

Philosophy education for informed citizens

Darryl Macer, Ph.D.,
Regional Adviser in Social and Human Sciences for Asia and the Pacific,
Regional Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific (RUSHSAP),
UNESCO Bangkok, 920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong, Bangkok 10110, THAILAND
Email: d.macer@unesco.org
www.unescobkk.org/rushsap

Ethics is a concept balancing benefits and risks of choices and decisions. The underlying heritage of ethics can be seen in all cultures, religions, and in ancient writings from around the world. The challenges relate to the relationships between human beings within their society, with nature and God, which start developing the moment we are born. How can we empower teachers to make a special contribution in the wider context of making a mature society. Mature means a person, or a society that can balance the benefits and risks of alternative options, and make well-considered decisions, and talk about it.

In the Action Plan for the Promotion of Philosophy Teaching in Asia and the Pacific adopted in 2009, called “Thinking for the Future”, a series of goals of philosophy education are set out. Let us consider how we can teach the goals of philosophy education, including those related to the search for wisdom, such as 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 and living a better life, through selected examples of history education. Another set of goals can include development of capacities for wise judgment and decision making skills, and for interpretation, construction and communication of knowledge, for example. The third set of goals is development of a disposition to use knowledge and skills for good, and increasing respect for all forms of life, while respecting different points of view, people and culture, and their values. History education can work to achieve these goals, or work against these, and we should be cautious of the examples and interpretations we offer in teaching.

There are at least four strategies that teachers need when being prepared for teaching students how to cope with the turbulent times.

1. **Descriptive studies** to enable people to accurately assess the situation as it exists. To understand the way people view life, their moral interactions and responsibilities with others in their life.
2. **Prescriptive ethics** is to tell others what is ethically good or bad, or what principles are most important in making such decisions. It may also be to say something or someone has rights, and others have duties to them. It is related to policy making and law, and empowering people to make good decisions in their life.
3. **Interactive ethics** is discussion and debate between people, groups within society, and communities, and necessary to live harmoniously with others. The tensions in turbulent times are even more stretched so how can we teach people to get along, and empower teachers to interact across disciplinary boundaries, culture, religion and ideologies.
4. **Practicality** is essential if teachers are expected to continue teaching, and students will continue their interest in the matter.

This paper will give some examples of these aspects using examples in different social issues, environmental and medical ethics issues. How do we promote the creation of ideas, and

individuality in an era of globalization? The rapid progress of technology has led to challenges in the way that we live. The existing systems and patterns that are seen in the relationships between people have changed.

UNESCO has taken up some of these challenges in response to global calls for bioethics debate and discussion. The implementation of international standards in ethics of science and technology and bioethics is important, and there are three International Declarations on Bioethics unanimously accepted by UNESCO General Conference. **The rationale for Bioethics education and a regional action plan to deliver this is outlined in the document, “Joint Plan of Action for Regional Networking in Bioethics Education Towards Better Bioethics Education”, developed by UNESCO in 2006.**

The mandate for governments and all persons involved in bioethics education is in the commitments made in the Declarations adopted by all member states of UNESCO relating to bioethics education, specifically including the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (adopted by the UNESCO General Conference 2005)

"23. (i) In order to promote the principles set out in this Declaration and to achieve a better understanding of the ethical implications of scientific and technological developments, in particular in young people, States should endeavour to foster bioethics education and training at all levels as well as to encourage information and knowledge dissemination programmes about bioethics. (ii) States should encourage the participation of international and regional intergovernmental organizations and international, regional and national non-governmental organizations in this endeavour."

In teaching of ethics and philosophy there should not only be theoretical introductions, but also a variety of participatory activities to provide examples of ethical dilemmas, assist learners in ways to resolve dilemmas and identify ethical issues. Recently UNESCO has also developed a Core Curriculum on Bioethics, and a variety of teaching materials, and processes, such as Darryl Macer, *Moral Games for Teaching Bioethics* (UNESCO Chair in Bioethics, 2008). Examples of teaching materials are available on the website (www.unescobkk.org/rushsap), as well as the reference materials.

Dialogue is essential for developing a better understanding of not only others, but also ourselves. In recent times the teaching of ethics and philosophy in almost all regions of the world has included core components with a predominance of Western philosophers. This relates to the predominance of published works in European languages, and to the higher output of postgraduate degrees in philosophy in North America and Europe, in the past two centuries. In order to strengthen local, regional and global awareness of the rich philosophical traditions of many regions of the world, UNESCO Social and Human Science Sector's program in philosophy has launched programmes on inter-regional philosophical dialogues in 2004 involving UNESCO Bangkok and UNESCO Rabat in Asia-Arab Inter-regional Philosophical Dialogues.

Biography

Prof. Darryl Macer is Regional Advisor on Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific, in RUSHSAP, UNESCO Bangkok, Thailand (<http://www.unescobkk.org/rushsap>).

He is also a Visiting Senior Research fellow at United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies and Affiliated Professor in Philosophy at Kumamoto University, Japan; and Founding Director, Eubios Ethics Institute, Japan, New Zealand and Thailand (<http://eubios.info/index.htm>). He taught bioethics at the University of Tsukuba, Japan from 1990-2005, prior to joining UNESCO.

Dr. Macer obtained his Ph.D in Biochemistry and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Philosophy from Kumamoto University, Japan in 2009. He has worked in UK, New Zealand, Italy, Japan and Thailand; and is a member of many international bioethics committees. He has published 12 authored books, 20+ edited books, and 200+ academic papers. **Email:** d.macer@unesco.org