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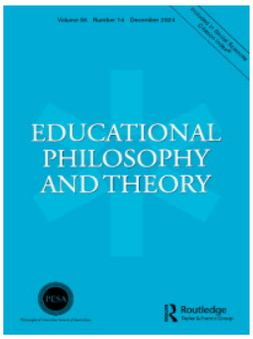

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Educating *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy in uncertain times: The promise of the pedagogy of the community of philosophical inquiry

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ABSTRACT

In a climate of growing intolerance and violence, marked by various forms of injustice across the democratic world, human rights and democratic citizenship education have the potential to help cultivate knowledge, values and skills or competences in the young that are necessary to foster a culture of human rights and democracy. However, education *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy needs to be critical and transformative by going beyond delivering content knowledge and prescribing values to practically developing distinctly democratic habits and dispositions. We argue that the Community of Philosophical Inquiry as developed by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp can contribute to creating a human rights and democratic culture by facilitating democratic experiences and the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue. This pedagogic process can be used to confront prejudices, discrimination, and violence as well as to address the problems of alienation facing young people today.

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Introduction

Amidst talk of 'democratic backsliding' (see Wolkenstein, 2023; Carothers & Hartnett, 2024) or 'democratic breakdown' (see Fung et al., 2024) and the resurgence of emboldened authoritarian states (see Bauer et al., 2021), democracy no longer seems clearly capable of delivering what it once promised—namely, a self-sustaining and peaceful method for solving political problems that preserves a relatively cohesive sense of collective belonging. In the wealthier, more established, liberal democracies, inequality and economic stagnation have challenged the political legitimacy of democratically elected governments, and the legitimacy of democracy itself, paving the way for renascent forms of nationalist populisms. In more fragile democracies we see on-going conflicts rooted in discontent within the demos and mistreatment of minority populations. Arjun Appadurai (2017, p.1) once evocatively asserted: 'The central question of our times is whether we are witnessing the worldwide rejection of liberal democracy and its replacement by some sort of populist authoritarianism.' Seven years later, global trends suggest that the answer to this question remains in the balance.

One particularly salient and current case of democratic fragility can be found in Thailand. Over the last twenty years or so, Thailand has experienced two *coup d'état*, adopted two new

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constitutions (one after each *coup*) concentrating power in the hands of the military, and witnessed an ideological divide that manifests itself in widespread expressions of hatred *via* online and in person speech as well as outright violence against people with differing political views (Bangkok Post, 2020b). Although this is not a mere localized reality (with neighbouring nation, Myanmar, for example, undergoing a much more radical democratic retreat in recent years), we will return throughout this article to the case of Thailand to illustrate and animate our discussion.

The central thesis of this article assumes that education has a crucial role to play in renewing democratic culture and promoting human rights. To be clear, we maintain that education can help cultivate the knowledge, values, virtues, attitudes and skills that enable 'all persons to participate effectively in a free society' (Art. 13, United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966) and prepare children for responsible life, 'in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples, ethnicities, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin' (Art 29 1(d), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). However, we know all too well that such aims are rarely given priority in curriculum planning and in the formal day-to-day organization of school activities.

This article argues that a reimagined human rights and democratic citizenship education (HRDCE)—one that requires that we educate *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy—is well placed to help deliver on the goal of sustaining and renewing democracy. We contend that the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and virtues promoted in human rights and democratic citizenship education are apt for addressing present challenges faced by democracies. However, ensuring that young people are able to acquire, embrace and act on the relevant educational goods effectively can be a complex and challenging process, especially in social contexts marked by prejudice, discrimination, fear, political hopelessness, and frustration. As a result, human rights and democratic citizenship education needs to be critical and transformative by going beyond the dissemination of discrete knowledge and the prescription of values and skills to include the development of distinctly democratic dispositions, habits and virtues that will enable young people to act on such knowledge and values. We contend that cultivating the dispositions, habits and virtues that are necessary to sustain a culture of human rights and democracy, in fact, requires engaging in specific pedagogical processes. In particular, we propose that the approach of the community of philosophical inquiry (which is the pedagogy at the heart of Philosophy for Children or 'P4C') can contribute to creating a human rights and democratic culture by facilitating the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue and fostering a set of democratic habits.

