrects itself. In the beginning of the training the teacher often has to point out the disagreements and contradictions but as the children become more used to the process they start to correct themselves. Frequently, children raise their hands and say that they have changed their mind and, after a time, they can even say why. Often, the reason is that they have listened carefully to their peers.

They become more tolerant and involved in the discussion, and their concentration as they listen to their peers became much better

To start with, many children lack tolerance and are easily carried away from the subject. They don't know what the discussion is about and express views that are not related to the subject. Very often they raise their hand to say something but have forgotten what it was by the time it is their turn to speak. Later they can concentrate better and follow the discussion more easily; and they listen more carefully to each other and wait longer to express their own views.

They become more ready to help each other in the discussion

One of the ethical aspects of discussion is the readiness to help others to express their views and find reasons for them. This is a focus in the discussions and children develop the desire to help each other. Their help might be in the form of interpreting an idea that was unclear, finding reasons for an opinion or finding examples that throw light on the opinions of others. In this process the children learn the joy of helping others and also learn to accept the help of others.

Discussion become a tool for conflict resolution

Both staff and parents report that the children become much more ready to give reasons for their opinions or wants; and seem more able to use discussions to settle differences with other children.

Differences in participation between boys and girls decreases

A very interesting factor is that the difference in the participation between boys and girls almost disappears. In the beginning the boys are much more active than the girls but by the end the girls have caught up.

The only area where the young children made little or no progress is in generalising: they don't seem able to do that by themselves so the teachers do it at the end of some discussions to teach them how.

The views of the parents

From the beginning we were anxious that the parents were with us, so we also discussed with them what changes they had observed in their children. Generally parents felt that their children talked with them in a different way. Many explained further:

He speaks about everything that frightens him or that he finds beautiful; he talks about everything between heaven and earth.

He is better able to talk about things and argue his case, and he demands the same from others.

She doesn't like answers like 'maybe' or 'possibly', she wants clear answers and reasons for everything.

The influence of the programme

The nearby elementary school to which these children go after their time at Foldaborg preschool notices significant differences in the ways in which they think and talk. This will obviously be influencing its view of who children are and what they can do. More broadly, the Foldaborg preschool programme has influenced many preschools across Iceland, and has already been introduced in several of them. This is helped by the fact that universities have started to teach future teachers how to work with Philosophy for Children.

Conclusions

Introducing the Philosophy for Children programme was difficult in the beginning because staff members were handling situations that were new to both them and the children. But progress was obvious after a very short time and that has been a constant reward and stimulus. The responses from the parents has also been very rewarding; most of them are very excited about the project. The wider influence of the programme is also gratifying, especially since it has reached university level and is impacting on teacher training. Nowadays, Philosophy for Children is becoming a very natural, important part of the curriculum and – as the pioneer in Iceland – Foldaborg preschool is well known for this work, both by parents as they select schools for their children, and by professionals. Also, since my time with the project in Foldaborg I have given many lectures introducing Philosophy for Children, and this has helped to ensure that it is taken up by other preschools.

*This feature has been updated by the author from an original article first published in *Early Childhood Matters* 94 February 2000. That edition covered 'Listening to Children' and it can be viewed and downloaded from our website www.bernardvanleer.org, and single hard copies can also be ordered.*

normal language, and in the ways that children might talk about issues and ideas. The first step is to share a story with a class of children by reading it aloud. The teacher then asks for comments and questions and the children choose an aspect of the story that is relevant to them and that they are really interested in talking about. The heart of the work is then a discussion between the children that the teacher helps them to generate and sustain by asking questions and seeking answers among themselves.

The discussion may naturally meander, so the teacher has to keep it within the 'norms of philosophical enquiry'. In effect, these are rules and guidelines and, especially with young children, it is useful to explain the need for these rules and guidelines, to have them spelled out and to show children how they keep within them – or not. These rules/guidelines include keeping to the topic under discussion, questioning assumptions, giving reasons for opinions and ideas, relating their ideas to those of other children, and so on. At the end of the session, a statement is produced about where the children have reached in their enquiry, and the teacher may then follow up the discussion with complementary activities.

For the teacher, the work is supported by a manual that contains suggestions for dealing with the kinds of questions that might be raised, and exercises that help children to explore the questions that interest them. The programme is flexible: for example, the stories can be rewritten – or new stories can be produced – to suit local cultural and physical realities; and the manual serves as a guide, not as an instruction book. It is also a long term programme: results are cumulative.

For more information see section 'Further reading' (page 38).

The links between Philosophy for Children and resilience

Ramón Eduardo Lascano

The Yachay project has been developed by OCLADE (Obra Clarentina para el Desarrollo) since its inception in 1992. Its mission is to improve the conditions of life for young children in the Kolla indigenous communities in the Andes mountains in the north of Argentina (Jujuy and Salta provinces). Over the years, the idea of resilience has been an inspiration to the project as it works to accomplish its mission. Ramón Eduardo Lascano is the Director of the Yachay project.

A child of four years participating in a debate about justice? Can a girl of five say anything about politics, or beauty, or discrimination, or poverty? Yes they really can. Take a group of young children, put them in an appropriate environment and, with the guidance and coordination of a competent adult, they can make themselves into a community of reflection or enquiry in which they can freely express their ideas, supporting what they say with logical arguments. And they can listen, agreeing or not, to what the other members of the group have to say. The Philosophy for Children¹ movement has developed an effective process that, from a very early age, allows children to:

- make judgements and take balanced decisions;
- give good reasons to justify their opinions and expect others to do the same;
- conduct rational discussions with others;
- look for the meaning of their experiences rather than accept other people's prefabricated interpretations;
- try out new ideas and reflect on them;
- ask questions that help them get to the heart of a problem;
- evaluate the quality of their own thinking; and

- make connections between what they think, say and do.

