Summary of the Teaching of Philosophy in Singapore

Philosophy in the National goals of Education

The Ministry of Education states several goals of the combined primary and secondary education system. Students should:

- be morally upright, be culturally rooted yet understanding and respecting differences, be responsible to family, community and country
- believe in our principles of multi-racialism and meritocracy, appreciate the national constraints but see the opportunities
- be constituents of a gracious society
- be willing to strive, take pride in work, value working with others
- be able to think, reason and deal confidently with the future, have courage and conviction in facing adversity
- be able to seek, process and apply knowledge
- be innovative - have a spirit of continual improvement, a lifelong habit of learning and an enterprising spirit in undertakings
- Think global, but be rooted to Singapore

Primary education

The MOE has first set out goals for the three-year pre-primary education programme. The goals are that children should:

- Know what is right and what is wrong
- Be willing to share and take turns with others
- Be able to relate to others

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3 The GER is used in the education sector and by the UN. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics the definition of the GER is the “total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year.” Its purpose is “to show the general level of participation in a given level of education. It indicates the capacity of the education system to enrol students of a particular age group. It can also be a complementary indicator to net enrolment rate (NER) by indicating the extent of over-aged and under-aged enrolment.” It is calculated by dividing “the number of pupils (or students) enrolled in a given level of education regardless of age by the population of the age group which officially corresponds to the given level of education, and multiply the result by 100.”
5 Ibid.
6 http://www.ibe.unesco.org/
7 http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/desired-outcomes/
8 http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/preschool/
The curriculum aims to develop the following dispositions and skills in children:

- Sound moral and social values
- Good habits of working and playing with others
- Positive self-concept and confidence
- A strong sense of curiosity about things and objects around them
- An ability to communicate effectively in English and a mother tongue language
- Physical control and manipulative skills
- Positive attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle
- Positive family values and strong community ties

Basic primary education consists of 4 years (year 1, 2, 3 and 4) followed by a 2-year orientation stage (year 5 and 6). The main aim of primary education is to develop students’ English, their mother tongue and mathematics. See the figure below for an overview of the primary school curriculum.

The inner circle subjects focus on life skills and include, amongst others, civics and moral education. The middle circle focuses on knowledge skills through project work while the outer circle covers content-based subject disciplines.

The MOE states several goals for primary education. Students should:

Adapted from the education booklet ‘Nurturing Every Child: Flexibility & Diversity in Singapore Schools’ published by the MOE (2006)

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10. Ibid.

This draft country briefing was prepared for comment by RUSHAP, UNESCO Bangkok. Comments are welcome to rushap.bkt@unesco.org
• have cultivated healthy habits

• be able to distinguish right from wrong
• have learnt to share and put others first
• be able to build friendships with others
• have a lively curiosity about things
• be able to think for and express themselves
• take pride in their work
• love Singapore

The weekly timetable can be seen below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly time allocation per grade in minutes</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 &amp; 6 (EM1/EM2/EM3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English language (including health education)</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>360/390/480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese/Malay/Tamil language (including civics and moral education*)</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>300/240/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics and moral education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90/90/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>270/300/390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>150/150/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>90/90/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and crafts</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60/60/60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30/30/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60/60/60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30/30/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30/30/30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Committee on Compulsory Education, 2000

* two periods (60 minutes) during lower primary (Y1,2,3) and three periods (90 minutes) during upper primary (Y4,5,6)

After year 4 the students who do well in English, the mother tongue and mathematics will be recommend to continue in the EM1 stream, which offers languages at a higher level. Most students will proceed to stream EM2. Thirdly, the EM3 stream is for students who have more difficulties in coping with the languages and mathematics. Since 2004 the first two streams have been merged and a system of subject-based banding has been put into place, which allows schools to band their pupils according to their ability. Finally, there is the ME3 stream, which focuses on the mother tongue as the first language (Higher Chinese, Higher Malay or Higher Tamil), and English at a basic level.

Assessment
There is a national Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). Pupils in the merged first two streams are tested in English, the mother tongue (Chinese, Malay or Tamil), mathematics and science. Pupils in the third stream (EM3) are tested in English, the mother tongue (at a basic proficiency level) and mathematics. The ME3 stream also has three examinations being the mother tongue, basic English and mathematics.

Case studies of philosophy teaching in primary schools: Identified courses called “philosophy” in schools
Not available at this moment.

Case studies of philosophy teaching in primary schools: Philosophy related teaching in schools
The rationale of the Civics and Moral Education Syllabus is “to anchor our young in sound moral principles.” To effectively live according to their values they need to understand the relevance of these values to modern society and combine them with the necessary social and emotional competencies. Only then they will be able to be morally upright and make wise decisions.

