

ISSN: 2166-2681 Print/ 2690-0408 Online
Volume 9, No. SI (2020), pp. 152-177
Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education
<http://ojed.org/jise>

Creative and Critical Thinking, and Ways to Achieve It

Michèle de Gastyne
Musique Universelle Arc-en-Ciel, France

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses creative and critical thinking across wide cultural and historical frameworks. It begins with an exploration of Socratic Dialectics in multiple contexts, highlighting the need for innovative views and investigative practices using Art and Culture. A major objective of this project is to use the Arts for finding the universal sources of culture through exploring diversity, with a particular focus on the role of Africa as the cradle of humanity and dynamic initiatives on the continent. Through collaborative advocacy and the interdisciplinary approach of Leonardo daVinci (1452-1519), relevant generalities for human rights education and humanitarian efforts, this paper contextualizes intercultural dialogue for universal equity in young people's development. The paper also explores how education influences the political development of learners. The paper then shows how humanistic and intercultural approaches to education are fostering creative and critical thinkers worldwide.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Binary, Intercultural Dialogue, Universal, Interdisciplinary, Socratic Dialectics, Civic Engagement

RAISING GENERATIONS OF INDEPENDENT THINKERS

The primary focus of the Socratic method, also known as Socratic Dialogue or Dialectic, was to allow interlocutors to think critically. But the usage of this method has to evolve to facilitate the development of critical and creative thinking in young adults. Going beyond the narrow conceptualization of the dialectic method, it has to occur within an engaged civic and intercultural setting that incorporates the Arts with their universal elements. The goal is to raise a new generation of independent thinkers and problem-solvers, who have reasoning skills to resist simplistic, binary thinking in all its forms, and who have interdisciplinary abilities to tackle serious and profoundly interconnected global problems. It goes without saying this implies the need for persons who can identify with humanity, above and beyond national interests.

This paper offers some ideas on how we can re-conceptualize the dialectic method. I start by examining the different ways scholars from diverse backgrounds operationalize the Socratic method in their work. I then propose an approach which mixes different elements from these scholars. In short, this paper is meant to propose an approach to dialogue, in education and other domains, based on the unique, and increasingly critical needs of our 21st century. The approach this paper advocates brings the wisdom gleaned from different fields that scholars for a long time considered as separate. It drew on information from intercultural studies, general education, Arts education, philosophy, and international communication.

EXPLORING DIALECTICS

Dialectic is a vehicle of philosophy for stimulating reflective thinking (John Dewey as cited in Rodgers, 2002). According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, dialectic comes from the Greek term *dialegesthai*, which means to converse or talk through (Meinwald, 1999). We learn that the principal aim of Socratic activity is to improve the soul of the interlocutors by freeing them from unrecognized errors and teaching them the spirit of inquiry. In other words, Socrates sought to nurture autonomous people of integrity who thought for themselves.

To deepen our understanding of this particular form of dialogue, it is helpful to place oneself in Socrates' linguistic context: The etymological roots of dialogue come from the Greek words *dia* and *logos*, with *Dia* signifying 'through,' and *Logos* translating as 'word' or 'meaning'

(Goulah, 2012). Therefore, dialogue is the process whereby the meaning of something is communicated through words or language. Stated another way, language is a tool born from intangibles like ideas, concepts, or feelings. Socrates understood words as being symbols.

In addition, the philosopher knew that the process of learning critical thinking could not happen in a vacuum. To aid students probe their thought processes, he believed they needed guided or rhetorical questions, engaging them in discussions in a cooperative atmosphere. These were not just debating for the sake of simply winning an argument or being 'right.' The focus was on authentic development of the student, and most importantly, that understanding would occur in stages, finally emerging from inside the students themselves.

The dialectical method also had the objective of helping Socrates' students in a metaphorical sense, 'give birth to their own soul' through profound exchanges and subsequent introspection. Birth here is a significant metaphor as it implies something difficult and painful, but which often produces profoundly gratifying results. (Collins Dictionary refers to the Socratic practice which Plato called *maieutic*, of bringing forth knowledge by a series of questions and answers. The dictionary entry explains the word's origin as the Greek word for midwifery, which comes from *maia*, meaning mother (maieutic, 2020, Collins Dictionary online).

