Thinking for the Future: An Action Plan for the Promotion of Philosophy Teaching in Asia and the Pacific

Adopted at the UNESCO Regional High-level Meeting on the Teaching of Philosophy in Asia and the Pacific, held in Manila, Philippines, 25-26 May 2009.

1. Rationale for philosophy education
Philosophy can contribute to reflections on every avenue of society. Given the rapid and major social transformations facing individuals and society, people need to have opportunities to think about the direction, purposes and goals of social development.

Societies and communities progress in a more just, equitable and sustainable direction if the cultural, ethical, and spiritual values of those societies are central determinants in shaping their futures.

Widespread informed public participation is necessary for wise decisions about the future. By developing the intellectual tools to analyze and understand key concepts such as justice, dignity and freedom, by building capacities for independent thought and judgement, by enhancing the critical skills to understand and question the world and its challenges, and by fostering reflection on values and principles, philosophy has been described as a “school of freedom”.

The participants recognized that historical reflections across all civilizations can make important contributions to the teaching of philosophy in any society. Given the importance of philosophy and the urgency of deliberations on the future of civilization, a detailed action plan with recommendations are offered below, to be available for countries to use as a point for further development of philosophy teaching in each community and inside each level of education.

2. The mandate for philosophy education
We remind governments and all persons involved in philosophy education of the commitments made by all member states of UNESCO relating to philosophy education.
We recall Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” This is recognition of a right to do philosophy.

The Paris Declaration for Philosophy (Paris, 1995)\(^1\) states that development of philosophical debate in education and in cultural life makes a major contribution to the training of citizens in two major ways. First, it exercises their capacity for judgment, which is fundamental in any democracy. Second, it affirms that philosophy education prepares everyone to shoulder their responsibilities in regard to the great questions of the contemporary world—particularly in the field of ethics—by training independent-minded, thoughtful people, capable of resisting various forms of propaganda.

The UNESCO Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy (adopted by member countries of UNESCO in 2005),\(^2\) stipulates that philosophy develops the intellectual tools to analyze and understand key concepts such as justice, dignity and freedom. It develops these skills by building capacities for independent thought and judgment, by enhancing the critical skills to understand and question the world and its challenges, and by fostering reflection on values and principles.

Pillar 2 of the above mentioned Strategy urges UNESCO to encourage the teaching of philosophy in all countries, most notably through the development of policy recommendations on the teaching of philosophy at the secondary and university level and on comprehensive curriculum development, which would include the teaching of different philosophical trends as well as comparative philosophy.

Taking into consideration the results of the Study published by UNESCO in 2007, Philosophy, \textit{A School of Freedom – Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize: Status and Prospects},\(^3\) of the existing literature on the subject, and of the discussions held in the regional meeting, participants of the regional meeting were fully aware of the necessity to overcome the challenges facing philosophy teaching in Asia and the Pacific.

Participants, in agreement to the above, aspire to establish clear goals and strategies for achieving these goals.

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3. Goals and Aims of philosophy education

The outcomes of philosophy education include:

a) Understanding and a search for wisdom. To this end we encourage:
   - Development of trans-disciplinary knowledge
   - Clarification of concepts
   - Enhancement of the ability to integrate knowledge, principles and argumentation in rational discussion
   - Understanding the power of questions
   - Broadening intellectual horizons
   - Knowledge of cultural values in different communities
   - Search for meanings
   - Living a better life

b) Development of capacities for:
   - Quality thinking and reflective processes
   - Wise judgment and decision making skills
   - Formulating appropriate questions
   - Creative thinking
   - Foresight
   - Reasoned choice
   - Interpretation, construction and communication of knowledge
   - Respect for reasons and evidence
   - Better understanding of reality

c) Development of a disposition to:
   - Use knowledge and skills for good
   - Increasing respect for all forms of life
   - Take into account the interests of others and the environment in the spirit of solidarity
   - Have empathy and compassion
   - Be tolerant, inclusive, and reasonable
   - Understand better the diversity of views of different persons (listen to others)

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4 While it is desirable to find culturally appropriate terms to refer to philosophy, such as thinking for the future, at each level of education these goals apply to broader goals of education and development of thinking in general.
Respect different points of view, people and culture, and their values
Reflect upon values
Consider alternative possibilities and world-views
Build and improve other virtues

4. Implementation challenges

The participants applauded the efforts made by those involved in philosophy education to date, and UNESCO for convening this conference, with the goal of building capacity in the region for teaching philosophy.

