

## Research Assessment Exercise 2020

### Impact Case Study

**University: Lingnan University**

**Unit of Assessment (UoA): 36 – Philosophy**

**Title of case study: Cultural and Educational Enrichment: Enhancing Appreciation and Understanding of Philosophy at Secondary Schools**

#### **(1) Summary of the impact**

This case study focuses on the impact of our research on the wider public culture, providing evidence of its contribution to students' and teachers' understanding and appreciation of philosophy in four Hong Kong secondary schools. This has been achieved through the dissemination of cutting-edge research in an innovative programme of secondary school lectures, and in course materials designed for the Ethics and Religious Studies program taught at local secondary schools.

Through this programme of activities, the impact has been:

- (i) the education of secondary school students and instructors through engagement with cutting-edge research;
- (ii) the provision of secondary school students and instructors with specialized expertise on topics (such as Daoism) relevant to the International Baccalaureate exam;
- (iii) the production of teaching materials and other classroom resources suitable for philosophy education in secondary schools.

#### **(2) Underpinning research**

The underpinning research for this submission was selected primarily on the basis of its relevance to the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. It was conducted by Baker, Chiu, Rowbottom, and Sauchelli, all of whom were employed by Lingnan University at the time the research was conducted.

Baker's student-focused lecture dealt with the question of whether free will and omniscience are compatible, drawing on his recent paper 'Deliberators Must Be Imperfect.' [R1] This paper presented more rigorous arguments than had previously existed for the conclusion that omniscience was incompatible with free will, and further connected this to Kant's claim that practical reasoning requires that we conceive of ourselves as free. The talk, held at West Island School for students from several different ESF schools, presented portions of this argument with implications for the nature of free will, the possibility of the existence of God, and attempts to provide a rational basis for morality. To make the material more accessible, these issues were illustrated with scenes from the famous science fiction novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. The talk connected with both the Theory of Knowledge and the Creativity, Action, and Service elements of the IB philosophy curriculum.

Chiu's student-focused workshops drew on his recent article 'Zhuangzi's Knowing-How and Skepticism'. [R2] This paper focuses on the *Zhuangzi's* critical analysis of practical knowledge. Chiu provided a discussion of the epistemological ideas of the *Zhuangzi* and connected the *Zhuangzi* to the *Daodejing* (which had been highlighted in advance by secondary school teachers as a topic that would be especially valuable to cover). The talk was relevant to the Theory of Knowledge element of the IB philosophy curriculum.

Marshall's presentation to students at the Independent Schools Foundation Academy drew on Rowbottom's textbook *Probability* [R3], which gives a novel presentation of all the major interpretations of probability and of how these might be applied in a variety of contexts (in science, social sciences, and humanities). The lecture introduced students to how to interpret probabilities, to their uses in the sciences, and to some of the paradoxes to which probabilistic reasoning can give rise. A key element was showing how thinking of probabilities in some ways can avoid committing fallacies in reasoning – this approach is unique to [R3]. The issues covered connect with the Theory of Knowledge element of the IB philosophy curriculum.

Sauchelli's course materials for Ethics and Religious Studies drew on his recently published book *Personal Identity and Applied Ethics* [R4]. This book is a sophisticated research-led introduction to the field of personal identity, covering perspectives in both Western and Asian philosophy, and the implications of different perspectives for well-known ethical problems. Sauchelli designed a detailed primer on abortion for instructors, providing summaries and discussions of the medical, ethical, and metaphysical issues relevant to the abortion debate (and is making another primer for topics in the category Sex, Companionship and Family).

### (3) References to the research

[R1] Baker, Derek (2016). "Deliberators Must Be Imperfect." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 93: 321-47.

[R2] Chiu, Wai-wai (2019). "Zhuangzi's Knowing-How and Skepticism." *Philosophy East and West* 68(4):1062-1084.

[R3] Rowbottom, Darrell (2015). *Probability*. Polity Press.

[R4] Sauchelli, Andrea (2017). *Personal Identity and Applied Ethics: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction*. Routledge.

### (4) Details of the impact

#### The Programme

In designing the lectures, we worked with local International Baccalaureate (IB) teachers to understand the ways in which our research could be tailored to their particular needs. For example, the IB teachers expressed a need for help in their instruction of the *Daodejing* and of the *Zhuangzi*'s epistemology; as a result, we organized a workshop especially designed to meet this need, focusing on the relevant research of Chiu.

The resulting Lingnan University secondary school philosophy programme consisted a series of lectures and workshops at four Hong Kong secondary schools:

- 'Spontaneity in Daoism': by Wai Wai Chiu at West Island School, 15 March 2019. Attended by 9 students and 1 secondary school teacher of philosophy.
- 'Spontaneity in Daoism': by Wai Wai Chiu at Sha Tin College, 7 March 2019. Attended by 14 students and 2 secondary school teachers of philosophy.
- 'Free Will and Fore-Knowledge': by Derek Baker, West Island School, 29 November 2019. Attended by over 50 students and 3-5 secondary school teachers of philosophy.