The first section of this article introduces the foundations for human rights and democratic education as set out in international human rights instruments and discusses the three components of educating *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democratic citizenship. The second section discusses competency-based education which has received growing attention, and how the Framework of Competence for Democratic Culture (CDC) developed by the European Council can be aligned with education *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy. Finally, we elaborate on how the pedagogy of community of philosophical inquiry can help minimize violence and combat prejudice, as well as help address disengagement and alienation while nurturing democratic imagination among young people today.

Human rights and democratic citizenship education

Despite their different names and domains of focus, human rights education (HRE) and democratic citizenship education (DCE) share the common aims of promoting respect for human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, peace and justice in all societies. Indeed, Schaffer (2015) contends that 'democracy and human rights express a common aspiration for human autonomy, dignity, equality and freedom' (p. 96). The idea that education should play a role in fostering human rights and democracy has its roots in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948, as the preamble proclaims that 'every individual and every organ of society,

[…] shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.' In fact, Article 26(2) of the UDHR also states that:

> Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups…

These fundamental aims of education were further reaffirmed and elaborated in a number of international human rights treaties including Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1965), which stipulates a clear obligation on the part of state parties to address and combat prejudice and racial discrimination through 'teaching, education, culture and information'. Article 13(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) also affirms that education should enable 'all persons to participate effectively in a free society'. Furthermore, Article 29(1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) elaborates the aims and values of education for children including respect and understanding of cultural identity, language and values, preparing the child 'for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin' and seeks to develop respect for the natural environment.

Given these normative bases, we will now consider the three dimensions of human rights and democratic citizenship education namely educating *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy as well as some of their challenges.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) stipulates that human rights education and training should encompass education *about*, *through* and *for* human rights. The first dimension, educating *about* human rights includes 'providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection' (Art.2). The focus of human rights education after the adoption of the UDHR was to educate about the declaration itself; this was carried out through UNESCO's Associated Schools Projects (ASP) and other initiatives (Coysh, 2017). In the 1990s, human rights education became intertwined with the idea of democracy as the UN's Agenda for Peace adopted in 1992 linked democracy with respect for human rights, and the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 called for human rights education to include peace, democracy, development and social justice (Vienna Declaration, 1993). As a result, knowledge about democratic institutions and systems including national constitutions as well as conflict, violence and different forms of human rights violation became an important part of human rights and democratic citizenship education. Similarly, learning about issues faced by specific identity groups is often a part of education about human rights, as is learning about different more systemic axes of struggle against injustice—including, for example, feminism and racism—which inform how power relations operate to privilege certain groups and identities at the expense of others.

Knowledge about how different groups in various parts of the world suffer from human rights violations and injustices can be understood not only through the examination of contemporary issues but also through the analysis of their historical roots. Learning about historical events can be designed in ways that help students understand the relationships between various elements in the social world, including political affairs, religion, inter-ethnic relations, and how changes in those relationships came about. Likewise, learning about historical knowledge can help learners understand the broad patterns of some persistent issues and links between the past and present, when history lessons are organized to meet such an active objective (Barton & Levstik, 2008). Understanding historical and contemporary elements in the social world and their relationship with one another is important not only for learning *about* human rights but also for learning *about* democracy. Santisteban et al. (2018) proposed using a historical concept of historical problems to 'analyze social problems and controversial issues by looking at their historicity, in order to understand their development

and alternatives, and to contribute solutions' (p.466). Issues and concepts including migration, forced displacement, freedom and conflict, for example can be explored from past to present. As such, history education has the potential to enable students to make more informed decisions about the kinds of policies they wish to support, and how they might wish to challenge certain features of the social world they have inherited (including its inequalities and injustices). In other words, they can identify and learn to exercise their own political autonomy by learning about how others have done the same thing before in their own contexts.

However, it has been pointed out that much of HRE in formal schooling has been limited by its implicit endorsement of what Paolo Freire (1970) called the 'banking model' of education (see especially pp.57-74). Educating *about* human rights and democracy often follows a transmission model where content knowledge is assumed to be transferred *from* educators *to* learners without or with limited active participation and critical reflection on the learners' part (Tibbitts, 2017). Furthermore, human rights education that emphasizes learning about the UDHR (or what is referred to as the 'declarationist' approach) has faced critiques from critical human rights scholars on the account that it 'limits the pedagogical value of HRE and most importantly its transformative possibilities' (Zymbylas & Keet, 2019, p. 35).

