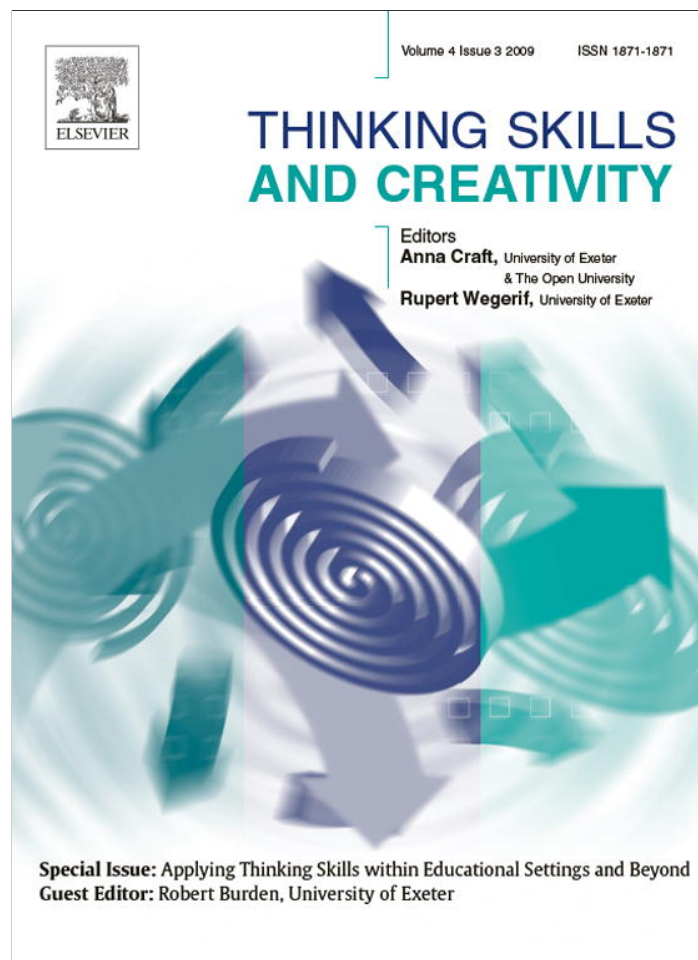


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Editorial

Thinking goes to school

One of the greatest problems with the study of thinking is the enormous range of activities involved. Most of the papers in this edition are devoted to the development of thinking skills, strategies and resources and their application within educational contexts. In this they provide a specific focus to recent research in this area, some of which has emanated from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter.

Advocacy for the teaching of thinking skills and strategies in schools is not new. Some thirty years ago, Reuven Feuerstein in Israel and Matthew Lipman in the United States were pioneering approaches to learning how to learn. It has taken many years and some fairly disastrous attempts at curriculum reform in England and elsewhere for the underlying premise of these programmes to sink in and lead to a reawakening of interest and enthusiasm in their aims, namely the development of autonomous and collaborative learners and problem solvers who in turn will become caring and responsible citizens. Initial attempts to bring about the desired changes have tended, with one or two outstanding exceptions, to be largely outcomes based, without due recognition being given to the importance of the process by which these outcomes might best be achieved. At the same time, an obsession with improvement in narrow and ill-conceived achievement test results and static views of intelligence have stultified discussion about the broader aims of education. Over-reliance upon positivist research in providing the only acceptable approach to gathering acceptable 'evidence' of change has also hindered worthwhile developments in this area. What are needed now are studies which chart and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of programmes designed to stimulate various forms of thinking in schools and beyond.

Shirley Larkin's paper provides one example of such a study in her in-depth description of her examination of the difficulties in assessing metacognitive outcomes of collaborative learning opportunities for young children, nevertheless concluding that, on balance, the evidence is positive in confirming such an effect. This paper provides an excellent introduction to the style and content of Larkin's recently published book on metacognition reviewed later in the current edition of this journal. It also helps to establish the value of a qualitative approach to research in this area in contrast to more common positivist studies.

The theme of early cognitive development is taken up by Anders Hansen in his description of a much more structured approach to teaching essential language concepts that has received considerable attention in Norway, its place of origin. This paper was originally presented at the South African branch conference of the International Association of Cognitive Education and Psychology in CapeTown, February, 2009, where it provoked a lively debate. It would appear that the programme has been most widely and successfully used with children suffering from severe speech and language delay, but a case can surely be made that the logical process by which the key language concepts have been identified and the intensive reinforcement accompanying their introduction makes wider application worthy of consideration. This is not an evaluative study but a description of work in progress in one part of the world, based on sound theoretical principles, which warrants wider dissemination and consideration.

Voldis Kudliskis is a senior teacher in a large English secondary school who sought ways of helping his older students develop techniques for coping with the stresses associated with studying for and sitting examinations. An approach which he found to be particularly helpful for many of his students was the range of activities offered by Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP). His doctoral studies at Exeter led him to investigate this phenomenon further, particularly in view of the fact that many NLP practitioners refer to their work in terms of some form of 'magic'. In his largely qualitative study, Kudliskis provides an overview of previous research in this area and seeks to chart the process by which he taught NLP principles to group of sixth form students prior to their 'A' level examinations and their subsequent reflections on its value to them. Kudliskis concludes that several NLP techniques are indeed useful, but need not take refuge in references to magical thinking as they reflect in their own particular language many well-researched psychological theories of thinking and learning.

The South African experience of curriculum reform has thus far been subject to considerable disappointment and concern. The principle of including all children is praiseworthy and the intended outcomes of the educational process are commendable, but lack of emphasis upon the process by which such laudable aims were to be achieved appears to have left the nation's schools floundering. A small but active group of educators have fought to keep the flame of cognitive education alive by providing in-service teacher training courses and organising local and international conferences. An inspirational leader and researcher in this movement has been Professor Leena Green, who has been particularly effective in fostering the introduction of Matthew Lipman's ideas on philosophy for children in township schools and in teacher training. Her paper, which was originally presented at an international conference on philosophy for children in Graz, Austria, describes an aspect of this work.

Susan Chedzoy and Robert Burden have been working together for several years on children's perspectives on their experiences in schools. As a PE specialist, Chedzoy is particularly interested in ways in which children can gain optimum benefit from PE lessons; Burden, on the other hand, is a psychologist with a particular interest in psychological theories and research underpinning the development of thinking and learning. In their paper they examine the applicability of Weiner's original attribution theory for gaining the perspectives of a relatively small sample of primary school children on why some children are better at PE than others and whether and how it is possible to change. As hypothesis generating research, this study is particularly interesting in suggesting that girls and boys differ significantly in the ways in which they make sense of what is happening in PE lessons.

The final paper by Joseph Matare differs from the others in this volume in that it is not directly concerned with thinking in schools. It nevertheless does throw light on an issue of great interest to educators, namely the application of Howard Gardner's ideas on multiple intelligences, in this instance, musical intelligence. In making a qualitative evaluation of the differences between novice, experienced and expert musicians in two contrasting cultures, Matare's paper touches also upon a further issue of interest to readers of this journal in traversing the border between thinking and creativity.

Robert Burden
University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom
E-mail address: R.L.Burden@exeter.ac.uk

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