Why is authentic Socratic dialogue painful? I suggest this is related to the difficulty of abandoning one's *à priori* or preconceived ideas. This paper suggests that precisely because of this, Socrates realized changes in perception must be gradual, and it must come from inside the individual and never imposed. Plato, Socrates' disciple, used a written form of dialogue in his famous Republic. Plato showed us how to bring readers gradually to seeing things from his perspective using the written word. As for examples of living philosopher-teachers, we could cite New York City philosophy professor Lou Marinoff who is notable for his use of dialectics in the manner he praises students' questions and his approach to a kind of directed dialogue in teaching, among other contexts. Marinoff insists that the art of posing pertinent questions for arriving at the heart of topics, is essential for becoming sincere listeners and moving dialogue in positive directions for learners (Marinoff & Ikeda, 2012, p. 26).

In other words, the kind of education model capable of nurturing autonomous, critical and creative thinkers is that which allows for authentic exchange: whether through face-to-face encounters, through literature,

poetry, music or other art forms. These educational models convey humanistic values and respect for life. Such approaches to education prioritize authentic dialogue with oneself and with others.

A good example of the kind of educational approach I am advocating is the approach taken by the members of the *Union des étudiants juifs de France* (UEJF, French Jewish Students' Union). UEJF members invited students of different faiths to join them for inter-religious exchanges. The objective for starting this forum was to help each participant find their hidden prejudices (UEJF, 2020). It is a project Socrates would have observed with great interest since it echoed the sometimes-painful process of *maieutic* giving birth to the soul or spirit, mentioned above.

MASTERS OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Masters of dialogue neither think nor communicate in a binary fashion. One example from 16th century France is the writer and former Bordeaux mayor Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). He was respected for his capacity for nuanced thinking, and detested all absolutes and extremist perspectives of that period from both Protestants and Catholics, but always looked to bridge differences. As such he was sought after by kings including his friend from youth, Henry IV. Montaigne was a listener who kept things he heard in confidence, respected his interlocuters from both sides and was a master of listening. Incredibly, his small château was never attacked throughout this period, so Montaigne's integrity and dialogue skills seem to have been appreciated (Montaigne, 2016). Montaigne also fought for justice with his plume. In his epoch, he was already criticizing inhumane French colonialism in Brazil, saying it divided generations by forcing a foreign culture and language on local populations.

In modern history, Nelson Mandela used sports as a channel for intercultural dialogue, as we see movingly in the film *Invictus*. Mandela's efforts to harmonize divisions between black and white South Africans is historic. Some well-known quotes from this film demonstrate this. An example is the moment actor Morgan Freeman, playing President Mandela, uses strong words to encourage South Africans to look deeper inside themselves, "You criticize without understanding (...) You seek only to address your own personal feelings. That is selfish thinking (...) Times change, we need to change as well" (Eastwood, 2009).

Mahatma Gandhi was also a known master of dialogue, bridging religious conflict not only with moving speeches but in one-on-one dialogues

with ordinary people, similar to Montaigne's approach. His dignity and force of character in facing authoritarian colonial British authorities is legendary. In the epic film *Gandhi*, the scene before a British judge is unforgettable: After asking Gandhi why he was not afraid, reminding him that he could crush him with one word Gandhi responds fearlessly, reminding him that India was not his home (Gandhi, 1982).

Taking two examples from the African continent, two exceptional Kenyan women, writer Grace Ogot (1930–2015) and Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai (1940-2011), had similarities to the ancient Greek philosopher in their approaches to intercultural dialogue. Wangari Maathai built a successful movement for change through a multitude of interconnections. Like Socrates, Maathai demonstrated the courage to ask hard questions. The issues she dealt with had an impact on the world, receiving the Nobel prize after having resisted years of attacks from detractors. Maathai protected ancient forests that were being razed for agriculture, producing erosion and worsening economic conditions.