In this connection, the second dimension of HRE—namely, educating *through* human rights and democracy—can be seen as moving beyond the traditional approach. Described as 'learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners' (UN Declaration, 2011, Art. 2), educating *through* human rights and democracy is essentially about making the entire educational process, including the curricula, the materials, the teaching and learning approaches as well as the schooling environment reflect and promote the values of and principles that support human rights and democracy. Such values and principles include respect for human dignity, equality, non-discrimination as well as the values of justice and fairness (Tibbitts, 2022). Human dignity is about recognition of the equal worth of everyone as human beings and having respect for people who may have different beliefs, values and status. It requires not only tolerance for but also actively valuing and engaging with diversity in a spirit of curiosity and openness to different world views and practices.

In practical terms, this means that education must be provided in a way that respects the inherent dignity of all learners and promotes the rights and freedoms of everyone including the right to express an opinion freely, the right to freedom of religion, and the right to participate in school life including in disciplinary proceedings (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001). This requires that the formal curriculum as well as the school system and culture—which come to constitute what Philip Jackson (1990) identified as a 'hidden curriculum'—be democratic and guided by human rights principles. However, scholars contend that the culture and the system in schools including school routines and the disciplinary system tend to affirm authoritarian values, with an emphasis on preserving the status quo, embracing of student docility and relying on stereotyping (Harber, 2004; Hughes, 2020). In Thailand, for example, it was found that despite the education reform efforts that aim to promote reasoning enquiries in the teaching approach, routine teaching practices in Thai schools continue to socialize students toward obedience and conformity while also treating corporal punishment as normal and effective (Boontinand & Petcharamesree, 2018). An acceptance of teachers using violent or domineering approaches in their disciplining practices has also been reported in other parts of the world despite it constituting a threat to sustaining democratic and inclusive schooling (see Lopez et al., 2022). Thus, educating *through* human rights will require changing not only pedagogical approaches in the classroom but also revisiting the routine and disciplinary practices regimenting the relationships between teachers, students and administrators. Crucially, we contend that philosophical enquiry has the potential to foster a more open and democratic classroom and help shift toward a rights-respecting and democratic school culture, thus, contributing to an effective practice of educating *through* human rights and democracy.

The third dimension, educating *for* human rights and democracy is about empowering individuals to enjoy their rights and to respect and defend the rights of others. As there continue to be profound human rights violations taking place in different parts of the world today, this dimension of human rights education is especially powerful because it can bring about a deep change in one's life as well as in those of others. While the state has the primary legal obligation through its international human rights commitments to respect, protect and promote human rights, individuals also have a moral and a civic duty to affirm the value of human rights and work to hold powerful rights violators to account (in the 'court of public opinion', if nowhere else). It is clear that many governments continue to commit human rights violations whether in the form of torture, suppression of freedom of expressions, repression of people committed to various religious beliefs, or through their failure to ensure proper access to healthcare and education, or through failure to provide access to a decent livelihood for marginalized populations (see, for example, Amnesty International, 2023). Moreover, non-state actors including individuals, corporations and armed groups also regularly engage in human rights violations (see Hessbruegge, 2005). Thus, citizens need to become aware of such violations and injustices and they must be willing to take actions that aim to trigger a change in the behavior of the relevant public and private actors (for example, by monitoring whether the human rights obligations of the relevant state are being fulfilled, campaigning on human rights issues, or by raising money for groups seeking to ensure that states and private actors obey their human rights obligations). In other words, individuals must also engage in activism of various kinds.

On the conventional approach to education for human rights and democracy, it is usually assumed that once learners become knowledgeable about international and national human rights norms and are aware of human rights violations taking place, they will almost automatically take appropriate action. The implicit assumption here being that knowledge about the world is sufficient to motivate the right kinds of action to help improve the world. However, this assumption of a straightforward connection between knowledge *that* something is the case and knowledge about *how* to do something about that state of affairs is ill-founded. After all, it may not always be the case that knowledge alone motivates action, since there are various factors which influence engaging in social activism (Kizel, 2016). More fundamentally still, the transformative goal of education *for* human rights cannot be effectively achieved through a conventional and passive mode of teaching and learning, which is still all too common in many schools in different parts of the world. This is because HRE must aim to foster certain habits, dispositions, and even virtues in learners. Minimally, HRE activities organized by civil society organizations (including organizations in the informal education sector) that involve participatory, empowerment and transformation pedagogies are likely to have a greater transformative impact because they aim to develop certain patterns of action and not just imparting knowledge.

