

Participation in the 2018 NSW Philosothon at St Andrew's Cathedral School

7th June 2018

The Applied Philosophy class will be attending a "Philosothon" event this week, to explore the following exciting concepts. The Philosothon is not just a competition between schools. Nor is it just for students who are 'really, really smart'. The educational agenda behind Philosothons is about helping all young people to think for themselves. The Philosothon Project is co-ordinated by the Federation of Australasian Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA) and is the result of a generous grant provided by the Templeton Religion Trust. Over the next three years a variety of grant opportunities will be made available to schools to help them promote critical, collaborative and creative thinking skills by establishing new Philosothons and participating in existing ones. Other grants will be made available for academics, teachers, and schools (more details may be found on the website). The Philosothon Project prioritises the needs of remote and regional schools and schools in low socio-economic areas. SPX will join the 300 schools participating in Philosothons this year.

To think for oneself means to be able to question what you have been told and to critique ideas you see and hear. To think for oneself means challenging the views presented to you, in a considered and considerate manner. To think for oneself involves intellectual humility: not only could others be wrong about things, but *so too could I*. And, it cannot be an isolated activity; rather, it involves building upon the ideas of others, both past and present.

In the tradition of Socrates who taught people to "Know Thyself", a philosophical thinker should engage in a dialogue with others ideally face to face, in an effort to seek truth and wisdom. You can't do critical thinking alone. Drawing upon the Philosophy in Schools pedagogy of the Community of Inquiry, Philosothons allow dialogue to take place within safe educational spaces that encourage collaborative and caring engagement with others around important philosophical and ethical issues. Philosothons, like the subject of Philosophy itself, deals with course content from all academic disciplines and it is not unusual to find students drawing upon knowledge gleaned from maths, art, science, history, languages, music, geography etc. In these ways, a Philosothon encourages participants and whole school communities to develop skills in young people which are foundational, multi-disciplinary and transferable. What is meant here by transferable are skills that can be used in whatever future a young person walks into. Students are encouraged to be collaborative which involves deep listening, responsive contributions and importantly clarifying important issues for the sake of the others in the whole group. This distinguishes a Philosothon from other similar competitions such as a debate. Indeed often students and observers forget they are in a competition.

In Philosothons, there are no pre-prepared answers...no speeches....no single 'right' answer. Instead, participants involved in a Community of Inquiry must respond genuinely to the ideas of others that unfold along with the discussion. This involves coming up with creative ways of explaining one's ideas to a group of their peers, using analogies, metaphors and examples which resonate with the group to further the discussion or take it into new and interesting areas. Students are rewarded for creativity and this requires them to be able to think on their feet!

The art of questioning is foundational to philosophy, and students start the dialogue in a Philosothon by asking their own questions and hopefully end up raising many more interesting questions along the way. Thereby a Philosothon provides a unique but vital input into the educational landscape. It is so much more than just another competition.