In the book, *The Challenge for Africa*, Maathai reflects: "...the world's interactions with Africa are not necessarily motivated by altruism, but by the self-interest of states seeking to maximize their opportunities and minimize their costs, often at the expense of those who are not in a position to do either" (Maathai, 2009, p. 88). The Western tradition of this trend was recently brought to light using extracts of a 1950 short film by Frenchman René Vautier. *Afrique 50* was the first French anti-colonialist film, and it was banned by the government for decades because it showed footage demonstrating Maathai's above statement : In the film we see Africans toiling under harsh conditions for 50 French francs per day, to open valves or sluice gates at the Barrage of *Martala Sansanding* on the Niger River, because it was less expensive than installing and maintaining a turbine, for example (Seumboy, n.d.). Maathai also demonstrated her creative problem-solving skills when she called on the world to work together to resolve environmental problems. She argues: "Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own - indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. Recognizing that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible is an idea whose time has come" (Maathai, 2004). In her poetic manner, it appears this humanistic scientist was asking us to consider that environmental, developmental and security problems are

dissociable, indicating the interconnectedness of Life in its diverse forms with all human activity.

This engaged, tree-planting pioneer did not give in to pressure from opponents. On the contrary, her focus was scientific evidence on the effects of deforestation. Yet she lost neither her creativity nor her humanity, as is seen in her slogan “Harambee” which is Swahili for let's all pull together. I believe this creative element, this “Soft Power” approach, could inspire some people in individualistic Western cultures, which have more difficulty creating solidarity.

In her own way, Grace Ogot used “intercultural” dialectics to educate her readers to the intricacies of tribal life. The Rain Came is a good example. In the introduction of a method book we discover why she decided to write. While attending a 1962 African literature conference at Makerere University in neighboring Uganda, Ogot realized that no East African work was on display, which inspired her to publish. Reportedly, at that conference Ogot read aloud her story, the Year of Sacrifice, which was subsequently published in *Black Orpheus* in 1963. Finally, this story was later reworked and retitled, the Rain Came (Ogot, 2012).

We could say the short story style she used here is a form of intercultural dialogue using literature. First of all, Ogot is recounting it in English, and not Swahili or another African language, and moreover she does this through the prism of her multiple influences, which included Western ones. She masterfully connects Occidental and Kenyan Luo cultural elements, through the tale of a young woman to be sacrificed by her tribal-chief father, under difficult conditions and according to millennia-old traditions. Ogot purposefully avoids pure logic or Western-style reason, even though she seems equally desirous of having the reader consider human-rights issues all the while experiencing empathy with the characters.

This is not easy and Ogot puts the reader in an uncomfortable position. We feel pain for the heroine Ogot and intense concern up to the moment she is delivered by the man she loves. But Ogot gives us the bigger picture so we understand the context, the agony of a grieving father conflicted with his responsibility to protect his people and his responsibility to his daughter. It is as if Ogot is asking us to not just judge him but to understand his standpoint, while simultaneously inviting us to reflect on an unjust predicament. This paper advances the idea such intercultural dialogue is needed for critical thinking, in literary and other contexts of our globalized and multicultural society. In her case, Ogot offers a critical-thinking approach

through short-story writing, while creating a creative bridge between vastly differing worldviews.

NORTON'S APPROACH TO DIALECTICS

As for the Socratic Method, among experts there exist different explanations of the Dialectics approach. I prefer that of the late philosopher Professor David L. Norton (1930-1995). Norton argued that 17th century Western philosophers diluted the original Greek approach to ethics, moral development and personal responsibility, which has led to the current decline of moral integrity in the West, particularly the United States. According to his writing and speeches, this is what has led to corruption in finance, business and government, the crises in business and industrial competitiveness, and most fundamentally, the crisis in education.

To explain this, Norton used the expression 'self-actualization' which was his translation of the Greek pagan word *daemon*, referring to the concept that everyone possesses their own innate, unique potential excellence. He believed that excellence is actualized through the process of discovering oneself and one's inherently 'right work,' used in the broadest sense to mean self-development in society (de Gastyne, 1990).