Despite the potential of education *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy discussed above, critical human rights scholars posit that human rights and human rights education have become essentialized, and that values embodied in international human rights standards are seen as absolute, thus, rejecting the possibility of genuine explorations and dialogue among learners on different value systems (see Keet, 2012). Even when human rights education is carried out through a reflective inquiry approach which enables learners to explore their own value systems, Joanne Coysh (2017) contends that it may be a challenge to engage learners in dialogue about values and beliefs without reference to international human rights norms and standards. As a result, we argue that although fostering important common values—including respect of human dignity, equality, and justice—remains an important goal for human rights and democratic citizenship education, it is key to recognize that learners must be authentically encouraged to foster their own sense of autonomy and of personal engagement with the ethical questions underpinning the values of human rights and democracy. Otherwise, a narrowly closed approach to moralistic education risks failing to meaningfully engage students and potentially veering into the territory of indoctrination. This means that there has to be

space in the classroom for genuine exploration, critical reflection and dialogue in education *about, through* and *for* human rights and democracy. Since a popular approach to teaching human rights and democratic citizenship is a competency-based one, it is important to examine the possibilities and challenges of applying this framework critically.

Competency-based education for human rights and democracy

One approach to teaching and learning that focuses on developing knowledge, values/attitudes and skills for learners is known as 'competency-based' education and has been adopted in different educational frameworks including in human rights and democratic citizenship education. This approach measures the outcomes of learning (i.e., what students know and what students can do rather than the time it takes to master certain knowledge and skills). In fact, the competency-based approach can be seen as corresponding to the three dimensions of educating *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy we discussed earlier. The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) published by the European Council identifies 20 competences including 3 sets of values, 8 attitudes, 8 skills and 3 bodies of knowledge and critical understanding (CoE, 2018, p.38). We also propose a set of knowledge, values/attitude and skills that correspond with the framework of educating *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democratic citizenship education in Table 1. In this table, our proposed elements which correspond with the competences in the CDC Framework are highlighted in bold.

Having an agreed framework of the knowledge, value/attitudes and skills that students should develop can be highly useful for educators who can then practically design their curricula and their teaching accordingly. However, there are three key considerations we need to bear in mind when operationalizing the competency model for human rights and democratic citizenship education:

a. *The risk of performativity:* The number of competences identified or suggested in various frameworks can be overwhelming for educators who are pressed for time to deliver this kind of education within the curriculum and this can lead to a situation where a set of competences is used just as a kind of checklist. If this becomes the case, there is also a danger that certain competences become unduly prioritized compared with others, simply because they are more assessable or valued more highly by the wider school system (for example, specific content knowledge may be privileged because it will serve in assessments in disciplines that play an important role in national standardised tests or communication skills may be stressed more than other skills because they are recognized as serving the purpose of boosting future employability).
b. *The risk of complexity:* Relying too heavily on the distinctions between different categories of competences can be confusing for educators since what constitutes knowledge, values/attitudes and skills in this domain are often intertwined. For instance, justice and human rights can be considered as both knowledge and values and hence, they may be classified differently in different competency frameworks.

Table 1. Knowledge, values/attitude and skills promoted through human rights and democratic citizenship education.

Knowledge (educating *about*)	Values/attitudes (educating *through*)	Skills (educating *for*)
*Human rights norms & standards	*Respect of human dignity	*Critical thinking
*Awareness of the world: contemporary issues & their historical roots; different elements of the social world (culture, religions, politics, laws)	*Equality *Non-discrimination *Justice & fairness *Diversity *Freedom	*Communication (listening; articulating & presenting ideas) *Awareness of oneself *Understanding others/ empathy *Suspending judgment
*Situations of violations and injustices	* Openness and tolerance	
*Democratic institutions and systems		

c. *The risk of over intellectualizing:* As touched upon above, having knowledge alone or knowing that some values are desirable does not of itself translate into adopting human rights and democracy enhancing behaviors or actions. This is a weakness of a content-heavy approach to human rights and democratic education. In the case of the competency framework, the risk is subtler, since it seems to affirm a practical outcome of the learning. This risk here, therefore, has to do with how we understand the skills that are outlined within this competency framework. Indeed, the risk is that we understand the relevant skills – such as critical thinking, critical analysis, communication, awareness of oneself, understanding of others, suspending judgment – as being primarily demonstrated at a relatively high level of abstraction in mostly intellectual ventures (assessed, for example, by writing essays or delivering formal presentations), rather than at a level of concrete practice (assessed, for example, by evaluating the quality of participation in various group activities students undertake).