The main goal of the course is “to nurture a person of good character, who is caring and acts responsibly towards self, family, school, community, national and the world.” Teachers and pupils are guided by a set of questions like ‘Who am I?’ , ‘How do I relate to others and the environment?’, ‘What are my roles and how can I contribute in my community?’, ‘Who are we as a nation?’, and ‘What constitutes our national identity?’. To nurture sound personal values the syllabus stresses an understanding of the relationship between moral knowing, moral feeling and moral action. According to the syllabus, only when actions are moral and based on moral feeling and knowing, can a person develop a good character. It is therefore important that the appropriate values are being taught and applied to real-life situations like the family and the nation. The goals of the programme are further specified for moral knowing, feeling and action. Regarding moral knowing the student will be able to:

- know what is right and good
- formulate sound moral principles
- know the principles involved in making sound moral decisions
- understand the importance of family and their role in it

Responsibility is when a person recognises that he has a duty to himself, his family, community, nation and the world, and fulfils his responsibility wit love and commitment.

Civil and moral education - Lower primary level
Core value example: Harmony
Topic: Interacting with friends from different races

The aims of this course are to develop in students their ability to:
- Interact with friends from other races
- Take the initiative to interact with friends from other races

Students will achieve these aims by working on the following questions:
- Why is it important to make friends with people from different races?
- What can I do to interact better with friends of other races?

Concepts, related values and messages:

| Appreciation | Racial and religious harmony |
| Care | Build friendships with others |
| Respect | We must preserve racial and religious harmony |
| Social bonding | Declaration of religious harmony |
| Consensus | Social awareness |

Civics and Moral Education Syllabus, Primary 2007 published by the Curriculum Planning and Development Division, MOE Singapore.

12 Ibid. p. A-19
- consider multiple perspectives when making moral decisions
- be open-minded and non-judgmental when considering the views of others
- practise moral reasoning and critical thinking when making decisions
- understand the need to maintain social cohesion and the
- importance of racial and religious harmony
- know the values essential to the well-being of our nation including
  Our Shared Values and the Singapore Family Values
- know their role in the community, nation and the world

Regarding **moral feeling** the student will be able to:
- develop a sincere belief in and commitment to uphold and
  practise moral values
- recognise the need to clarify their values and actions through
  understanding their feelings, so that they can consciously take a
  moral stand
- consider the feelings of others when faced with moral issues
- develop intrapersonal skills e.g. self-reflection

Regarding **moral action** the student will be able to:
- base their decisions and actions on moral knowing and moral feeling
- put good values into practice
- develop good habits as a result of consistently engaging in moral action
- cultivate good social and communication skills
- be responsible in their actions
- promote harmony and social cohesion in a multiracial and multi-religious society

The six core values focused upon by the syllabus are represented in the figure below.

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Respect is when a person believes in his own self-worth and the intrinsic worth of all people.

15 Ibid. p. A-46

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Mentioned next is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which is defined as “the acquisition of skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively.” The social and emotional competencies that complement the previous mentioned values are:

- self awareness
- self management
- social awareness
- relationship management
- responsible decision making

Combining these competencies with values will make it easier to translate the values into action. Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of teaching approaches, which are process-based rather than content-based. This means they focus on learning “why” and “how” instead of “what”. Their aims is to “facilitate the learning of skills and to internalise values through action.”

The following approaches are mentioned.

- Cultural transmission approach
  - Inculcation of desirable values relevant to Singaporean society
- Narrative approach (story-telling)
  - Creating meaning through stories
- Consideration approach (perspective-taking)
  - Focus on empathy and creating a caring personality
- Action learning approach
  - Focus on experiential learning through projects in real-life situations
- Cognitive development approach (moral reasoning)
  - Developing pupils’ moral reasoning based on Kohlberg’s theory of moral development
- Modified values clarification approach (responsible decision making)
  - Helping students to clarify their values by doing a rational and emotional aware examination of their personal feelings and behaviour patterns

For values education to be effective a whole-school approach is necessary. This includes Community Involvement Programmes (CIP), Service-Learning (S-L) and other programmes and activities.

The Primary Social Studies Syllabus also contains philosophy related content. The syllabus describes aims, objectives, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The aims are to:

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19 Ibid. p. A-31
20 Ibid. p. A-6

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• Equip pupils with knowledge, skills as well as attitudes and values to make informed decisions
• Enable pupils to communicate and work as a team in a multicultural and interdependent world

The syllabus mentions the three components knowledge, skills and attitudes and values as the basis for achieving these aims. The specific components within them are stated below.

Knowledge\textsuperscript{26}:
• To understand people’s interaction with places and the relationships between people, places and the environments
• To acquire knowledge of how things were in the past and how things change and develop over time
• To understand the importance of making informed choices about the use of resources
• To appreciate the multi-cultural world.