The participants called for increased support in implementing all methods of philosophy education at all levels in culturally appropriate ways. Sound discussion of the underlying values and cultural factors in setting these targets is important.

The participants agreed to work to implement philosophy education by utilizing the following methods:

a) training more teachers to teach philosophy,
b) providing attractive salaries for all teachers at each level of education,
c) providing employment to philosophy teachers,
d) elevating the social status of philosophy teachers,
e) developing a wider range of appropriate support materials for different contexts/situations,
f) establishing teaching resource and research centres and/or facilities open to all.
g) considering carefully the time allocated to the teaching of philosophy,

h) increasing the value or credit given to philosophy components of courses or philosophy courses,
i) developing teaching and learning methods that encourage motivation to learn about philosophy,
j) integrating the goals of philosophy, and philosophy education into the core goals of the curriculum at levels appropriate for each culture,
k) researching the best methods and materials for teaching philosophy,
l) using objectivity in evaluation.

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5 In most countries it was considered that more philosophy teaching should be included, however, in one state they considered there was too much at present.
5. Target Groups

There are many target groups, such as:

a) educational institutions including: pre-school, primary schools, high schools, and universities
b) academia
c) student and youth clubs
d) parents of students
e) the general public
f) government officials and ministers
g) media and journalists
h) legal professionals and administrators
i) publishing companies

6. Research

Research is critical to development of appropriate education. This includes a needs assessment as well as an analysis of the impact that values education has on learners’ psychology during moral development. A contextual analysis is especially necessary in order to recognize distinct and varied needs.

Continued research is needed into appropriate assessment methods for a philosophy curriculum, student learning and behavioural outcomes, and teaching practices.

Ongoing research and assessment of curriculum and continuing modification.

Conducting research to find the optimum methods and materials for teaching philosophy.

Stimulating comparative research on the above mentioned topics for the purposes of deeper understanding, increased dialogue, and sharing of research.

7. Curriculum development
Philosophy curricula based on research needs to be developed, adapted to local needs and integrated across all levels of education.

Cooperation between different academic disciplines to encourage thinking and development of a transdisciplinary curriculum that achieves the above aims.

Curriculum development workshops for in service and pre service teachers and for all levels of education needs to be organized.

8. Teaching materials

Researchers and educators should work together across cultures to compile and produce multicultural materials which can be used at all levels. Participants call for an extension of existing compilations of materials. Materials should bring reflection to bear on cultural and religious practices to philosophical dilemmas.

Participants call for all teaching materials to be made openly available.\(^6\)

A repository of case reports by countries/regions needs to be established.

Teaching materials will be richer if they consider different cultural and religious practices in response to ethical dilemmas.

9. Learning activities and approaches

Encouraging different types of learning methods and models for different target groups.\(^7\)

Researchers should work alongside educators to research into appropriate teaching methods for different target groups, and assess the effectiveness and impact of philosophy education.

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\(^6\) These resources should use all available materials, and access methods to these materials, including for example, Internet, Web 2.0, DVD, videos, games, etc.

\(^7\) Many methods have been developed and are used in the region already, including community of inquiry, lectures, seminars, workshops, drama, games, narrative, role plays, case presentation and analysis, essay composition, small group discussion, on-line discussion forums, newsletters, public open discussion, media commentary and critiques,
Generating sustainable philosophy teaching and promotion programmes in a community of inquiry.

10. Evaluation

Evaluation methods for the effectiveness of philosophy education need to be developed urgently in many dimensions such as: knowledge, understanding, wisdom, developing capacities, skills, personal values, disposition and character building.

Evaluation should be authentic, comparative and ongoing to give a better estimate of the way philosophy-related education is received and developed in each group.

11. Human capacity building and Networking

Raising awareness within professional communities of the importance of philosophy teaching can be achieved through various measures, including philosophy teaching education courses for related teaching fields and events, e.g. workshops, or conferences at intervals to be determined. Refresher courses are necessary for professionals.

Support from parent organizations, the government and agencies such as UNESCO is required.

The participants appreciate the efforts of the Asia-Pacific Philosophy Education Network for Democracy (APPEND) and will work together with them.

The participants also recognise the importance of utilizing the expertise of philosophers in national associations and the Federation of International Philosophical Societies (FISP).