Thus, in adopting a competency-based approach for human rights and democratic citizenship education, it is helpful to consider the concept of 'competence' as defined by the Council of Europe's CDC Framework which is 'the ability to deploy relevant values, attitude, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by democratic and intercultural situations' (CoE, 2018, p. 32). In other words, we need the kind of human rights and democratic citizenship education that enables learners to put their knowledge, values and skills into action.

In fact, one might go further still and suggest that the cultivation of habits and dispositions is *the central means* of developing a culture of human rights and democratic citizenship. Dispositions can be understood as features of character and behavior guided by beliefs, attitudes and values. Katz (1995) notes that dispositions are usually understood as habits of mind or tendencies to respond to certain situations in certain ways and, hence, are differentiated from skills and from a certain body of knowledge. In fact, we argue that cultivating the habits and dispositions necessary for a culture of democracy requires specific pedagogical processes. Here, we draw on John Dewey's notion of democracy as a way of life and as a form of collective deliberation, where free citizens engage in associative activities in conversation with one another in pursuit of common goals.[1] This requires that citizens develop intellectual, moral and civic capacities, dispositions and virtues. Dewey considered the purpose of education to be continuous with democracy itself and therefore aims at collective problem solving and thus for continuously collectively co-creating the communities in which we live. In the sections that follow, we will elaborate on the method of community of philosophical inquiry originally developed by Matthew Lipman (who was deeply influenced by Dewey) but reconceived as a pedagogy for democratic citizenship and human rights. We will address how it may be used to confront prejudices, discrimination, and violence as well as to address the problems of political apathy, indifference and frustration facing young people today.

Reducing violence and prejudices through the community of philosophical inquiry (CoPI)

Violence is a threat to human rights and democracy. Johan Galtung, the late Norwegian peace studies scholar, defines three types of violence including direct, structural and cultural violence. Direct violence is mostly visible and encompasses both physical and verbal violence that harm the body, the mind or the person's sense of self. Structural violence constitutes inequitable social structures that produce harms such as poverty and marginalization. Cultural violence is defined as 'the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logics, mathematics)—that can be used to justify and legitimize direct and structural violence' (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). Studies have shown that

school climate can play a role in both mitigating and reproducing violence, prejudices and discrimination (Harber, 2004; Hughes, 2020). A common approach to teaching violence reduction is by denouncing it. However, Lipman (2003) contends that '[s]ermons and lectures denouncing violence and extolling peace are all too often exercises in stereotypical thinking' (p.106). Such thinking, as pointed out by Fletcher (2020), can result in epistemic rigidity which undermines one's reasonableness.

To effectively educate *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy and, hence, to engage in the art of violence reduction requires young people to seriously engage in relational deliberative work. Instead of merely telling students that human rights, democracy or peace are values that should be upheld and that violence is to be condemned, schools ought to give young people the opportunity to learn to deliberate together, to solve problems together, and to learn to give good reasons for why they believe in and for what they wish to do. This is because societies that uphold human rights and embrace a democratic culture need not only to recognize these values but also to sustain the very social conditions that underpin them. One such social condition is having a citizenry that can intelligently and effectively engage in moral reasoning. At the same time, we want to avoid promoting one-dimensional or overly simplistic moral thinking, since it can feed into stereotyping or spread only superficial knowledge without providing students a deep enough understanding of, or an opportunity to deliberate on, the specific context in which salient moral questions emerge. We must aim for complex moral reasoning.

