Fostering Social- Emotional Learning Competencies Through Philosophy for Children

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A 1984 study of more than 27,000 parents, students and teachers found that half of the participants selected social, personal and vocation goals as the most important emphases for schools (Goodlad, 2004).

More recently, a 1999 survey found that more than a third of respondents thought that schools should emphasize CHARACTER EDUCATION AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS more than academic skills and knowledge (National Public Radio, 1999).

Character Education has always been one of the key focuses in Singapore to develop our children holistically. It is widely acknowledged that we have achieved high academic standards but it is a common view among employers that our school system has produced graduates who are not sufficiently resilient and self-reliant. They do not possess enough of "soft skills" to compete in the increasingly competitive global market place. In order to strengthen character development and "soft skills", Social and Emotional Learning is introduced into the school curriculum recently.

The term Social and Emotional Learning is an umbrella term that refers to skills and habits that will enable students to do well in their personal and mental well-being, character, citizenship, academic achievement and employment. Social and Emotional Learning was coined by the Fetzer Institute in the United States.

There are various Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programmes, but the SEL skills that are common to most of the programmes are:
1) Values
2) Self: The Physical, Emotional, Sexual and Spiritual
3) Group: Social Skills
4) Surviving Skills: Vocation and Life Long Learning
5) Citizenship and the Environment

The Singapore SEL framework was based on the learning points distilled from the careful review of the different SEL Programmes. There are 5 core SEL competencies and they are:
1) SELF AWARENESS
2) SOCIAL AWARENESS
3) SELF MANAGEMENT
4) RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
5) REPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING

These skills are derived from Peter Salovey's Emotional Intelligence and expanded upon by Daniel Goleman and other researchers at CASEL.

Table 1: *Key SEL Competencies*

Core SEL Skills	Descriptions
Self Awareness	• Identifying and recognising emotions

	• Accurate self-perception • Recognising strengths, needs, and values • Self-efficacy
Social Awareness	• Perspective taking • Empathy • Appreciating diversity • Respect for others
Self Management	• Impulse control and stress management • Self-motivation and discipline • Goal setting and organizational skills
Relationship Management	• Communication, social engagement and building relationships • Working cooperatively • Negotiation, refusal and conflict management • Helping, seeking and providing
Responsible Decision Making	• Problem identification and situation anaylsis • Problem solving • Evaluation and reflection • Personal, moral, and ethical responsibility

From Zins, J.E., Bloodworth, M.R., Weissberg, & Walberg., H. J. (2004). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. In Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg., H. J. (Eds). *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning*. NY: Teachers College Press

Social & Emotional Learning and Thinking

A nation-wide study of crime prevention programmes in US schools conducted by the American National Institute of Justice, found that comprehensive instructional programmes that focus on a range of social competencies and thinking skills delivered over a long period of time to continually reinforce skills demonstrated positive effects in the prevention of problem behaviours in school.

A local study by Choi and Chan (1994) and a 2003 study conducted by PGSB found that juvenile delinquents had lower social and emotional competencies.

Though there are different approaches to the teaching and development of Social and Emotional Learning Competencies, it would be ideal to be able to combine the development of both SEL competencies and Thinking Skills.

In a recent research study on Philosophy for Children in a Singapore Primary School, I found using the P4C approach to teach young children to think critically and analytically has the additional benefit of developing SEL competencies in the young children.

Philosophy for Children developed by Matthew Lipman in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was built upon the recommendations of John Dewey and the Russian educator, Lev Vygotsky, who emphasize the necessity on teaching for <u>thinking</u>, not just memorizing. It is not enough for children merely to remember what has been said to them; they must examine and analyse that material just as thinking is the processing of what children learn about the world through themselves, so they must think about what they learn in school (Cam, 1995). Memorizing is a

relatively low-level thinking skill. Children must be taught concept-formation, judgement, reasoning, etc.

The Philosophy for Children has been identified by Sternberg as being the most effective approach to the teaching of thinking. Lipman gave the following reasons for its strengths (Saeed Naji, 2003):

1.   *Interest*
Children work best at whatever it is that most keenly interests them. P4C involves the use of imaginative fiction in engaging children's thinking and discussion. It goes beyond Critical Thinking.

2.   *Emotion*
P4C is not limited to the improvement of critical thinking. It provides ways in which children can talk and analyze emotions like fear, joy, anxiety.

3.   *Critical*   *Thinking*
P4C wholly embraces critical thinking, but it does so with greater breadth and depth. Critical thinking is generally only an "add-on" to the existing curriculum, but P4C recognizes the need children have to deal truthfully with what they find problematic or puzzling.

4.   *Values*
Children can think better about issues that concern them, when their thinking, in addition to being critical, is caring, appreciative and compassionate.

5.   *Creativity*
Good thinking can be charged with imagination, when children are deeply involved in a story or in the development of a hypothesis. P4C is therefore especially successful in the area of creativity.

6.   *Communality*
Philosophy is dialogical: it stresses the need to open the dialogue to all members of the community. It stresses shared inquiry.