This doesn't imply an intellectual activity in which children simply think, rather it means their total involvement and it means that the adults have to conduct themselves differently, and connect differently with the children.

In this sense, we can relate Philosophy for Children with resilience: they complement each other both in their conception, and in their methods and intentions.

What is resilience? Resilience is a human characteristic or quality that allows people confronting adversities that ought to unbalance them and disrupt their development, to overcome those adversities and even build positively on them. The concept of resilience holds that risk, stress or general adversity do not determine how children develop. Instead, it assumes that there is potential in each child and in their environment that allows them to confront these realities and achieve a good level of development despite them.

Philosophy for Children requires adults to trust children and value their thoughts, recognising that what they say has a special value. This basic confidence is also fundamental to resilience. The thoughts of young children have their own logic, are unique but are seldom recognised. From a very young age, children look to express their interests and needs, and also their vision of the world around them. To let children speak, say what they think and feel, support their statements, choose what they will do, defend

their rights, needs adults who believe in these things, so that children trust them. This creates the right kind of climate: one that is based on mutual confidence.

When children feel themselves valued for what they say, and see that others listen to them attentively, recognise the value of what they do, they develop self confidence, and discover their self esteem – a fundamental element in resilience. Vanistendael² says that Philosophy for Children 'is a fascinating focus for bolstering the cognitive capacity of children, for clarifying values' and for finding out about order, sense and significance in life.

Our country is the total of all the good that we do. An example, my father is working as a bricklayer in Formosa province and he's building a school so that more children can be educated so they can be useful to our country in the future.

(8 year old child)

Philosophy for Children allows children to develop very valuable cognitive capacities and aptitudes that in adversity, can help them understand, overcome and, above all, build the ability to rationalise and therefore comprehend reality. From there, they can go on to construct logical tools.

Understanding reality is an important element in the development of resilience in children; and is fundamental in enabling them to transform and overcome adversities. The words of children about how they understand what they are living, how they analyse their environment (families, neighbourhoods, communities, schools) and how they link up to the actors in each of these spaces, allows the development of their own vision about what is happening. To talk about war, presidents, the things that are wrong with the neighbourhood, the train that still hasn't come, the teachers in the school, their own culture, is to get themselves inside the problems around them in a different way, taking distance from them, being objective about them in terms of the individual logic of each child. In this process, children construct logical tools – that is to say, instruments for the processing of information to allow them to give their arguments a solid base, so they understand what they are speaking about and thinking about, so they know how to ask questions and what to ask questions about. None of this is



Yachay Project, Argentina
Photo: © Angela Ernst

Philosophy for Children and resilience may complement each other conceptually and otherwise

about fancifulness or wilfulness. Rather is about recognising and reasoning in a complicated process in which words are important conveyors of sense.

Resilience is a concept that is integrated into thinking and practices about overcoming adversity and building on that. It is an idea that is open and constantly being elaborated. But it has an incredible force and efficacy that inspires actions and a range of programmes, and allows a range of techniques, practices, and concepts that, like those that develop through Philosophy for Children, seek to deflect or mitigate the effects of adversity on children. Philosophy for Children starts from a basic premise: that children know and can, and have the tools, to understand the different cultural and social norms by which they live, from the biggest abstractions – such as beauty or goodness – to the most concrete and everyday.

Notes

1. See page 26
2. Vanistendael, S, 'Cómo crecer superando percances'; in *Resiliencia*, BICE

India

Thinking skills in Mobile Crèches

This feature outlines the place of thinking skills in the work of the Foundation-supported Mobile Crèches Projects. It has been assembled from an email interview with Mridula Bajaj, Executive Director of Mobile Crèches, amplified by material from the video Mobile Crèches child-to-child made by Indu Balagopal/Tata Institute of Social Sciences for the Aga Khan Foundation; and from the Mobile Crèches publications: Activities for preschool children; Training for Empowerment; and On the seedbed of childhood: stories in development and change.

Mobile Crèches is a non-governmental organisation that has been reaching out to the young children of construction site workers and their families since 1969. As its name suggests, the organisation reaches them through crèches which can follow the families from one site to another. Given that it often does not know how long it will be in contact with each child and family, Mobile Crèches tries to impart thinking skills in children to try to have a maximum impact in a short space of time. It sets out to stimulate the children to think for themselves and undertake action based on rationalising what they have learned and how to apply it. These thinking skills will hopefully stand the children in good stead for the rest of their lives. Mobile Crèches works in New Delhi, Bombay and Pune.

In situations of social deprivation, great responsibility is placed on the shoulders of young children. They often take on adult roles in caring for siblings or older family members, performing domestic duties, and generating income. To be able to do this, children need to have the capacity to rationalise situations and make decisions. Mobile Crèches tries to let the children develop this capacity, in the belief that it will equip them with

skills that they and their families will benefit from for the rest of their lives.

Mobile Crèches works with children aged 0-12 years old. It stimulates thinking through a natural, gentle approach in which the children themselves are encouraged to take part in question and answer sessions, express their feelings, make choices and set priorities. It tries to expose the children, whose lives are often bound by the borders of the construction sites, to a wider set of experiences through visits to places of cultural and social interest, or interaction with groups of children from other backgrounds. These enriching experiences give the children a wider set of references, and thus a basis for comparison, thereby fostering their thinking skills.

Mobile Crèches erects a crèche on each site for the duration of the building work, where possible enlisting the help of the contractors. In the unsafe environment of the construction site, the crèche is a safe place for the children, and after a short while they know that they are welcome there and do not have to be afraid. It is a place where they feel free, as there are not many restrictions or rules. Mobile Crèches avoids telling children what to do, but lets them learn through play and by choosing their own activities. This is often a new approach for the children, but they generally respond well. In an atmosphere of openness, Mobile Crèches' workers talk to the children about what they are doing with them and why. Creative activities such as drama, story-telling, art and clay modelling are an important part of the work with the children. They bring out the children's emotions; the crèches are often the only places where they can express themselves safely and be taken seriously. Encouraging the children to express their emotions and analyse them is a catalyst in helping them



Mobile Crèches activities create a basis for critical thinking during the early years

Mobile Crèches, India
Photo: Courtesy Mobile Crèches

develop analytical thinking skills and place themselves in the world around them.