We contend that the pedagogic approach of CoPI is well-suited to fostering the right kind of conditions for human rights and democratic citizenship education. This approach provides the space for young people to think critically and reason together, to search for possible answers to important questions and contemplate the meaning of values such as justice, equality, peace. In so doing, students and teachers co-construct new ways of understanding themselves and their context in light of their own personal and collective thoughts, feelings and experiences. Lipman (2003) believed that if a meaningful question is asked to which the answer is unknown or controversial, the classroom discussion will likely require participants to think more and more carefully about a situation or a particular value that is being explored.[2]

In teaching for violence reduction, for example, teachers using the CoPI approach might invite students to think about a question that invites making distinctions between seemingly similar forms of behavior. Students would have the opportunity to consider under which circumstances violence should be condemned and under which it may be morally justified, citing the reasons to draw such conclusions in different cases. Similarly, if students seriously engage in deliberative inquiry and have strengthened their faculties of reasoning and judgment, they will be on the path toward noticing and possibly overcoming (or at least reducing) prejudices, logical fallacies, and any unwillingness to admit error. However, Lipman (2003) cautioned that 'the obstacles to the performance of deliberative work are latent rather than manifest' (p. 117). He further reminded us that in practicing to become more reasonable, people might not realize that 'we are overcoming some of the prejudices or intellectual vices that have normally blocked our path', and that '[b]reaking down these obstacles can be a long and a never-ending job, since no one is able to get rid of such obstacles once and for all' (Lipman, 2003, p. 117). CoPI, therefore, does not aim at ridding ourselves of our prejudices and mistakes of reasoning once and for all but it aims to help us wrestle with our own reasoning tendencies and to help improve them over time.

In order to enable the education and schooling system to facilitate reducing prejudice and violence, the curriculum and teaching practices need to also be sensitive to what is likely to be considered contested or problematic in a given society. In the learning process, if knowledge or concepts are presented as clear and settled, it will likely be rather challenging to motivate an exercise in thinking and inquiring about them. Thus, the curriculum should bring out topics or aspects of the subject matter that are unsettled and problematic in order to engage students'

critical thinking and inquiring skills. In this connection, critical human rights education scholars have suggested exploring the role of emotion as a pedagogical tool to help students deconstruct the ways in which they have learned to see, feel and act. Indeed, Zymbylas (2017) contends that adopting a pedagogy of discomfort can be a viable path to helping young people recognize the prejudices they might hold without realizing it. According to him, '[a] pedagogy of discomfort begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. By problematizing the emotional habits and routines, teachers and students can begin to identify the invisible ways in which they comply with dominant ideologies' (p. 59).

In other words, confronting the problematic and dealing with it in a spirit of collective reasonableness can enable young people to learn to be self-critical (i.e., critical of their own prejudices which they may not recognize at first, but also potentially of group prejudice). It is also expected that the curriculum and pedagogies which take the problematic or unsettled features of knowledge and societal values seriously will encourage young people to inquire together and thus learn that challenging violence and bringing about greater equality and justice requires changes not only at the individual level but also at the structural level by potentially transforming unfair social, political and economic systems and practices. This kind of education thus has an important role to play in empowering the younger generation of citizens to become change agents who understand and act to support the values of human rights and democracy. The final section discusses how CoPI can also help tackle disengagement and alienation by nurturing democratic citizenship among young people.

Addressing disengagement, alienation and nurturing democratic imagination

A problem facing young learners is their potential lack of motivation in their academic life. This situation can lead to a feeling of frustration which in turn contributes to a sense of disengagement from education. A study by Legault et al. (2006) which drew on self-determination theory indicated that the lack of motivation and disengagement among young people in the context of schools is related to four factors including 'ability beliefs', 'efforts beliefs', 'values placed on the tasks', and 'characteristics of the tasks.' The study found that among the four factors, 'values placed on the tasks' demonstrated the strongest association with students' intention to drop out. This means that if a task or the educational experience is not seen as a valuable part of students' lives or that the students do not consider the specific learning as having any meaningful benefit for them, then many of them tend to feel demotivated and ultimately quit. Similarly, when a learning task is boring, routine or irrelevant, students can become disengaged. The study also suggested that interpersonal affiliation plays a crucial role in fostering young people's motivation and engagement in academic and school life. Indeed, positive relationships and connectedness with peers are highlighted as significant for students' sense of school belonging and engagement.