Skills\textsuperscript{27}:
• To acquire, use and evaluate information and ideas from a variety of sources
• To express and present information and ideas clearly in oral, visual and written forms
• To work effectively in a variety of group settings
• To apply decision-making skills

Attitudes and Values\textsuperscript{29}:
• To develop respect for and positive attitudes towards their own, and other people’s culture
• To develop a sense of responsibility towards the environment
• To develop a positive attitude towards life-long learning
• To foster a sense of belonging to the country

The syllabus is based on the expanding environment approach, which can be seen in the next figure. Through the years pupils move from topics that are familiar to them to topics that are less familiar to them like the study of Singapore’s South East Asian neighbours. To teach concepts the syllabus advocates the use of the spiral approach shown in figure 2.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. p. 1-2
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. p. 1-2
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. p. 1-2
Finally, the way in which pupils acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values through the different themes of the course is shown in the conceptual model shown below.

An example of primary 6 in streams EM1/2 is included on the next page.

Secondary education

The MOE states several goals for secondary education. Students should:

- have moral integrity
- have care and concern for others
- be able to work in teams and value every contribution
- be enterprising and innovative

### Knowledge Objectives:

**People, Places and Environments**
Pupils will be able to understand how people adapt to and change their environment

**Time, Change and Continuity**
Pupils will be able to develop an awareness of the progress made in Singapore and other countries

**Scarcity, Choices and Resources**
Pupils will be able to recognise the element of interdependence between Singapore and other countries

**Identity, Culture and Community**
Pupils will be able to develop an awareness of the cultures of the peoples of Southeast Asia

### Skills Objectives:

**Process and Inquiry**
Pupils will be able to propose and evaluate solutions and issues

**Communication**
Pupils will be able to make sound arguments to persuade others to accept their points of view, decisions or solutions

**Participation**
Pupils will be able to show respect for the opinion of others

**Critical and Creative Thinking**
Pupils will be able to explore ideas beyond what is given and consider their relevance

### Attitudes and Values Objectives:

- Pupils will be able to show confidence in Singapore’s future
- Pupils will be able to appreciate the similarities and differences among peoples and communities in the region and the rest of the world
- Pupils will be able to appreciate the importance of maintaining good relationships in the region and the rest of the world
- Pupils will be able to develop a sense of responsibility to local and global environment and communities

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31 Ibid. p. 19
• posses a broad-based foundation for further education
• believe in their ability
• have an appreciation for aesthetics
• know and believe in Singapore

Based on the result of their PSLE, pupils continue their education on one of four paths represented in the figure on the left. The Special course leads to the Singapore-Cambridge GCE O-level examination after four years. In addition to the usual courses mentioned on the next page students will study English, Higher Chinese, Higher Malay or Higher Tamil. The Express course, which has the same trajectory but includes normal-level Chinese, normal-level Malay and normal-level Tamil. The Normal course, consisting of an Academic route and a Technical route, leads to the GCE N-level after four years with the option of doing a fifth year to prepare for the GCE O-level examination. The Academic route includes English, the mother tongue, mathematics and various subjects, which are similar to those in the Special/Express course. The Technical route includes English, the mother tongue at a basic level, mathematics, computer applications and various subjects that have a more technical and practical basis. The weekly timetable per stream for the first two years of secondary education can be seen below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Special/Express</th>
<th>Normal Academic</th>
<th>Normal Technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>280-320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese/Malay/Tamil language or Basic Chinese/Malay/Tamil</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>105-120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>175-200</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>280-320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>175-200</td>
<td>140-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and crafts</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design &amp; technology and home economics</td>
<td>105-120</td>
<td>105-120</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer applications</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>140-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical studies and home economics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>140-160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The weekly timetable per stream for year 3 and 4 of secondary education can be seen below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Special/Express</th>
<th>Normal Academic</th>
<th>Normal Technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core examination subjects:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>280-320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese/Malay/Tamil language or Basic Chinese/Malay/Tamil</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>105-120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>175-200</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>280-320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A science subject</td>
<td>210-240</td>
<td>175-200</td>
<td>140-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A humanities subject</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer applications</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elective subjects</strong></td>
<td>2-4 subjects</td>
<td>2-4 subjects</td>
<td>1-3 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8-10 periods</td>
<td>3-8 periods</td>
<td>3-9 periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compulsory and non-examination subjects:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design &amp; technology and home economics</td>
<td>105-120</td>
<td>105-120</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer applications</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>140-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical studies and home economics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>140-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics and moral education</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>70-80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Committee on Compulsory Education, 2000

Assessment
Not available at this moment.

Case studies of philosophy teaching in secondary schools: Identified courses called “philosophy” in schools
Not available at this moment.