Some of the children have difficult home situations – the extreme poverty in which their families live brings multiple problems. By getting them used to thinking and making decisions about simple things, such as choosing a toy, they start thinking about more important choices. Mobile Crèches tries to facilitate an analytical and thinking process, so that the children arrive at their own decisions or choices after having thought about them, weighing up the options and anticipating the outcomes. The younger the children are, the more this process is facilitated. It is difficult to associate critical thinking with very young children, as they do not yet have the capacity for it. But getting them used to observing their environment and thinking about it from an early age – for example, through such simple

things as identifying colours and shapes and seeing relationships between objects – and learning to make choices about basic things will get them into the habit of thinking. As they get older this will gradually turn into critical thinking and analytical skills.

Mobile Crèches' activities create a basis for critical thinking during the early years. The project makes a conscious effort to stimulate children's cognitive abilities, sensory motor abilities, pre-reading and writing skills. These in turn help develop their ability to rationalise and analyse. The children learn through play, using materials specially designed for this purpose, which the crèche workers learn to make themselves.

Without the crèche workers, Mobile Crèches could not do its work and it is very particular in selecting them. The right attitude and a love of children are

the most important criteria, more so than being literate or having qualifications. When Mobile Crèches was established in 1969, all that was asked of the workers was an ability to nurture and some basic home running skills. Since then much has changed, and the current training programme is the product of a dialogue between academic principles and sound practice demonstrated by the field workers. While the workers must be able to create an environment that is supportive, loving and enabling, their focus must always be on developing children's critical thinking skills. The curriculum, too, has been planned on the basis of methods born of years of experience of effective early childhood care and education. The crèche workers undergo rigorous training, which lasts between 6 and 12 months. It is on-the-job and is reinforced by a continuous programme, which brings field experience and theory together. The trainees learn to care for and stimulate the children, and in particular, learn how to conduct activities that foster cognitive development. These are based on five major principles: experiential learning; working from simple to complex; working from concrete to abstract, familiar to unfamiliar; and learning through play.

These five major principles are worked through in three different steps. The first step is to provide the children with opportunities for expression, in which they will be listened to without judgement. In the second step, the emphasis is on exposure and building experience. This is when the children are taken on outings, they hear and tell stories, they read books, they eat different foods. In the third step a topic is selected and discussed for a month. Initially that topic is examined in a way that the children can relate it to their everyday lives. They discuss it in terms of how it affects themselves, their families and communities, and what its implications are in terms of their gender and their roles in their families and society. They then look at the topic in a wider context. For example, its role vis-à-vis environmental factors such as plant life, ecological linkages, environmental threats and possible solutions. In the Mobile Crèches curriculum, the crèche workers consistently build on the last stage that the children have reached, before moving to a new stage.

Mobile Crèches invests in the children in the hope that once they develop the ability to think critically, they will be able to carry it through in the rest of their lives and will benefit from it. While it is hard with such a transient population to know what happens to the children after they leave Mobile Crèches, there are regular reports from surrounding schools that the children from Mobile Crèches show a special ability for leadership and creativity. In the longer term, some of the children have successfully struggled against the odds to enter a wide variety of professions. One is a policewoman, another an artist with an advertising agency, and others have become computer operators or garage mechanics. These people are living examples of how critical thinking developed in early childhood, together with other factors, leads to success in the long run. Even for children born into dire poverty.

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Mozambique

Critical thinking skills and HIV/AIDS

Criança, Família e Desenvolvimento (CFD) means children, family and development. CFD is an NGO in Mozambique that focuses on early childhood development rooted in community action. Over the last two or three years, much of its work has turned to working with children and families in an HIV/AIDS context. Many of the communities that CFD works with are located in the rural areas along the 'Maputo Corridor', which, with an estimated prevalence of over 20%, has become the country's HIV/AIDS hot spot. This feature is drawn from a telephone interview with Agostinho Mamade, Director of CFD; and from Integrating HIV/AIDS Education into Early Childhood Development. A Curriculum of Living Well: for children, families and educators (2002), Associação Criança, Família e Desenvolvimento, Maputo, Mozambique; and the CD-ROM on the HIV/AIDS work of the Associação Criança, Família e Desenvolvimento, produced by Louise Vaz, Hine Fellow, Centre for Documentary Studies, Duke University, USA.

As in many other places, most HIV/AIDS work in Mozambique concentrated on youths and adults, while younger children were completely left out. CFD saw not only that young children are aware of HIV/AIDS in their communities, but also that they start becoming involved in risky behaviour themselves at a younger age than many adults think. Given the limited resources available, CFD believes that one of the most effective and long-term ways of dealing with the pandemic is to make young children aware of preventive behaviour, thus reducing the risk of contracting the disease later in life. It therefore increasingly emphasises the development of critical thinking skills in children and communities. CFD feels strongly that education can help reduce children's vulnerability, by providing them with the knowledge to make positive decisions about

themselves and to develop empathy for those who are infected or affected. As thinking individuals who are capable of expressing themselves, children too must have a say on matters and decisions which affect their lives and the communities which they are part of.

