12 December 2019

To Professor Masters & colleagues:

We are pleased to present the view of members of the Association for Philosophy in Schools NSW, a group who have been active in education in NSW for decades. Our association is part of a network that spans across Australasia and Oceania, united in our purpose through the Federation of Australasian Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA). Our Association's aims are:

1. to inspire and encourage students to practise and acquire independent skills in reasoning and reflexive thought, so as to develop the capacity for critical and creative thinking;
2. to provide students with intellectual motivation and to develop self-esteem within a classroom environment in which collaborative, substantive and respectful dialogue is central; and,
3. to enable students to become effective thinkers who demonstrate sound judgement.

As such, we strongly support the NSW Curriculum Review's articulated long term vision "*for a future school curriculum that supports teachers to nurture wonder, ignite passion and provide every young person with knowledge, skills and attributes that will help prepare them for a lifetime of learning, meaningful adult employment and effective engagement as contributing citizens"* (Executive Summary).

In commenting on the Interim Report, we earnestly advocate for a focus on thinking in the Curriculum, a focus on what Dewey (1910) refers to as "thinking of the close-knit type" which aims at "knowledge, at belief about facts or in truths". Such thinking is distinguished from day dreaming or the loose flux of casual and disconnected material that floats through our minds and is casually referred to as 'thinking'. Our peers in the Philosophy in Schools movement have been instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of critical thinking in the national curriculum, together with ethical understanding. Our approach requires a decisive focus on providing training to teachers and teacher-education students so as to stimulate and guide them to embed a focus on thinking within their pedagogy. This training entails extending their skill in experimental inquiry, and their ability to awaken their students' curiosity, capture their imaginations and channel their engagement with inquiry in ways that may surprise students. It is

our strong view that adopting this approach across the curriculum will provide strategic methods to develop the overarching vision for the new NSW curriculum to 'nurture wonder and ignite passion.'

We have worked with hundreds of teachers in NSW through our professional development programs to focus on thinking and metacognition within the context of collaborative inquiry, including the embedding of the explicit teaching of higher order thinking skills. Many of our peers have developed and published resources to assist teachers in this regard. Please see the short list of available books here. Teachers corroborate the views represented in the Interim Review that the curriculum is indeed crowded. As it becomes refined, we encourage the advisory board to further develop an explicit focus on 'thinking' and to promote the development of the thinking skills required to engage with genuine inquiry in any field.

In this letter we advocate for two initiatives. The first is the inclusion of the methodology of Philosophy in Schools in the curriculum K-12; and the second is the inclusion of philosophy as a discipline area in its own right in the senior school.

We would like to respond first to the questions raised in the Interim Report about the overall scope of the curriculum, and to discuss the Philosophy in Schools methodology in that light. The report considers whether the curriculum should "explicitly include and give greater priority to the social, ethical, emotional and physical development and health of every student" (p.4). Clearly, student engagement in schooling is naturally linked to the identified broad role (and responsibility) of schools to make provision for students' personal, social, emotional well being as well as provision for their physical, mental, and intellectual development. We are pleased to see an emphasis on character building and on the development of "soft skills" including communicating, collaborating, critical and creative thinking, both for their contribution to the flourishing of the whole human individual and to the development of students as effective, participating members of society (p. 13). In our experience, the Philosophy in Schools methodology is effective in stimulating interpersonal engagement in the classroom, self-reflection, the development of self-esteem, thinking of the close-knit type and the capacity to articulate ideas and support arguments. In doing so, it responds well to calls to priority to the development of the whole student.

Ensuring Students Reach Their Potential
It is crucial that the next iteration of the NSW Curriculum promotes strategies and methods which maximise student engagement by responding both to social needs and intellectual needs. We wish to bring your attention to the fact that the philosophical method has been shown to positively affect the engagement of students of all ages, as has inquiry into the history of philosophical ideas with older students.

We encourage the development of a more rigorous and flexible curriculum guided by a commitment to making explicit provision for thinking. We invite the architects of the Curriculum to recall John Dewey's emphasis on the conditions that facilitate thinking in education. The

teaching of philosophy has an enviable track record in terms of cultivating student thinking by engaging their curiosity and their problem solving capacities. Inspired by the ideas of John Dewey, philosopher-educators (e.g. Matthew Lipman, Philip Cam, and others) have adapted philosophical methods and thinking strategies for use in schools (Cam, 2006). Cam writes,

> *If we are serious about teaching children to think, then we need to be serious about structuring the curriculum around thinking. This requires us to pay attention to the general thinking strategies and broad conceptual understandings that find a natural home in philosophy. By looking to the concepts and procedures of philosophy, we can help to integrate the curriculum and at the same time make children more effective participants in the process of learning.*