The approach to teaching P4C is through the Community of Inquiry, using purposefully written philosophical stories or specially selected objects or media.

What is the meaning of "community"?
1.   listening to what others have to say
2.   cooperation: engage in two ways communication
3.   reasonableness: learn to discuss disagreement reasonably
4.   tolerance: learn to respect others whom we disagree
5.   open-mindness: to explore new possibilities
6.   care: ability to explore own thoughts, ideas, and values, and to develop sense of care and concern together. (Cam, 2004)

In a usual P4C lesson, students will sit in a circle (if number is small) or in groups of 3 or 4 (if the number is large, like 40). A chosen story with a special theme like honesty, beauty, friendship, truth or other philosophical concepts is being used. Students will then be

encouraged to raise appropriate questions relating to the issues raised in the story, picture or object.

Ground rules are set at the beginning of each P4C lesson to ensure
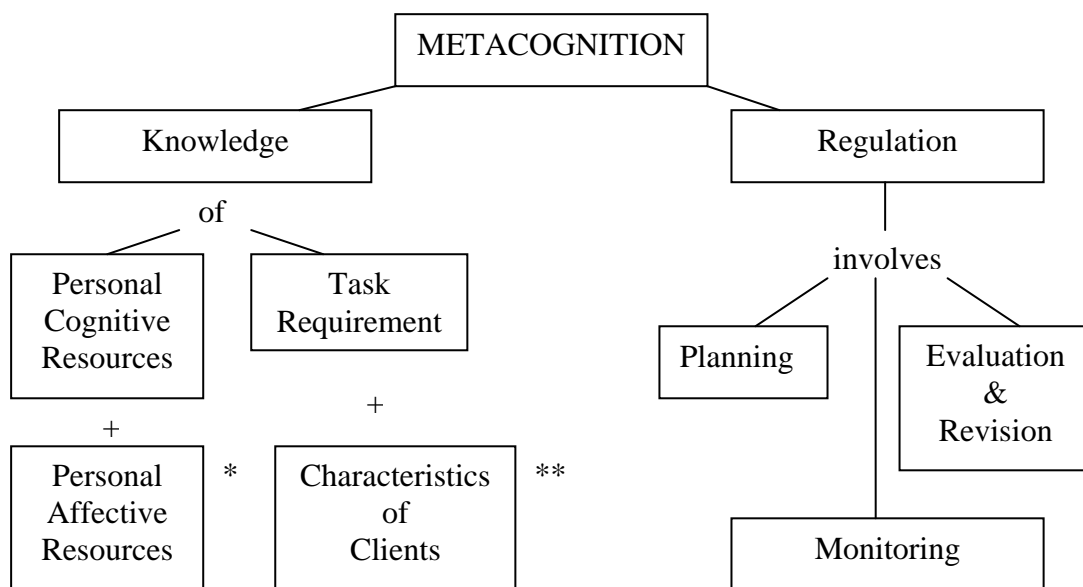1) Listening to others
2) Cooperation
3) Giving reasons for statements or suggestions made
4) Tolerance and respect for others
5) Open-mindness
6) Care and concern for others
7) Self awareness and reflection

There are general procedures for intellectual inquiry and they include:
1) asking appropriate questions
2) making useful distinctions
3) drawing relevant inferences
4) investigating questionable assumptions
5) looking for significant consequences
6) exploring probabilities
7) seeking better alternatives
8) giving and seeking reasons
9) making considered judgements
10) engaging in self-correction. (Cam, 2004)

In being engaged in the procedures of Intellectual Inquiry in a Community, the students develop reflective thinking and metacognitive skills. Students became more aware of one's own cognitive and affective strengths and weaknesses, the requirements of the tasks, the needs of others in the community and self-regulation in planning and executing a task. They learn to restrain impulsivity, think carefully, and make a decision based on knowledge of self and task, and monitor the execution of the task. More importantly they learn self-correction. One of the common worrying traits in young children and adolescents is their refusal to admit that they have made a mistake and give unreasonable excuses to defend their mistakes.

Fig. 1 shows the knowledge and regulation components of Metacognition.

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                          ┌──────────────────┐
                          │  METACOGNITION   │
                          └──────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
              │    Knowledge     │        │    Regulation    │
              └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────┘
                      of                        involves
         ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
         │   Personal   │  │     Task     │   │ Planning │  │  Evaluation  │
         │  Cognitive   │  │ Requirement  │   └──────────┘  │      &       │
         │  Resources   │  └──────────────┘                 │   Revision   │
         └──────────────┘                                   └──────────────┘
              +                    +
         ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐       ┌──────────────┐
         │   Personal   │ *│Characteristics│ **   │  Monitoring  │
         │  Affective   │  │      of       │      └──────────────┘
         │  Resources   │  │    Clients    │
         └──────────────┘  └──────────────┘
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Schmitt and Newby, 1986
Chang and Ang, 2002*
Chang, 2006**

Fig. 1: *Components of Metacognition*

Table 2 illustrates the reactions of a group of Primary 3 students to P4C.