CFD is certainly not the only institution that believes that young children cannot be ignored in discussions about HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention. The debate, however, is often about the appropriate age to begin teaching children about the virus and the syndrome. CFD's experiences in Mozambique indicate that most communities believe that HIV/AIDS education should begin at pre-adolescence, about 9 to 10 years of age. With this age group, much of the discussion focuses on sex and intravenous drug use. CFD, however, believes that it should also look at what has gone awry with society, communities, families and personal relationships. It therefore concentrates on developing the attitudes, behaviours and values that can help reduce the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS later in life, and believes that they can be learned by children as young as three years of age. In this way, social changes will be set in motion that will help overcome the disease in the long term.

Drawing on their experience in working with children in other areas, CFD and its partner educators in the rural communities found that the best way to address HIV/AIDS in the *escolinha* (preschool) setting is not to focus on the 'problems' associated with it, such as unprotected sex, drug abuse, rape, discrimination and so on, which weigh heavy on young minds. Rather, the focus should be on the root of these problems: raising the children's self-esteem and teaching them to respect others, to take care of those who are ill, to share, be tolerant

and so on. There are many benefits to be derived from concentrating on the root cause of problems instead of on the problems themselves, and these can be extended to a number of other health and social issues affecting children that will improve their general well-being.

Based on its experience of working with communities and with the staff and children of its *escolinhas*, CFD developed a manual for parents, adults and *escolinha* workers to start a dialogue with children on HIV/AIDS. This manual is called *A Curriculum of Living Well: for children, families and educators*. Its intention is to start by looking at the social and biological factors associated with HIV/AIDS, to empower young children to reflect on the many issues surrounding the epidemic and to equip them with the thinking skills and life skills necessary to make responsible decisions in the future. This is done by suggesting various activities for adults to do together with children. They are all based on a scenario or game, followed by a guided discussion on what lessons could be learned.

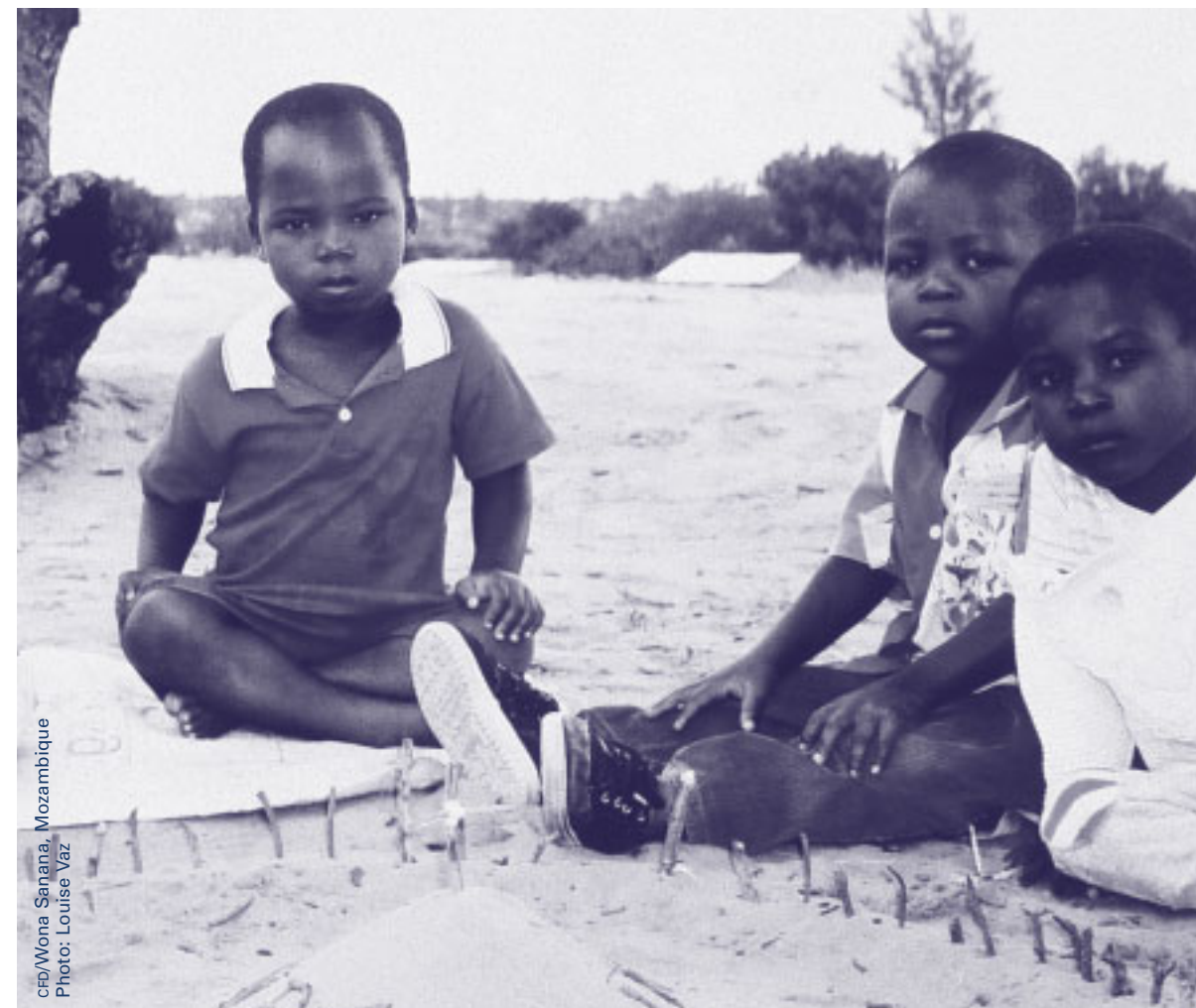
Through the games and the discussions that follow, the children are asked to think about the given situation, analyse the impact it may have on themselves or those around them, and express their feelings about it. The whole approach in *A Curriculum of Living Well* is positive. All the activities, games, songs, dances and drama featured in it were designed by CFD staff and educators to address issues related to HIV/AIDS and to reinforce concepts that include friendship, love, caring for others, respect, expressing emotions, conflict resolution and negotiation skills. Parents are encouraged to participate at all times, so that the learning process continues at home and expands to others in the community.