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY, PERRY'S SCHEME

In the world of North American educational philosophers on critical thinking, it might be interesting to note the work of two writers, even though they did not spend significant time on the use of the Arts, or the discussion of intercultural dialogue. These men would be William G. Perry (1913-1998), and Benjamin Bloom (1913-1999) and his team, who created Bloom's Taxonomy, whose ideas still provide an interesting backdrop to our discussion here. This is particularly true as pertains to what I noted above as 'binary thinking,' which is sometimes called 'dualism' and the importance of civic engagement.

To start with, in Perry's so-called Scheme of Intellectual Development, critical thinking was meant to anticipate various stages of students' intellectual development, to respond in helping them become critical thinkers. As well, it is intended to give perspective to teachers frustrated by students who resist nuanced ways of thinking.

His four basic stages were described as Dualism (black and white thinking) ; Multiplicity (everything is grey) ; Relativism (everything has a

context) ; and Commitment in Relativism (the acceptance that our knowledge has an impact on our “moral being”) (Perry, 2008).

Regarding Benjamin Bloom and his educator’s committee that devised what was subsequently known as Bloom’s Taxonomy in 1956, they used 6 levels of activity : Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create (or Synthesize). Subsequently he developed the following 6 corresponding steps : Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation.

An applied example follows :

Thesis Statement - *Why was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. ’s, “I Have a Dream” speech so important to our nation?*

Evaluation – How would Martin Luther King react to our current state?

Synthesis - Construct an outline of what this country would look like without racism.

Analysis – What would Dr. King have accomplished if he were still alive?

Application – How can you help turn Martin Luther King Jr. ’s vision into a reality?

Comprehension – Why did Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. make this great speech?

Knowledge - In what year did King make his great speech “I Have a Dream”? Name three things in the speech that stand out to you? (Bloom, 2001).

PERRY/DEWEY – CRITICAL THINKING GOES WITH ENGAGEMENT

Building on the above concepts, our paper suggests going farther with critical thinking approaches by adding the element of engagement and the use of the Arts. Vermont-born John Dewey, psychologist, philosopher and education reformer born in the mid-19th century did this, and he was one of the most prominent thinkers of his day. We believe Dewey’s ideas on critical and creative thinking absolutely retain their importance.

According to Vucina Zoric (2015) at the University of Montenegro, here is what Dewey felt about active engagement in the world outside the classroom and civic engagement:

The starting point of this paper is the fact that Dewey's concept of citizenship education was one of the most

important in this period, as well as the fact that its influence on the development of educational theory and practice and beyond is still present. The study is aimed at examining the substance of Dewey's basic ideas of civic education and within it the attitudes towards national identity, society and state... We conclude that the role of civic education was indispensable and fundamental when it comes to the development of Dewey's view of the individual, society, state, democracy and education, and that impact of the two was reciprocal (Zoric, 2015).

As we have seen above, William Perry was not far from this line of thinking, and went as far as to put engagement as number 4 in his Scheme : Commitment in Relativism, insisting that our knowledge is not isolated, in that it has an impact on our moral being (Perry, 2020). For reasons demonstrated above, one of our objectives in this paper is to show how using the Arts and intercultural elements -- and what we define as humanistic education-- are also closely related to civic education. Some examples follow near the end of this paper.

OBSTACLES TO CRITICAL THINKING

As David Norton indicates in the earlier citation, a problem found in many modern societies is that individuals are limited instead of being empowered by education. In addition, this paper suggests limitations can be caused by traumatic life experiences, which educators need to perceive. Such traumas could be linked to political and social climates and passed throughout generations. Consequently, thinking patterns can result from inheriting conceptualizations and traumas.

A book by Franco-Algerian psychoanalyst Karima Lazali titled *La trauma colonial* (Lazali, 2018), demonstrates this. The author shows -- through multiple examples using Algerian and Franco-Algerian literary/historical sources -- the difficulty of breaking generations of ingrained experiences, such as a violent colonial one. And once again we see the power of Art and Culture: the lack of published psychoanalytic research in the Franco-Algerian context pushed the author to use a literary context, which ended up adding depth to her work.