Philosophy teachers in each country should establish and support network partners for the development of philosophy education. These partners can include many existing associations as
mentioned above, and could also lead to development of new forums, networks and associations specifically linked to philosophy teaching where appropriate.

Networks can support teacher education (pre-service and in-service).

12. Recommendations for action

Recommendations to teachers

Teacher-initiated action has been, and remains, essential for development of philosophy education and will continue to be important for evolution of the subject.

Not to discuss just "philosophy”, but to integrate philosophy into interdisciplinary education, and to relate philosophy to the challenges of life.

Constructing a classroom atmosphere conducive to the education of thinking, e.g. a community of inquiry.

Share experiences and resources with others, to gather more data from different levels, situations and cultures.

Recommendations to philosophers

To be involved in promoting philosophy education, conducting comparisons of different approaches and contents, and developing methods to document this.

To write papers explaining each country’s circumstance and needs to various target audiences⁸ who need to understand the subject more in order to support provision of relevant materials and appropriate pedagogies for philosophy education.

Network with others to encourage sustainable activities.

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⁸ These groups include teachers, teacher trainers, policy makers, media, university faculty, for example.
Promote and research how to effectively facilitate a dialogue and build mutual understanding and complementary strategies between philosophers and other professionals.

Involve the media and publishing companies in communication strategies.

Not only to rely on government initiated schemes, but to also take initiatives to develop activities mentioned in this action plan.

**Recommendations to teacher training institutions and universities**

To employ specialised teachers of philosophy to teach teachers how to assist students to develop their thinking skills (in concordance with the goals above).

To establish or maintain philosophy departments, and involve them in teacher training.

To establish philosophy teaching and learning resource centres.

To give adequate resources to support the activity of the centres.

To establish and provide sustainable philosophy education support courses for building teacher capacity. To make philosophy courses compulsory in teacher training.

**Recommendations to member states**

Adhere formally to the importance and relevance of philosophy teaching as a discipline having its own methods and diversely articulated contents to develop a quality education system.

Accord an equally important place to philosophy compared to other disciplines, in order to achieve quality education.

Develop trainings that are comprehensive and complete, being able to train reflective citizens.
Enhance what has been done in the field of philosophy teaching in the region, and to encourage philosophy teaching in countries where this discipline is not taught.

Elaborate a national Action Plan on philosophy teaching at all levels of education in order to present the results of this Plan to the Regional Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO. This would allow for international comparisons and knowledge sharing, with the intent to encourage interested countries to promote comparative research, share perspectives and projects.

Engage in formal or informal consultation between countries where philosophy teaching exists at the different educational levels, so as to benefit from existing experiences both in terms of the curricula content and pedagogy.

To share the national Action Plan on philosophy teaching at the Interregional Meeting on Philosophy Teaching to be organised by UNESCO in 2010.

Elaborate feasibility studies concerning the introduction of philosophy as a separate and independent discipline in curricula of secondary and tertiary education, in consultation with the different stakeholders in the field of Education.

Rethink and analyse philosophy teaching’s specific contributions to the implementation of the educational principles stated in countries’ official texts.

Acknowledge the contribution that philosophy can make to improving the quality of education in schools.

Provide support to develop trainings that are comprehensive and complete, able to train reflective citizens.

Promote an interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy and other disciplines, since the philosophical inquiry and analysis allow students to become better thinkers while shedding light on the modalities of knowledge acquisition.

To extend philosophy teaching into every branch and level of education.
Ensure the continuity between philosophy teaching through pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Undertake pilot experiences in the field of learning to philosophize in basic education.

Safeguard the principle of academic freedom in a community of inquiry.

Accord value to specialising in philosophy in order to ensure specific professional opportunities, to ensure that philosophy teaching posts at the secondary level are filled by faculty members who are specifically trained for that function.

Organize workshops to revise curricula and school philosophy manuals, and to promote in-service training for school teacher trainers, so as to sustain and update the skills of philosophy teachers.

Designate a focal point within the secretariat of the National Commission for UNESCO in each country, to be in charge of the follow-up of initiatives related to philosophy teaching.

Create national databases on philosophy teaching, including the goals, curricula, schools manuals and activities related to philosophical reflections, teacher training programmes, etc. and to link them through a network.