It is widely recognised that the earliest years of a child's life are the most influential, and working with these concepts with such young children might lead to positive choices at a later stage. Children learn behaviours and values while they are young, and these become increasingly more difficult to change as they grow older. Ideally, the root cause of the behaviour must be sought and dealt with, and not just the behaviour itself. As a result of CFD's work with the Curriculum of Living Well and in

fostering thinking skills, young children are starting to question adults' behaviour. They see, in an HIV/AIDS context for example, that adults may have multiple partners or be engaging in unsafe practices. In turn, the adults see that the children are learning by watching and picking up these behaviours and exposing themselves to dangers, too. The adults recognise that they need to change their own practices in order to have a positive influence on the children.

CFD believes that attitudes, behaviours and values that can have an impact later in life with regard to reducing risk for HIV/AIDS can be learned by children starting as early as three years of age

The children thus trigger the adults into looking differently at their communities, seeing their assets, strengths and drawbacks. This ultimately leads to a community which is a learning place for children. In CFD's experience, working with critical thinking in children has had a ripple effect: community members see things that are not right and think about them, while perhaps previously they may have just accepted them. They then start to realise how important it is for the children, who learn from their surroundings, to be in positive surroundings, and they start to act and put these things right. People see that children are able to analyse the rights and wrongs in their own community. As their thinking skills develop, the children pressure adults to give responses to their questions. They do not accept being told that the adult doesn't have time, or doesn't want to discuss something. The parents start to respond to the children and become more open to them. The children push the adults into thinking more about the implications of their behaviour and how to change it. CFD talks a lot to parents about their children, and they often hear that their children are more active, ask more questions, and exert more pressure on their parents to get answers. The children are thinking about the world around them, and are trying to find the right way of being for themselves.



CFD/Wona Sanana, Mozambique
Photo: Louise Vaz

Children must be helped to understand the consequences of their actions, to care for others and to develop empathy

A culture of values and conditions must be created that will help children seek alternatives to situations and resolve problems. Children must be helped to understand the consequences of their actions, to care for others and to develop empathy. This can be stimulated by giving children affection and love, and encouraging them to express their emotions and frustrations and be taken seriously. CFD believes that if children develop these important human qualities early on, they will be able to think critically about their actions and their consequences, and not resort to negative behaviour in the future. If children are empowered with the tools they need to make good decisions that will affect themselves and others, they will be helped to create behaviour patterns that

will make them less likely to engage in unsafe or compromising situations, thus decreasing their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS in the future.

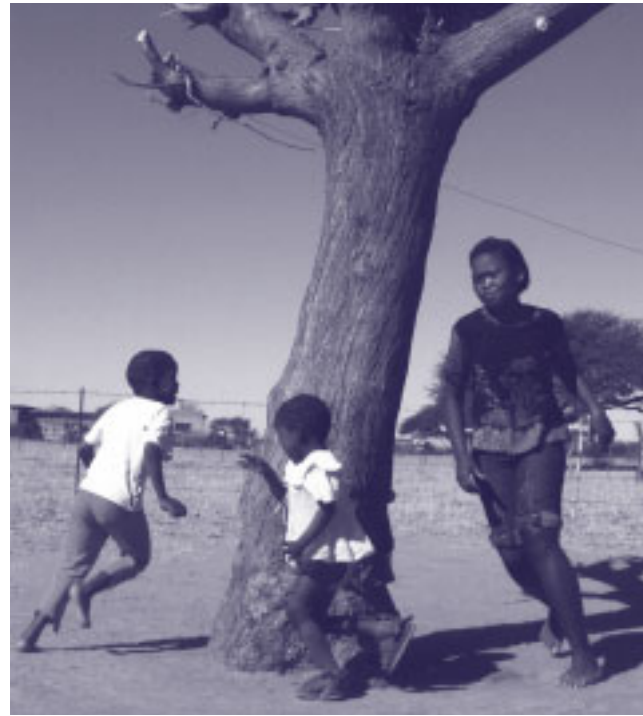
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South Africa

The roots of critical thinking

The Children's Rights Centre is an NGO situated in Durban, South Africa. As its name suggests, the Centre is committed to children's rights and sees its work as establishing a child friendly society and a sustainable children's rights culture in South Africa. It works towards this goal by trying to have the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child entrenched in the laws of the country, in the fabric of South African society and in human relations at every level. Since its inception in 1988, it has evolved from activist roots to supporting projects, and advocating and lobbying for long term development. Never losing sight of the children at the heart of its work, the Centre also provides training for child-based organisations, develops materials, provides information, supports organisation building, facilitates children's participation, and raises awareness. While the Centre's office is situated in Durban, its work has national and international relevance. Critical thinking is an essential aspect of its work on children's rights, and it encourages critical thinking by all parties at all times. This feature is based on an interview with Cati Vawda, the Director. It explains her ideas of how adults can build on children's ability to think critically, starting at birth so that the foundations for continuous development are laid early.

The Children's Rights Centre believes that all children have the innate ability to think critically, but that this needs to be stimulated in order to emerge fully. It believes that children of different age groups need to be stimulated in ways appropriate to their



level of development and understanding. With very young children, such as those who are not yet verbal, adults need to be able to recognise and understand the signals that these children give in order to understand their capacity for thinking and the stage at which they are at. Children of all ages are naturally curious, and they have a thirst for learning when they are young. But their ability to think critically depends heavily on themselves as individuals, on their personalities, and characters, but also on other factors such as the society and environment in which they live. Underlying these are other influences that count too. For example, children need a strong bond with an adult and this must develop in their first months and years. Building on that, if their curiosity is stimulated from a very early age, this will bring out their critical thinking skills.