DANGERS OF BINARY THINKING

Digging deeper into the challenges of developing true critical thinking we discover its opposite: We would submit this to be “binary thinking,” such as what we saw in Perry’s Scheme as his lowest level of cognitive development. A “binary perception” is the tendency to perceive ideas and people in polarities: Right vs. Wrong, Us vs. Them, Black vs. White ...without the myriad nuanced shades in-between. In comparison as we have seen, critical thinking is open to learning, flexible and courageous, and not the easier path.

Blind adoration of role models, past or present, is a major pitfall of binary thought. This is increasingly perilous because of what we now call Fake News. Common sense dictates no human being is foul-proof or 100 percent in the right (a result of binary thinking). Yet it is common to put personages on pedestals and lose critical thinking skills, perhaps from a human desire to believe someone will ‘save’ Humanity from crises, for example.

A modern example of binary logic and discourse on a large scale, is the now-well-known quote by former US President G.W. Bush, “you’re either with us, or against us,” when he launched his anti-terrorism campaign after the September 11, 2001 attacks and subsequent Iraq invasion. To underline the message Bush added at the time, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001).

After it was proven in 2007 that what Bush called ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ to justify this intervention was a lie created by the CIA, he publicly admitted it was an error. But the damage had been done to this land of ancient civilizations which is still now steeped in violence and insecurity, as is Afghanistan. Most tragically is the loss of many lives, most of whom were civilians.

This paper argues that such binary Western discourse and Hard Power approaches put Muslims on the defensive world-wide, as well as alienated those not in agreement with U.S. military interventionist approaches. Consequently, the resulting increase in antagonism fed the ranks of Islamist extremists, providing them efficient promotional tools for their recruiters. This paper posits that the 21st-century phenomenon of Daesh, the so-called Islamic State and such extremist groups, have real roots in Western errors related to binary thought and discourse.

Not limited to the U.S. of course, other examples abound and Media play a part in pitting communities against each other by insults, demonizing

and amalgamations. Exacerbated during high unemployment and when resources are scarce, such a scenario is also seen in Beatrice Uwambaje's book on the Rwandan civil war, *La silence des collines* (Uwambaje, 2019), as well as in writings by Harvard University Turkish cultural anthropologist Prof. Nur Yalman, when he speaks of carnage in the former Yugoslavia (Yalman & Ikeda, 2009). Other examples can be found in *Fear of Small Numbers*, by NY University's Arjun Appadurai, who was born in Bombay in 1949 (Appadurai, 2006).

An additional book regarding simplistic, binary-style definitions is *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, by Amin Maalouf (Maalouf, 2000), with a newer translation titled *On Identity*. A few years before the September 11 Twin Tower attacks, Maalouf writes he stopped smiling when people asked him if he felt more French, or more Lebanese. He had finally realized, he said, that this **either/or** question was dangerous because it creates division, is based on false logic, and too many people thought in this fashion. Consequently, the author who is a linguist, historian, and now member of the *Academie Française*, gives many examples in different historical and cultural contexts how people have multiple belongings. In his words:

How many times, since I left Lebanon in 1976 to live in France, have people asked me, with the best intentions in the world, whether I felt 'more French' or 'more Lebanese?' And I always give the same answer: "Both!" I say that not in the interests of fairness or balance, but because any other answer would be a lie. What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself? (Maalouf, 2000, p.1)

A few sentences later he encapsulates his definition:

Identity cannot be compartmentalized. You can't divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven't got several identities: I've got just one, made up of many components in a mixture that is unique to me, just as other people's identity is unique to them as individuals (Maalouf, 2000, p.1).

Over-simplified, polarized thinking leads to extremism in all areas, including religion, ideology and politics. By its nature it is violent as it puts ideologies above human beings in importance. – One is given up for the other.

Under these conditions such a collective tendency translates into sacrifice of human beings and Life itself, all for the sake of ideas and ideology. Additionally, profit is often behind manipulation when communities are abandoned, especially if they do not recognize the deception because they have not developed critical thinking skills...

In our globalized world of social media - with huge populations displaced because of war, poverty and environmental crises - different cultures and religions are increasingly face-to-face. The need to create viable solutions against extremisms and binary thinking is imperative. And this argument is reinforced considering purposeful manipulation by governments, secret services, and other entities wishing to destabilize communities.