**At the pre-school, primary and secondary levels**

Prepare teachers of primary and secondary schools to practice philosophical discussion in their classrooms.

Foster exchanges of experiences regarding the practices of learning to philosophize in schools, involving in particular countries of the region where this approach has been elaborated.

Encourage teachers of the various Humanities disciplines in the secondary education to follow in-service training in philosophy at university or competent training institutes.

Dedicate a specific time slot to philosophical reflection or to the analysis of philosophical texts in secondary education.
At tertiary level:
Encourage the creation and/or the strengthening of autonomous philosophy departments within institutions of higher education with a goal to promoting philosophy as a field in its own right.

Encourage the creation and/or strengthening of philosophy departments in terms of human resources and budget so that they may provide valid opportunities for philosophy graduates.

Encourage universities in all member states to introduce philosophy courses in undergraduate studies.

Ensure durable, systematic interaction and collaboration between secondary school teachers and university professors, especially through in-service training, joint research projects, or teacher assistance, with the goal of guaranteeing faculty motivation and high standards.

Recommendations to UNESCO

Continue its promotion initiatives and advocacy action in favour of the teaching of philosophy at all levels of formal and informal education.

Strengthen its initiatives aimed at creating links and establishing networks between philosophers, teachers and students of different regions of the world.

Continue and reinforce its actions in favour of a philosophical reflection that is open and accessible to the general public, notably through the celebration of the World Philosophy Day.

Continue to act as a clearing-house for exchanging the best practices in the field of philosophy teaching, through events at the national, regional and global level.

Provide special support to countries willing to set up regional exchange programmes between universities and training institutes, in order to build the capacities of philosophy teachers.

Create dynamics of exchange and interaction between regional networks, national and regional associations of philosophy, experts, UNESCO Chairs of Philosophy, etc. in different regions, so as to encourage the establishment of exchange programmes for students and philosophy teachers.
Elaborate anthology and commentaries of Asian and Pacific philosophical texts deemed important by the countries’ community of philosophers, so as to facilitate the development of school books and manuals for both students and philosophy teachers. Networks such as the Asia-Pacific Philosophy Education Network for Democracy (APPEND) can be a privileged partner in this task.

Work in partnership with other organizations, such as the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) in order to study the possibility and the relevance of introducing philosophy in the curricula of the different educational levels in the countries of the region. Have a focal point in such organizations in charge of initiatives related to philosophy teaching in the region.

Foster translation and dissemination of philosophical texts.

Encourage countries to develop national strategies aiming at enhancing philosophy teaching at all levels.

Provide special support to countries willing to engage in the process of national policy formulation on philosophy teaching at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Provide assistance, as much as possible, for the implementation of national policies in favour of the introduction of philosophy in curricula. Foster the sharing of experiences between countries which are at different stages in the process of policy-formulation, notably through expert meetings.

Make expertise available to all countries on practices, pedagogy and material development for philosophy teaching. Make expertise available to interested countries on the practice of learning to philosophize. Help elaborate, produce and make use of educational materials, including resources already available in the country, or translation initiatives.

Support the gathering of pilot experiences and case studies in the field of philosophy teaching, particularly concerning the learning to philosophize in primary schools.

Work together with teachers, philosophers, institutions and member states to continue the ongoing work to elaborate the summary documents on goals of philosophy education in each state,
Work together with teachers, philosophers, institutions and Member States to collect philosophical texts that are specific to the countries of Asia and the Pacific region, in order to value and exploit philosophical texts that belong to the country’s intellectual heritage.

Help member states access anthologies of materials and philosophical texts from all regions and traditions of the world. Further expand an anthology of philosophical texts from across the region that are deemed important by the countries’ community of philosophers, so as to facilitate the development of school books and manuals for both students and philosophy teachers. Networks such as the Asia-Pacific Philosophy Education Network for Democracy (APPEND) can be a privileged partner in this task.

Foster multilingualism in philosophy teaching.

Encourage philosophy departments in universities to address contemporary stakes and challenges in the region.

Holding a regional and an interregional meeting on the teaching of philosophy at all education levels, as well as a follow-up.

Support the exchange, dissemination and circulation of knowledge and practices relative to the learning to philosophize in primary schools, at intra-regional and international levels.

Develop and support exchange systems between universities in the region so as to foster and disseminate best practices in terms of philosophy programmes and pedagogical training.

Carry on the Interregional Philosophical Dialogues.