As babies grow into toddlers, they become more expressive, and move from the tactile (touch) to the verbal. Their thought processes can be stimulated by asking questions in different ways, preferably questions that rely on them observing their own behaviour in their current surroundings. For example, if adults see a child following something with his/her eyes, they can ask about that object of interest, or reinforce good answers, even perhaps supplying the answers to aid the learning process. They can do the same if a child reaches for something. In this way, the Centre believes that children learn about their surroundings and can have some of the questions that they might not yet be able to articulate, explained.



It is important for adults to stimulate children without 'taking over'

CRC, South Africa
Photo: Alex Fattal

As they get older, the different parts of their world start falling into place for the children. However, some children aged from about 18 months to four years do not have the natural ability to distinguish the real from the unreal. This may bring with it unsettling experiences. Cati Vawda gives the example of young children who are afraid of shadows. To them, shadows are real as they can be seen, they move, and therefore the children think that they are alive. Yet they cannot be touched, they are intangible. Children do not understand what they are and this can be frightening. If an adult does not understand the cognitive development processes of children, they may react to these fears in the wrong way. This might cause the child to shut down and the fear remain. The adult must help the children to analyse shadows and understand what they are. Recognising the fears of newly or non-verbal children, is extra difficult because we cannot really understand what they are saying. So we have to be very observant and pick up the non-verbal clues that they give us.

Later, children's powers of expression and rationalisation increase. Problem solving becomes an increasingly important basis for critical thinking. Children will try to solve the problem if they face a difficult situation. They start trying to analyse the world around them, or the situation they are in. All the questions that children might ask about a situation, or their repetitive behaviours, are their ways of trying to understand the situation and find a solution. One simple example of this, according to

the Children's Rights Centre, is when children are playing a game in which they have to fit a particular shaped object into a matching hole. They will often repeatedly try to fit the object into the wrong hole before eventually finding the right hole. This repetition of the action is their way of trying to work out the situation. It is up to the adults to stimulate the children without interfering or taking over the game. Letting children learn by themselves and to work things out for themselves is crucial in helping them to develop an ability to think critically.

To complement its work on critical thinking, the Centre builds questioning into everything that it does, whether it is seeing if a child feels comfortable while playing, or assessing the political situation in South Africa. The Centre regularly asks itself 'What difference do we make? What are we missing? What do we have to change?' It finds that people and organisations can be so busy working that they sometimes don't step back often enough and ask themselves these basic but crucial questions.

Contact:
 Children's Rights Centre
 First Floor, icl House
 480 Smith Street
 Durban 4001
 South Africa
 Tel: +27 313076075
 Fax: +27 313076074
 Email: childrts@mweb.co.za
 Website <http://www.childrensrightscentre.co.za/>

Further reading

Websites

Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC)

The IAPC was formed in 1974 as part of Montclair State University, New Jersey, USA. From the beginning, its mission has been to develop a complete curriculum in elementary and secondary school philosophy; to demonstrate by experimental research the academic benefits of such a discipline; to provide teacher-education services to school districts from around the country and around the world; to conduct a Masters program leading to an M.Ed. in Philosophy for Children; and to prepare professors of philosophy and other educators to set up affiliate centres from which they could train teachers in their parts of the world. While the IAPC at Montclair State University is the International Headquarters of Philosophy for Children, there are some 70 affiliate centres around the world (listed in their website) engaged in teacher preparations, curriculum development, and/or experimental research.

Web home page
<http://www.montclair.edu/iapc>

p4c.net (Philosophy for Children.net)

Forum of the Philosophy for Children community. Information about members of the community (organisations, schools, universities), calendar of events and useful resources.

Web home page
<http://www.p4c.net/index.php>

International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children

The International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC) was created in 1985 by philosophers and teachers interested in engaging children in philosophical inquiry. The objective of ICPIC is to strengthen communications among those in different parts of the world who are engaged in philosophical inquiry with children, in teacher education, in research and for school administrators looking to initiate and develop programs that would encourage children's philosophical thinking.

Web home page
<http://www.simnet.is/heimspekiskolinn/icpic.html>

Robert H. Ennis' Academic Web Site

Professor Robert H. Ennis website. Definitions and references about critical thinking can be found on:

Web home page
<http://faculty.ed.uiuc.edu/rhennis/>

GrupIREF

GrupIREF is an association born in Catalonia (Spain) in 1987, with the aim of promoting the research for the teaching of philosophy. From the very beginning, one of its main tasks has been the development of the educative proposal 'Filosofía 3/18', which takes as a reference the international programme Philosophy for Children. A parallel task has been focussed on the training of teachers in relation to Filosofía 3/18.

GrupIREF has translated and adapted materials from the original curriculum of Philosophy for Children, and has created new programs, specially for pre-school and first grade levels.

GrupIREF has also researched the language of arts as a way of knowledge. In this sense, several materials and projects, developed by GrupIREF's teachers, have arts at their core.

Web home page
<http://www.grupiref.org/eng/default.htm>

Centro Brasileiro de Filosofia para Crianças (Brazilian Centre of Philosophy for children)

The Brazilian Centre of Philosophy for Children is a non-profit organisation funded in 1985. Its main objective is to promote the development and dissemination programmes regarding education for critical thinking.

Web home page
<http://www.cbfc.org.br/> (in Portuguese)

Research Centre of Philosophy for Children International Programme, Argentina

Website of the Argentinean representative of Philosophy for Children international programme. Access to interesting links and useful references (including books written by Stella Accorinti, Director of the centre: *Introducción a Filosofía para Niños; Trabajando en el aula: la práctica de Filosofía para Niños*). Books available at:

Web home page
<http://www.izar.net/fpn-argentina/> (Spanish/English)
<http://www.emanantial.com.ar/>

Ediciones Novedades Educativas

Programme focused on the production of pedagogical and didactical materials for Spanish speaking educators.