- ‘An Introduction to the Philosophy of Probability’: by Dan Marshall, Independent Schools Foundation Academy, 15 May 2019. Attended by over 50 students and 3-4 secondary school teachers of philosophy.

The programme also resulted in:

- Sauchelli producing new course materials on the topic of “Abortion” for the Curriculum Development Institute of the Education Bureau.

### **The Impact**

Student surveys conducted after the lectures show that the lectures were culturally enriching and educationally beneficial for the students. They demonstrate that the lectures: (a) contributed significantly to the students’ understanding of central concepts in philosophy; (b) were very successful at encouraging students to think about complex ideas in philosophy; and (c) conveyed some ideas that would impact on the lives of the students.

In response to the question, “How much did the talk contribute to your understanding of central concepts in philosophy?”, the average scores were [C1]:

- **3.9** out of 5 for Prof. Baker’s talk (with 49 students responding)
- **4.6** out of 5 for Prof. Chiu’s talk at Sha Tin College (with 14 students responding)
- **4.1** out of 5 for Prof. Chiu’s talk at West Island College (with 9 students responding)
- **3.7** out of 5 for Prof. Marshall’s talk (with 38 students responding)

Evidence also showed that the presentations successfully introduced students to philosophical ideas. Average scores in response to the question “How successful was the talk at encouraging you to think about complex ideas in philosophy?” were [C1]:

- **4.3** out of 5 for Prof. Baker’s talk (with 49 students responding)
- **4.4** out of 5 for Prof. Chiu’s talk at Sha Tin College (with 14 students responding)
- **4.2** out of 5 for Prof. Chiu’s talk at Creative Secondary School College (with 9 students responding)
- **3.8** out of 5 for Prof. Marshall’s talk (with 38 students responding)

In response to the question, “What did you like best or think was most effective about the talk?” answers included [C2]:

- “The presenter was very knowledgeable, organized, and clear in his presentation.”
- “I think the best thing about the talk was the detailed definitions and explanations of ideas in the Tao, e.g., spontaneity.”
- “The explanations were very well explained, so new concepts were easy to understand.”
- “Structure of presentation is good. Discussions and concepts are clear and contribute to greater understanding.”
- “I liked now it was very focused and all the talking points linked to the central theme of spontaneity.”
- “The explanations were very well explained, so new concepts were easy to understand.”
- “I found that giving examples was effective as it made concepts easier to understand (e.g. Slaughterhouse Five and Stone Paradox)”
- “I found the examples (e.g. Slaughterhouse Five) extremely effective in helping understand concepts. The handouts were also very useful in helping us follow the talk.”

- “The ideas were very interesting and presented some points I never thought about. It was good when he explained other philosophers’ perspectives on issues to support his argument.”
- “The different arguments and criticisms helped to put the overall view and ideas into perspective.”

Furthermore, feedback also showed that the presentations had a broader positive impact, beyond the realms of the IB. In response to the question “Did you find any of the ideas here especially interesting? Are any of them relevant to other parts of your life?”, answers included [C2]:

- “The idea that labelling/judging something devalues the spontaneity of the action is honestly very helpful for me in my personal life; helps me live in the moment and accept things as they come.”
- “Yes. I love the real life example Wai Wai provided because it helped me to make a clear connection between the text and its application and implication on daily life.”
- “I thought the political aspect was very interesting, especially when applied and compared with modern politics and political philosophy. Topic was very intriguing.”
- “I found the conflict between free will and foreknowledge really interesting. This is a topic that’s explored a lot in literature and other aspects of culture so it’s really relevant”
- “I found the subjectivity and objectivity of free will especially interesting as it’s something we rarely question in daily life outside of philosophy”

Regarding Prof Chiu’s workshop at Sha Tin college, Ms Ariana Findlay, the Head of Philosophy and Religious Studies, wrote in a letter [C3]:

- “[The] resources were exceptional and provided both staff and students with a detailed explanation of the way in which the concept of Spontaneity exists through the teachings in the Tao. ... [We] thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to talk with you in the teacher help session and the discussion was insightful.”

Ms Findlay here refers to a teacher help session, which was provided in addition to the workshop. One aim of this was to pass on knowledge to the teachers, and thereby benefit their future students.

Finally, in response to Sauchelli’s course materials:

- Mr. Cheung Fung, the chairperson of Hong Kong Association of Ethics and Religious Education, commented in an email: “The material is very useful and suitable to HKDSE ERS [Ethics and Religious Studies] syllabus. Especially, to the students with interest in critical thinking and philosophy, they’d like much [sic]. The material also includes the guideline to teachers and lesson preparation for facilitate the learning process.” [C4]
- Mr. Yip Cheong-man also agreed with Mr Cheung that “it [is] very useful in training the logical reasoning of students.” [C5] He is using the materials for trial teaching.

## (5) Sources to corroborate the impact

[C1] Quantitative results from student surveys at the four lectures.

[C2] Qualitative results from student surveys at the four lectures.

[C3] Qualitative evidence from Secondary School Educator’s letter.

[C4] Mr. Cheung Fung’s email.

[C5] Mr. Yip Cheong-man’s email.