Case studies of philosophy teaching in secondary schools: Philosophy related teaching in schools
Civics and moral education is also taught all through secondary education but is not part of the examinations. The rationale is the same as for primary education and it builds on the concepts handled during primary education. Included here is an excerpt of the syllabus for lower secondary education.

Recommended ways of assessment are peer-assessment, self-assessment, service-learning tasks, journals and portfolios, checklists and rubrics.

There have experiments with the Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme in Singapore. Especially Dr. Tock Keng Lim is an authority figure regarding P4C in Singapore. His article in the spring 2007 newsletter of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) tells about the Singapore experience and is included here.

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**Resilience** is when a person has emotional strength and perseveres in the face of challenges. He manifests courage, optimism, adaptability, and resourcefulness

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Philosophy for Children (P4C) began in Singapore in 1992 in one primary and one secondary school, using IAPC curriculum titles *Pixie and Harry*. It was initiated by Dr. Lim Tock Keng at the National Institute of Education (NIE). The first year proved to be difficult as teachers and students were not used to the community of inquiry approach. Things started to improve the next year, when two additional schools that began the program (including Singapore’s top girls’ school) provided funding to invite consultants such as Ann Sharp and Thomas Jackson. In 1994, another two primary schools joined the program. The program curriculum expanded to include *Thinking Stories* and Asian poems and stories. The Singapore program is unique in that a carefully controlled, broadly conceived evaluation study was set up when the program was initiated. Formative evaluation—including classroom observations, recordings and transcripts of lessons, as well as feedback from teachers and students—was conducted annually to improve the program. Feedback on the community of inquiry approach from both teachers and students was very positive. A quasi-experimental summative evaluation study was also conducted annually, but was less successful due to the inadequacy of instruments to measure the community of inquiry approach.

In 1994, the program received funding from NIE to develop a package of reliable and valid instruments and performance assessment tasks for evaluating the program, to ascertain the effectiveness of the community of inquiry approach, and to introduce Asian philosophy and core values into the program. From 1994 to 1998 the experiences and results of the annual formative and summative evaluation exercises were used to develop a package of three primary-level and three secondary-level instruments, video-based tests, community of inquiry exercises and multiple choice tests (measuring the same traits as the NFTRS). These tests can be adapted for countries that would like to use them (contact Dr. Lim at limtk@pacific.net.sg). The Asian materials used included stories by Singapore writers, the Asiapac comic series, including titles such as *The Sayings of Confucius* and other Asian philosophers, and Asian-American poems and stories.

These rich experiences of the program (1992-98) were presented in many international conferences and published in numerous journals and book chapters. Teachers, principals and students involved in the program participated in annual local conferences and a number of teachers were sponsored by their schools to present at ICPIC and other conferences abroad. The top girls’ school still includes philosophy in their curriculum. Dr. Lim, currently with Psychometrics International, continues to research, present and publish in P4C.

Since the late 1990s there have been several new educational initiatives in Singapore, including the recent “Teach Less, Learn More.” The impact of this initiative prompted the professional wing of the Singapore Teachers’ Union to invigorate P4C in 2003 by bringing consultants from the Federation of Australasian Philosophy for Schools Associations (FAPSA), based at Melbourne University, to prepare a new cadre of primary, secondary and junior college teachers in the community of inquiry approach.

The highlight of this initiative was the launch, in April 2006, of the first international P4C conference in Singapore, “Philosophy in Schools: Developing a Community of Inquiry,” which was officially opened by the Singapore Minister for Education and attracted about 350 participants from Singapore, Australia and Malaysia. The Conference was designed to introduce school principals and teachers to the significance of *philosophical inquiry* in the classroom, and for schools which had used P4C to share their experiences. Keynote addresses on “Philosophy in P4C,” “Philosophy and the School Curriculum,” “Philosophy in a Crowded Curriculum,” and “Teaching Philosophy in Australian Schools,” were followed by nine seminars organized into three strands: “Implementation and Training,” “Philosophical Attitudes,” and “Asian Traditions in Philosophical Thought.”

Conference papers focused on how even young schoolchildren can be encouraged to think more deeply about matters of significance that concerned them. Conference presenters emphasized that thinking is not another subject in the crowded school curriculum but is the core of everything we do in our classrooms. Given the multicultural make-up of Singapore (with three main ethnic groups - Chinese, Malay and Indian), there were presentations from local scholars on Confucianism, contemporary Islamic thought and Indian philosophy, which added to the philosophical richness of the Conference. The practicality of using the community of inquiry approach in the classroom was illustrated in presentations made by schoolteachers from Singapore and Malaysia. (cont...)
Identified programmes to provide teaching materials in philosophy
Not available at this moment.

Links

Committee on Compulsory Education, 2000


http://www/ibe.unesco.org

http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/ (for all information on all levels of education in Singapore)


Acknowledgements
This summary was prepared by Arthur Wolf, and comments on initial drafts were made by several experts.