Web home page
<http://www.noveduc.com/> (in Spanish)

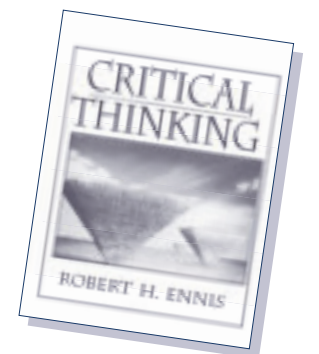
Books

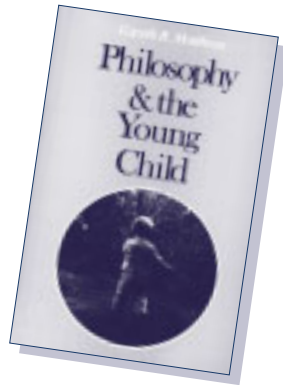
Critical Thinking

Robert H. Ennis
Prentice Hall, 1996
ISBN: 0-13-374711-5

Critical thinking affects every aspect of our lives. However, making a reasonable decision about what to believe or do involves complex thought processes that, fortunately, can be understood and improved upon.

Emphasizing Focus, Reasons, Inference, Situation, Clarity and Overview (FRISCO), the author presents a checklist useful for judging already stated ideas as well as developing new ones.





Philosophy and the Young Child

Gareth B. Matthews
Harvard University Press, 1980
ISBN: 0-674-66606-2

The author demonstrates that children have a capacity for puzzlement and mental play that leads them to tackle many of the classic problems that have traditionally formed the core of philosophical thought.



The Philosophy of Childhood

Gareth B. Matthews
Harvard University Press, 1994
ISBN: 0-674-66481-7

A profound inquiry into the nature of philosophical discussions which children and adults can hold together.

Journals



Thinking: The journal of Philosophy for Children

Thinking is an academic periodical, published quarterly by the IAPC. Since 1979, Thinking has been prime reading material for those professionals in education wanting to know more about the latest developments around the world in the theory of Philosophy for Children and its experimental foundations.

Order form at:
<http://www.montclair.edu/iapc/index.shtml>

Analytic Teaching: the Community of Inquiry Journal

Published in the USA by Viterbo University in cooperation with NAACI (North American Association for Community of Inquiry).
Language: English
Editor: Mort Morehouse.



For more information and subscriptions:
<http://www.viterbo.edu/campnews/camppub/analytic/>

Manuals, others...

The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking for Children

Linda Elder
Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2001

This 24 page guide is designed for K-6 classroom use. Focuses on explaining basic critical thinking principles to small children using cartoon characters.
Price: \$5 for single copies + shipping costs

Order form and more information at:
<http://www.criticalthinking.org>

Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Early Years

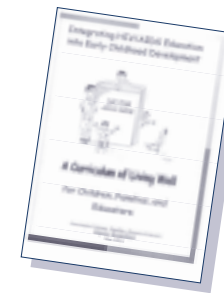
A Practical Approach for Children Aged 4 to 7
Edited by: Belle Wallace
David Fulton Publishers, 2002
ISBN: 1-85346-842-8



This text is designed to help teachers incorporate problem-solving and thinking into the National Curriculum at the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 1, in line with QCA and DFES recommendations. It presents a range of activities for children aged between four and seven, all of which have been tried and tested in classrooms. The ideas are cross-referenced with the Learning objectives of the National Curriculum and are enhanced with samples of children's work. The book provides sections on the core subjects of literacy, numeracy and science, as well as ideas for project work across the curriculum.

For more information:
<http://www.fultonpublishers.co.uk/>

Resources from the field



Integrating HIV/AIDS Education into Early Childhood Development. A curriculum of living well: for children, families and educators

Associação Criança, Família e Desenvolvimento (CDF)
Maputo, Mozambique, 2002
38 pages

This curriculum looks at social and biological factors associated with AIDS, empowering young children to reflect on the many issues surrounding the epidemic and equipping them with life skills necessary to make responsible decisions in the future. ACDf has found the best way to address HIV/AIDS in the pre-school is focusing on 'solutions': raising self-esteem, learning to respect others, taking care of those who are ill, sharing tolerance, etc. Games, songs, dances, theatre and arts and crafts activities were created to address the issue. The manual provides the tools to enable communities to address HIV/AIDS.

Electronic copies (PDF format) available at:
Associação Criança, Família e Desenvolvimento
Av. Armando Tivane 1608
Maputo
Mozambique
Tel: 258-1-493855
Fax: 258-1-493345
Email: cfid@mail.tropical.co.mz

Young Consumers and the Cloudy Gang

MAYA, the Art and Cultural Institute for Development
Bangkok, Thailand, 1994
Videotape, VHS-PAL system
45 minutes

Urban and rural children are interviewed about spending their pocket money on sweets and chips. Children buy the chips for the stickers that are included and which - if a set is complete - give the chance to win a Gameboy or other expensive toy. In the stage play that follows children are shown the misleading character of advertising in all its aspects. The slogan 'Stop to think, think to stop' is taken over by the children, which after seeing the play are more conscious of the misleading advertising and will change their behaviour.

For more information:
MAYA: The Art & Cultural Institute for Development
189 Soi Ladprad
96 Bangapi
10310 Bangkok
Thailand
Tel: 662- 931 8791
Fax: 662- 931 8746
Email: jeapmaya@loxinfo.co.th

In brief...

The rights of young children

The UN General Assembly 2002 Special Session on Children adopted a Plan of Action that committed Member States to the 'Development and implementation of national early childhood development policies and programmes to ensure the enhancement of children's physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive development'. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, a body responsible for reviewing progress made by States parties in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child decided to devote its 2004 day of general discussion to 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood'. It is aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of the contents and implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as they relate to early childhood.

