



Newsletter

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*Mockingbird
Education is 2 years'
old!*



Kia ora tatou, talofa lava, malo e lelei, greetings.

Dear friends and colleagues

This little company was established two years' ago to fulfil a simple purpose - captured in its mission statement: to provide high quality professional advice, service and support to New Zealand schools.

Your support of this humble endeavour is greatly appreciated. To mark the occasion, you will notice some differences: a new logo, a new website (same address - please check it out) and a fresher looking newsletter.

Thinking Children - a book review

Cassidy, C, *Thinking Children*
London, Continuum International Publishing Group. 2007

This book raises some interesting points, especially if you are wondering how to put muscle into the concept of thinking in the curriculum. This is not a *how to* book, however. It *will* serve you if (a) you have not yet given serious thought to the issue of thinking across the curriculum, and (b) if you feel you need some theoretical support if you are planning to introduce a thinking initiative into your school.

Claire Cassidy wants the reader to think about *thinking* children and to note that *thinking children* could have a more involved place and position. Her book challenges readers to see children as thinking and rational persons, rather than as 'becoming adults'.

Cassidy understands 'personhood' as treating others as ends-in-themselves, however, the idea of 'becoming' an adult essentially robs the young person of personhood, because 'childhood' is a means to the end of 'becoming adult'.

Everyone lives in a society and under a moral code - including children, who are part of these moral spaces and therefore cannot be treated as 'becoming'. With maturity one may opt for a different moral code or to reject the prevailing moral code. Doing so has to do with critical and rational thinking, and the problem is that 'society', thinks that children have not yet developed this ability to think critically and rationally.

Cassidy accepts 'childhood' as

the time in one's life when one is a small person. The concept of 'child' is however problematic. Its current form she believes has developed since the development of print and the growing need to school and socialise the young to become literate, participating members of adult society.

She strongly rejects stage theories of child cognitive development and says that the difference between adults and children is the sophistication and complexity of adult knowledge, not the ability of children to reason. Stage theory is akin to a kind of deficit thinking about children.

In her professional life, Cassidy works with children by facilitating Community of Philosophical Inquiry (COPI). This is an empowering teaching method that is associated with the 'Philosophy for Children' movement, which has gained some popularity in New Zealand. It is a way of practicing philosophy in a group through conversation. Participants ask questions posed in response to a text or some other media, which includes discussion of specific philosophers or philosophical traditions.

The facilitator of the community is a philosophically educated person, who summarises and reconstructs the major elements of thinking traditions through the distributed thinking characteristic of dialogical discourse. The role of the facilitator is to act, among other things, from the Socratic position of ignorance as a bridge between concepts and arguments and as a devil's advocate.

This work Cassidy has done suggests that children are as

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Business Activity

Sept 09

Business Activity

- BOT consultation on new Principal Appointment process
- O n - g o i n g N Z C implementation work
- Principal appraisal

Sept 09

Client Schools

- Kaikohe West School
- Kaikohe Christian School
- Elim Christian College
- St Pius X School
- St Mary's School, Avondale
- Holy Family School
- Wesley College
- Whangarei Intermediate
- Whau Valley School
- Park Estate School
- St Ignatius School

Mockingbird Education Management Consultants has been established to provide high quality professional advice, service and support to New Zealand schools.

It is a consultancy based on:

- Trust
- Quality
- Professionalism

Mockingbird understands that:

- Principals and Senior Managers are busy professionals
- Middle Managers need support and guidance
- Schools have to achieve results

Therefore, Mockingbird will work closely with you to identify the advice, service or support you require and how best to deliver that to you, your senior managers, staff or school community.

able to construct moral codes as adults, the chief difference between them being the complexity of vocabulary. This position refutes the view that childhood merely inducts young people into the behaviour and moral codes of the adult world. The COPI is a ready tool for developing reflective and critical participation by children in a democratic society.

It operates on the basis that all participants are able to reason, all are fallible and all are creative. Creativity is critical to reasoning as it allows the participant to meet challenges, defend positions, interpret evidence and make connections. It is this set of assumptions that gives the COPI the great advantage of developing and maintaining equality amongst its participants.

Cassidy argues that children do not have a voice; that adults find the notion of child voice threatening; and when children are given some kind of voice or any rights for that matter, this is at the behest and discretion of adults. One solution, argues Cassidy, is that children could be give voice through their participation in COPI.

She finds it ironic that increasing numbers of lawmakers do not have children of their own yet make fundamental life-impacting decisions on behalf of children. Even noble efforts such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been determined with little or no child input.

Cassidy wants to see children have the opportunity to engage philosophically with political and

moral issues that affect their lives. The act of philosophising, possible through COPI, requires little empirical knowledge of the world, and the only real disadvantage children face is their limited life experience and vocabulary. Therefore, Cassidy would like to see philosophy in school curricula instead of 'citizenship education', which is a thinly-disguised preparation for acceptance of the prevailing moral code.