Unfortunately, education—both at the school level and in higher education—is, globally, moving away from engaging students meaningfully in academic and civic life. Education policies in many countries are geared toward high-stake testing, top-down accountability measures and aim to prepare young people for a rather narrow conception of employability rather than aiming to develop deeply reflective, critical and socially engaged democratic citizens (see Walker, 2014; OECD, 2015). At the school level, when the education system overly focuses on measuring academic success through content knowledge that students perceive as being disconnected from their own lives, they may become uninterested in and frustrated with learning. A study by Cortinal et al. (2017) on school belonging in different cultures indicates that in East Asian societies, where a strong emphasis is placed on academic success, students tend to develop an individualistic attitude as they learn to compete with their peers. This results in a lower sense

of school belonging. At the university level, as higher education adopts a market and consumer mode of operation due partly to the decline in public funding (see, for example, Collini, 2012, Willetts, 2015) and partly to what Naidoo (2018) calls a 'competition fetish', more students see themselves as entitled customers (see Naidoo & Williams, 2014) who, with minimal effort, are 'owed' the services of lecturers as well as their grades and, of course, the ensuing degree (Lippmann et al., 2009). While one of us has previously argued that this marketisation results in the cultivation of epistemic vice (Forstenzer, 2018), Harward (2008) argues that the marketization and consumer model of higher education has contributed to the growing disengagement of students, who then fail to develop into intellectually and civically engaged individuals. This situation also raises a profound concern about the purpose and role of education in general and of higher education in particular (see Barnett, 2017), as a space for nurturing democratic citizenship and a site to practice individual and collective civic agency and empowerment.

The situation is linked to what can be observed at a larger societal level where social and political apathy and alienation among young people is visible across different societies. A study on political passivity among youths in eight European countries found that there is real political apathy (measured as future non-voting intentions) and a sense of alienation (i.e., feelings of powerlessness and lack of political trust from formal political institutions and processes) among young people in the European Union (Dahl, et al., 2018). However, despite this, some youth alienated from formal politics have reportedly employed unconventional ways to influence public affairs. Unconventional political participation in the study included the following activities: '[p]ainted or stuck political messages or graffiti on walls'; '[t]aken part in an occupation of a building or a public space'; and '[t]aken part in a political event where there was a physical confrontation with political opponents or with the police' (p. 289). This is also the case in Thailand, country that has experienced rising authoritarianism and political repressions and where young people have also resorted to various unconventional means to make their voices heard. Their style of activism does not reflect apathy but rather alienation and exclusion from formal political spaces. Unfortunately, the youth who participate in such alternative forms of political actions often face violence and suppression by the police (Bangkok Post, 2020a).

Minimally, what this shows is that young people would benefit from freer and more numerous spaces to voice their concerns and to express their political views. It also indicates, we believe, that political parties and people in power should engage more clearly in efforts to consider the authentic needs and aspirations of today's youth. Furthermore, we contend that young people, on the whole, will feel more engaged with both educational institutions and formal politics if they are encouraged to develop the dispositions and habits that come with collectively confronting and discussing the ethical, social and political problems that speak directly to their concerns in a self-directed manner, within at least some formal educational settings. Therefore, to empower young people, schools need to foster meaningful learning and deliberative interactions among members of their communities. To this end, we need curricula that do much more than *telling* students what democracy is in terms of institutions and processes; we need curricular experiences that *demonstrate* what democratic life is and feels like by facilitating open and honest discussions about different values, attitudes and forms of knowledge and understanding that are often overlooked by educational institutions but which are relevant for the lives of young people. We believe that these discussions are, in fact, the cornerstone of a thriving democratic and human rights culture.

The community of philosophical inquiry can help reduce and possibly even prevent a sense of apathy and alienation among the youth by supporting them in exploring the kind of people they want to become and the kind of society they want to live in. In practice, CoPI is a pedagogy which puts a group of people in conversation about a self-selected common question while embracing a willingness to come together as equals in order to inquire as well as to test out their own ideas and hypotheses through dialogue, discussion, and questioning in response to a common experience. CoPI thus fosters a space where students willingly engage in

reason-giving practices for the sake of gaining in theoretical and practical wisdom. It does this by establishing a strong norm of horizontal equality between students and teachers, where the teacher is to act as a facilitator of a discussion rather than as the deliverer of truths to the community and where students collectively develop questions and then democratically select which questions they would like to discuss. Typically, these questions emerge in reaction to a stimulus (e.g. a short text of prose, a poem, a video, a piece of art) selected either by the teacher or by some of the students. In the ensuing discussion, knowledge is pursued by participants, but such knowledge always remains fallible and open to further questioning. The authority of the discussion is not that it reveals the ultimate truth of the matter but rather that in the effort to reach the truth or discern wisdom, progress is ultimately made more likely (see Forstenzer, Demissie, Boontinand, Forthcoming).