The discussion day is a public meeting where government representatives, individual experts, United Nations bodies and specialised agencies, as well as members of civil society are welcome. It will take place on Friday 17 September in Geneva, Switzerland. For all those wishing to make a written submission or attend should consult the webpage: www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/

The invisibility of young children impacted by HIV/AIDS

The Foundation's Young Children and HIV/AIDS Initiative

Young children impacted by HIV/AIDS are all but invisible in the wider HIV/AIDS field. With a few notable exceptions, if they are mentioned at all, it is as minor footnotes in the general discourse on children and HIV/AIDS.

This is bewildering: no group impacted by HIV/AIDS is more vulnerable, no group is more deserving, and no group has greater potential to benefit from proper programming. In addition, young children have needs and rights that are particular, distinct and special, and that cannot be met through programmes for children generally – especially when such programmes collectively can cover an age range from pre-conception to as much as 25 years.

The Foundation's Young Children and HIV/AIDS Initiative has been running for two years now; and, in response to these realities, is centred on getting young children onto the international HIV/AIDS agenda, and simultaneously working to generate, gather and share the knowledge and experience needed to inform programming for them.

Our starting point is that all young children, irrespective of their HIV status, have the right to the richest possible development opportunities. That means that work specific to HIV/AIDS must be in the context of a holistic early childhood development programme that is designed to maximise young children's potential and thereby enhance their chances of taking life on and doing well. We also see young children as active agents in their own development, who have ideas, reflections, understandings and opinions that must contribute to determining what their needs are and how these can be met.

In promoting their interests, we are working to raise awareness at policy and decision-making levels about young children as a social group and how to respond to their needs. Core to this is highlighting the stages of development that young children go through, and the ways in which this helps to determine programming. It is not enough to broadly group young children together and devise general programmes: at different stages of development: they have both different needs and different capacities; and these must be acknowledged.

During 2003, an hypothesis emerged from work within our Young Children and HIV/AIDS Initiative, that

Optimal holistic early childhood development is likely to reduce the risk of HIV infection when children become sexually active young adults, or when they are exposed to unsafe drug use.

The hypothesis derives from our experiences in supporting early childhood development programme over many years. It builds on the notion that positive early childhood experiences, that are sustained and reinforced throughout childhood, and that are supported by those who most impact on the

behaviour of young people, can encourage safer behaviours at critical times. While asserting that individual behaviours are at the heart of reducing risk, it also acknowledges children as social beings who are both influenced by their social environments and make an impact themselves. It therefore encompasses the need to complement holistic early childhood development programmes with wider action across their social worlds, seizing opportunities to support safer behaviours, while simultaneously taking on important challenges.

To support our Young Children and HIV/AIDS work and also to inform programming with young children, we have launched a series of reviews that are now being developed for publication. These range from a mapping of the entire field of early childhood and HIV/AIDS to looking at gender-related factors that offset opportunities for choice. These reviews will be made available later this year through our Working Papers in ECD series.

New publications from the Bernard van Leer Foundation

Introducing Tracer Studies Guidelines for implementing tracer studies in early childhood programmes

Ruth N. Cohen
Bernard van Leer Foundation
March 2004
ISBN 90-6195-070-8



Introducing Tracer Studies is based on the experiences of studies that have followed the footsteps of former participants of early childhood programmes. Participants in these programmes included children, adolescents, parents, teachers, community members, and others, and many were followed up between three and 20 years after they had left a programme.

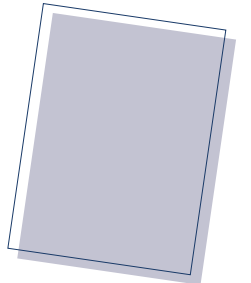
The Studies formed part of programme, called 'Following Footsteps', started by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in 1998. This programme had the dual purpose of exploring the medium to long term effects of a selection of early childhood programmes and developing an approach that could be used by and for programmes that do not have access to large resources, and could be adapted to fit their own contexts.

The emphasis in this publication is on the approaches and methods that were used to study programmes,

that operate in very diverse settings, have varied programme approaches, target different populations, and have their own unique aims and objectives.

Supporting fathers Contributions from the International Fatherhood Summit 2003

Contributing authors: Gary Barker, David Bartlett, Tom Beardshaw, Janet Brown, Adrienne Burgess, Michael E Lamb, Charlie Lewis, Graeme Russell, Nigel Vann.
Bernard van Leer Foundation
April 2004
ISSN 1387-4813
ISBN 90-6195-069-4



In March 2003, the Bernard van Leer Foundation supported International Fatherhood Summit was held over the course of a week in Oxford, England. It brought together practitioners and academics from 20 countries to discuss practical work, policy issues, the state of current research, and areas of international concern. The discussion started from the notion that children benefit from effective, involved and loving fathering, and acknowledged a traditional bias towards mothers in all childrearing areas. Issues discussed included: the current economic, social, cultural and political factors and trends that affect a) what fathers do; and b) the perceptions on what they should do, what research tells us about the effect of fathering on child development; the lessons that can be learned from existing experiences in addressing fatherhood issues; and the effect of public and workplace policies on a father's participation in the family.

This publication presents the five papers that were prepared for, and discussed during, the Summit. This is not a volume of definitive knowledge or a manual on how to deal effectively with fathers. Rather it provides a basis for further discussion and exploration on providing the best possible environment for the development of children by explicitly placing fathers within the concept of parenthood.

Single copies of the above publications are available free of charge on request from:
Bernard van Leer Foundation
PO Box 82334
2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands
Fax: +31 (0)70 350 2373
email: registry@bvleerf.nl
These publications are also available to view or download at: www.bernardvanleer.org