At the same time, philosophical inquiry within the classroom has the advantage of taking account of what John Dewey described as "[t]he native and unspoiled attitude of childhood, marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination, and love of experimental inquiry" (Dewey, 1910). Dewey's view is that capturing this natural attitude an applying it to students' everyday lives will help develop skills of problem solving, compassionate imagination, creative expression, and civic self-governance, such that:

> There will be almost a revolution in school education when study and learning are treated not as acquisition of what others know but as development of capital to be invested in eager alertness in observing and judging the conditions under which one lives. Yet until this happens, we shall be ill-prepared to deal with a world whose outstanding trait is change. (Dewey, 1944)

In relation to the potential of Philosophy in Schools to develop the full potential of students, it is also worth noting Barbara Weber's recommendation of "its emphasis on playful engagement with ideas"; and her argument that this form of engagement impacts "on the social dimensions of classroom inquiry, on student's developing senses of themselves and the world, and on learning" (Weber, 2011). The value of this playful attitude is that learning becomes pleasurable and this aspect of the Philosophy in Schools methodology responds well to the Review's aspiration "to see every student engaged in meaningful, enjoyable learning" (p.13).

Community of Inquiry
One foundational interactive method used in Philosophy in Schools, known as a Community of Inquiry (COI), has been enthusiastically adopted in many corners of the globe, including schools in the United States, Britain, Europe, Turkey, South America, Asia and Australia. Where it has been employed, inquiry has proven to be a valuable and versatile methodology for implementing dialogic and reflective classroom talk, thereby explicitly meeting the criteria for syllabus outcomes across a range of stages and KLAs (Jensen & Kennedy-White, 2014).

Successful engagement with inquiry not only yields desirable academic outcomes but it also results in positive community-building effects including an increase in respect and tolerance

(D'Olimpio, 2014). As such making provision for regular engagement with Community of Inquiry in lessons (K-12, all KLAs) can marry the social, interpersonal, collaborative needs articulated in the Interim Review while also honing thinking skills including critical and creative thinking. In the growing research literature, COI has been repeatedly shown to include both social and cognitive benefits for students.

Philosophy in Schools, Critical Thinking and Metacognition
We wish to emphasise and articulate the potential role that philosophy can serve in the development of critical thinking and metacognition; for example please see Hand (2018), and references therein. At present this potential has been largely overlooked in educational discussion in NSW. For example, no mention is made of the Philosophy for Children or Philosophy in Schools research literature or research on the use of Community of Inquiry to facilitate and practise collaborative thinking. The recent Willingham review is notable for its failure to engage with this literature. For a recent summary of the literature, please see: "The generic argument for teaching philosophy in schools" by Phil Cam (2018). This paper explores in detail the way in which Philosophy in Schools methods and approaches can be harnessed in the Australian context to enact the Critical and Creative thinking mandated by ACARA. Adding Philosophy in Schools to the NSW Curriculum would be a straightforward way to address the priority, stated on p. 46, that "metacognitive teaching strategies should be a priority in all school subjects."

It is important not to conflate general skills or capabilities with generic skills, a distinction that is not always adequately made in speaking about critical and creative thinking.

The Interim Report is right to point out the difficulty in assessing the general capabilities; however, we must consider the possibility that the difficulty arises because a particular ACARA general capability (e.g., ethical understanding) may not be one distinct skill. The same could be said of something more general such as 'problem solving'. If the capabilities are not composed of one specific skill, the criticism that they are not 'transferable' is considerably weakened, given that a number of interconnected specific skills may be operating in relation to the development of a particular capability.

In the realm of critical and creative thinking, we have formulated, trialled and refined rubrics for assessing the thinking skills that we explicitly teach within the classroom. Though it is always the case that the specific skills used (e.g. using analogies, providing examples, offering reasons, evaluating evidence, etc.) must be substantiated in a particular field of content, generic thinking skills are accessible. Given the generic nature of thinking skills, it is critical to make provision for the explicit teaching and practice of such skills.

It is important that NSW makes clear provision for developing thinking skills in students. Community of Inquiry methods have been shown to be both effective and also low-cost. A recent large-scale study undertaken through the EEF in 2015 found the cost to be "roughly £16

per pupil per year for a school of 240 pupils. The main cost was teacher training." This is just one recent example; there are many more in the literature.

In the Australian context, some schools include philosophical inquiry in select KLAs or with select populations (such as to extend gifted and talented students.) For a full review of the Australian context please see Burgh and Thornton (2016) and Burgh and Thornton (2018). The greatest success stories emerge in cases where a whole school takes on board philosophical inquiry across all KLAs. The first school to embark on this process, Buranda State School in Queensland, has become a landmark case for others to follow (Buranda State School; Mergler, Curtis, & Spooner-Lane, 2009). Buranda is living proof of the vision expressed in Cam (2010) that philosophical inquiry could become the 'connective tissue that would enable the different parts of the curriculum to form a more effective whole'.