Why should we think that there is a connection between the community of inquiry and democratic citizenship? In short, because this pedagogic practice fosters a democratic ethos. Mathew Lipman (2003) saw the community of inquiry as developing critical, creative and caring thinking, as learners learn to recognize 'the complexity and multidimensionality of human experience' (p.173) by engaging in this pedagogic practice. Fisher (2008) claims that the community of inquiry helps to 'create a moral culture, a way of thinking and acting together that cultivates virtues such as respect for others, sincerity and open-mindedness' (p.57). Makaiau (2016) directly suggests that this pedagogy helps build skills associated with democratic citizenship. There is also empirical evidence that there are non-cognitive benefits involving the development of social skills (such as self-confidence and communication) derived from engaging in this pedagogic practice (see Siddiqui et al., 2017, 2019) that are likely beneficial for engaging in democratic life.

We think that this is partially explained by the fact that focusing on building a practice of meaningful dialogue among and with students fosters a positive sense of belonging and engagement. This was evident in a recent research project which one of us (…) conducted that focused on supporting lecturers to apply the CoPI method in Thai university classrooms. One of the project participants who teaches in a provincial university that caters for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds used this approach to help students at risk of dropping out to gain confidence and become more connected with their peers. Through the process inquiry and reflection, this lecturer reported that students became more engaged and develop greater interest in learning. This finding is supported by Leng (2020) who reported on her study on adolescent learning experience through philosophical inquiry that it has helped created an intellectually safe environment in which 'students transformed their learning into an art of democracy' and became more engaged in learning while cultivating 'a sense of belongingness and connectedness in and out of the class' (p.8). Finally, we contend that the CoPI method can effectively address the risks of performativity, complexity and over intellectualization we associated with the competency-based framework because its holistic approach and focus on developing multi-dimensional thinking meaningfully connected both to the lives of students and to democratic practices over time enables fostering an organic community of thought and practice that sustains egalitarian practices of knowledge production and collective decision-making.

Conclusion

In these challenging times where human rights and democratic values appear to be threatened, we have argued that human rights and citizenship education needs to be re-imagined. We contend that civic education *about*, *through* and *for* democracy and human rights can be reconceived by placing the pedagogy of the community of philosophical inquiry at its heart. In a community of inquiry, everyone's unique contributions are welcomed and valued, while still being the object of reasonable and reasoned critique. When facilitated in the right way, participants experience a positive sense of belonging and a sense of engagement, in no small part because they experience what Marshall Ganz (2010, p. 535) calls 'YCMAD'/'You Can Make

a Difference', within the discussion by shaping the procedural as well as substantive features of the discussion. Young people are thus able to contribute authentically and to experience a space defined by reasonableness, mutual respect and appreciation for each other's contributions. In so doing, they develop the ability to think critically, creatively, caringly and collaboratively, ultimately developing epistemic, moral and civic virtues that are central to defending democracy and human rights. In these uncertain times, we need to learn to interact with others who may have different views and values in an increasingly complex, diverse, and fractious world. At the same time, there are growing problems and ethical crises that we need to face (such as climate change, the lasting impacts of the pandemic, the threat of wars, and profound wealth inequality) which require the sustained efforts of caring, reasonable and active citizens who are disposed to habitually participate in collective problem-solving practices.

Finally, it is important to remember that, for Dewey, 'the construction and maintenance of a healthy democracy did not mean adopting a preordained externally moderated "right way" to live' (Hannam & Echeverria, 2009, p. 64). To face the social, economic and political uncertainties of our times requires a new kind of educative practice—one that enables us to engage in shared ethical exploration and to think deeply, personally, collaboratively and meaningfully about important questions relating to the nature of justice, human rights, and democracy itself. Hence, education *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democracy needs to offer pedagogic experiences that empower, raise awareness, and encourage the exercise of thinking skill and the development of civic courage. Lipman's community of inquiry gives us at least one concrete pedagogic intervention that does that and it can thus potentially serve as a model for developing other pedagogic and curricular interventions that serve the same goal.

Notes

1. Dewey's (1966) account of democratic education in *Democracy and Education* is clearly a touchstone for us and for this kind of thinking more broadly.
2. This explains the focus on philosophical inquiry, since it usually deals with unresolved or complex questions.

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