Table 2 Experimental Classes' Responses on P4C lessons

Experimental Class 1 = 39 Students
Experimental Class 2 = 39 Students

Items	Experimental Class 1			Experimental Class 2		
	Like	Dislike	Neutral	Like	Dislike	Neutral
1) Do you like the philosophy discussions?	78.4	10.8	10.8	94.9	0	5.1
2) Do you like to listen to others' views?	83.8	5.4	10.8	94.7	0	5.3
	Yes	No	Neutral	Yes	No	Neutral
3) Are you encouraged to think more during philosophy lessons?	97.3	2.7	0	100	0	0
4) Are you encouraged to give reasons for your answer?	91.9	8.9	0	100	0	0
5) Do you think philosophy is useful?	78.4	8.1	13.5	97.4	0	2.6

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
6) Do you think philosophy lessons helped in your learning of English, Math and Science and other subjects?	80	10	10	90	10	0
7) Do you think the philosophy lessons have influenced your behaviour in your relationship with classmates, teachers and family?	70	30	0	70	30	0
8) Are you prepared to speak up and disagree after the philosophy lessons?	70	30	0	100	0	0
9) Do you think more about what you intend to do before taking action now?	60	40	0	100	0	0

Examples of Individual Students' feedback on P4C lessons

Response 1

Philosophy is when people ask questions followed by a reason to support the answer and we answer them. There's no right or wrong answers in philosophy. We share our ideas with each other. During philosophy, only one person talks while others litsen quietly to the speaker. Sometimes when it is your turn to speak, you get into a delimma. It is okay to the wrong answer as there is no right or wrong answers. You also have to give a reason for your answer. It is important to give reasons because so that others will understand why you have chosen that answer.

Response 2

Philosophy is something which has neither wrong answers nor right. It is something that needs a lot of reasoning. I think that it is fun and exciting hearing different reasons. It lets people to show their creativity and good reasoning. It helps students in their studies by giving them experiences they never experience before and problems they never faced. It should make them give good and reasonable answers. Although can be boring at certain times, I still think that philosophy is fun in an indescribable way. I end this review concluding that there is no philosophy unless there are reasons.

Response 3

About philosophy

Philosophy is an interesting subject. It teaches us how to build stronger relationship between our family and relatives. It also helps me to improve my responsibly and behaviour. It also teaches us not to tease or bully people. We should also not push one another. The projects which was about philosophy are interesting. It also trains us to do group work. I really appriciated it. I must be really greatful to have philosophy. I am really looking forward for more philosophy session. I really hope that there will always be a philosophy lesson. I really love philosophy lessons. I hope that this will carry on.

By matching the components of SEL Competencies with the learning outcomes of the Community of Inquiry, we will be able to explore the feasibility of developing SEL Competencies through the Community of Inquiry.

Table 3: *Matching SEL Competencies with Learning Outcomes in the Community of Inquiry*

SEL COMPETENCIES	LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY
SELF AWARENESS • Identifying and recognizing emotions • Accurate self-perception • Recognizing strengths, needs and values • Self-efficacy	• The positive and negative aspects of emotions like joy, fear, anger are being examined and analyzed • Reflection on personal values and biasness take place during the discussing and sharing session • Self-correction is encouraged
SOCIAL AWARENESS • Perspective taking • Empathy • Appreciating diversity • Respect for others	• Dialogues and sharing are encouraged • Listening to others • Building on others' suggestions • Tolerance and respect for others • Care and concern for others
SELF MANAGEMENT • Impulse control and stress management • Self-motivation and discipline • Goal setting and organizational skills	• Making considered judgements • Engaging in self-correction • Looking for significant consequences • Investigating questionable assumptions
RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT • Communication, social engagement and building relationships • Working cooperatively • Negotiation, refusal and conflict management • Helping, seeking and providing	• Dialogue and sharing • Cooperation in group work • Tolerance and respect • Building on others' suggestions • Lending support and showing appreciation for good ideas • Care and concern for others
RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING • Problem identification and situation analysis • Problem solving • Evaluation and reflection • Personal, moral and ethical responsibility	• Giving and seeking reasons • Asking appropriate questions • Drawing relevant inferences • Making useful distinctions • Seeking better alternatives • Engaging in self-correction • Open-mindness in seeking new possibilities • Self-regulation

Conclusion

In many instances, learning of SEL Competencies is incidental and infused into the many curricular subjects like CME, PCCG and CCAs. P4C through the Community of Inquiry is purposeful in developing expected intellectual traits and behaviours in the students through ground rules like "One voice", "Provide reasons", "Building on others' answers" and "Appropriate questioning". Activities are carefully planned and intentions are explicit. Through systematic practices, the desirable outcomes are obvious and even young children are conscious of the transfer of reasoning and analytical skills to their daily behaviours.

In using the P4C Approach in developing SEL Competencies, students get the dual benefits of developing Thinking and Social Emotional Skills.

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