This whole-school method has borne fruit in two highly effective NSW primary schools: Bondi Public School and Leichhardt Public School. In both places, students engage in one dedicated philosophy lesson per week, and all the teachers in the school have been offered professional development to enable them to encourage and facilitate thinking philosophically across a range of KLAs. There is both testimony and raw data to support the efficacy of these philosophy lessons. In one longitudinal study, improvement in NAPLAN results for persuasive writing are highly correlated with number of hours of philosophy a student had undertaken (Kennedy-White, 2015). Further recognition for the value of this approach is evidenced by a recent submission to the NSW Department of Education Catalyst Lab project, which has led to the engagement of a cross-school team in a 2020 innovative co-curricular event. Led by Mr Dan Smith of Leichhardt Public School, the event will be focused around the Community of Inquiry methodology. The process will involve professional learning for teachers and ongoing support in the development of facilitating community of inquiry, supporting the development of thinking skills and recognising and nurturing metacognition. Organisation and preparation for the event will constitute a pilot study of the value that Philosophy in Schools could add to education in NSW if it were incorporated as a central element of the Curriculum.

Including Philosophy in Schools in the NSW Curriculum could straightforwardly promote and develop the articulated vision to 'nurture wonder and ignite passion.' The Review calls for a more flexible curriculum, including a reduction of content. A reduction of content would most profitably be accompanied by a rigorous focus on process, with explicit methods for teaching and practising thinking clearly elaborated. Arguably, it is only such a focus that will allow teachers to best equip NSW students to become effective thinkers capable of solving future problems that as yet have not even been formulated.

Philosophy in Schools Motto: *Teach how to think, not what to think.*

HSC subject selection

In addition to the employment of the Philosophy in Schools methodology within the senior schools context, we reiterate the view that Philosophy should become an HSC elective, and propose that NESA consider employing participation in Community of Inquiry as a final assessment strategy. At present 31 NSW Department, Catholic and Independent schools offer the Year 11 NESA-Endorsed Preliminary course in Philosophy that was developed by North Sydney Girls High School in 2016. The value of this course lies in its capacity to deepen engagement with concepts that are integral to inquiry across the Curriculum, in the training that philosophical inquiry provides in investigation of arguments and hypotheses as well as in the conduct of rigorous, collaborative and respectful substantive dialogue; the latter dimension trains students in habits that are crucial to meaningful lifetime learning and participation in a civilised society. Demand for this Year 11 Preliminary course is growing, and the network of schools offering elective Philosophy in stages 5 and 6 has grown considerably since our Association last made representations to the Board of Studies. In the Stage 6 Preliminary course at North Sydney Girls High, assessment is comprised of (i) Community of Inquiry, (ii) a personal project and (iii) an exam. This form of assessment could easily become a model for HSC assessment of philosophy. Taking up this opportunity would help diversify the range of assessment used in HSC and also provide for more authentic opportunities to showcase learning (as opposed to memorisation of content, for instance).

Adding Philosophy as a humanities option as part of the future NSW HSC is a laudable goal in its own right. Arguably, it should be foundational to all HSC students, whether they pursue the 'academic' curriculum or the 'alternative' vocational curriculum. If the goal, as stated on p. 41 of the Interim Report, is to "produce well rounded students who are good people and active citizens", it would seem to require some careful thought about the nature of what makes something 'good', what makes a 'good life', a 'good friend', a 'good decision', etc.

In the last two decades, philosophy has been accepted into the senior school curricula in all Australian states, with the notable exception of New South Wales. As such, adding philosophy to the HSC would mean that NSW would join VIC, SA and WA in meeting standards advocated by UNESCO, which has consistently recognised philosophy as an integral part of education. Bini et al. (2009) writes, "Almost every country in the world includes philosophy in its curriculum. Philosophy is recommended for inclusion in national curricula by the UN – and, in particular, by UNESCO – because of its importance in creating the conditions for a free and democratic society." For a survey of philosophy in schools internationally, we refer readers to Gregory, M.R., et al. (2017), *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children.*

In summary, we would like to make three recommendations:

1. Include Philosophy in Schools in the K-12 curriculum, as part of the integrated learning outlined in the Review (p 74). Doing so would realise the vision that general capabilities such as critical and creative thinking can and should be consistently incorporated into daily classroom practice.
2. Develop and require philosophical thinking-focused units as part of pre-service teacher education. This will be critical to ensure the success of (1), above.
3. Extend the current NESA-Endorsed Stage 5 and Preliminary Course offerings in Philosophy to add Philosophy as a Board-Developed two unit examined HSC subject.

The Association for Philosophy in Schools NSW would be pleased to offer further consultation to the collaborative process of curriculum development, in particular to discuss our approach to professional learning and mentorship in (i) upskilling teachers in embedding thinking "of the close-knit type" and (ii) to making the teaching of thinking and metacognition rigorous but also enjoyable – both for students and teachers.

Yours sincerely,

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on behalf of the Executive of the Philosophy in Schools Association of NSW
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