LIFELONG EDUCATION APPROACHES

Yet, with determined critical-thinking habits and *life-long education systems* that support this, populations, including youth, can resist such manipulation. Lifelong learning was one of the pillars of Japanese education reformer Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's (1871-1944) *Soka* education for value creation. A book recently published in France titled *L'école sans murs – Une école de la reliance* (tentative translation: *A school without walls (is) a school that connects*), includes a compilation of academic essays reflecting Makiguchi's approach.

In his contribution to this work, Rikio Kimata from Soka University Japan focuses precisely on this aspect of Makiguchi's thought. After attacking the constant rote-learning and over-focus on absorbing knowledge without application -- in order to explain the concept of half-day schooling and half-day working in the community Kimata describes Makiguchi's motivation: A seriously worsening social situation in the 1920s (Kimata, 2019).

At that epoch, Japanese youth had difficulty integrating school and finding work. So Makiguchi insisted the school system responded in no way to the needs of the population. The obvious solution, therefore, was having learning opportunities throughout one's lifetime, with the possibility of learning early on, what constitutes life (and work) outside school for half of each school day.

In the introduction of this book, Véronique Boy from University of Paris 8 evokes the importance of learning skills for self-teaching, for a future

seeing change at an ever-rapid pace and for which we have difficulty imaging (Boy, 2019). This brings to mind the TED.com conferences of Sir Ken Robinson, such as “Do schools kill creativity?” (Robinson, 2006).

Boy’s comments on “self-teaching” also make an argument for universally-accessible and predominantly free MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) lessons. From 2019, it is encouraging to learn there are also London-based *Intellectus* video courses for all pre-university levels (Intellectus, 2020).

For my final reference from *L’ecole sans murs*, the essay touching on interculturality by Nicole Blondeau, who titles her paper “Literature as access to the world,” is also pertinent to this discussion. Here is our translation of how she begins, which introduces the intercultural-dialogue element we believe critical for education’s future: “Literature can be a window on the world, in other words a means of diversified social, cultural, historic, ecological and environmental knowledge of others and of their patrimonial anchors... All literary persons are convinced of this” (Blondeau, 2019).

As we finish this discussion on Makiguchi’s contributions, Andrew Gebert and Monte Joffe summarized them this way in 2007, indicating a free and fearless spirit ready to challenge all social assumptions and paths of facility:

His (Makiguchi’s) "radicalist" vision of the way the world should be was always balanced with a keen pragmatic awareness of how it actually was. The dynamic tension between these two aspects of his thinking -- radicalist and pragmatic -- gave rise to an approach to educational reform that was at once visionary, gradualist, and doggedly determined (Gebert & Joffe, 2007, ch.4).

I find the above definition one of the most extraordinary things about Makiguchi’s life and thought, because he was always courageous enough to challenge the status quo without compromising his convictions, but was convinced that immediate and radical change was not acceptable, nor sustainable. He sought gradual improvements, even though his ultimate goal was a total paradigm shift.

THE ARTS AS TRIGGERS AND CHANGE AGENTS: USING “FLOW”

Dewey(1934) in his paper on aesthetics and art, “*Art as Experience*,” spoke of the importance of “intuition,” and Ikeda (1989) spoke of the

Universal which he intuits through the Arts (Ikeda, 1989), and which we find complements the former. With the predominantly logical, left-hemisphere brain and the right hemisphere, which is primarily intuitive according to neuroscientists, are we not discovering that real learning must engage both sides of our cognitive capacities? Dewey, among other education philosophers, seemed to imply that purely logical parts, our ‘reasoning capacity’ or so-called ‘Cartesian’ approach, is not enough for optimal learning. Dewey wrote :

...ultimately there are but two philosophies. One of them accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities—to imagination and art. This is the philosophy of Shakespeare and Keats (Dewey, 1934, pg.34).

There exists a Left/Right Brain theory which, although greatly modified since the 1960s when first introduced by Roger W. Sperry(1913-1994), still interests neuroscientists. The general idea supposes that people who are largely dominated in their thinking by their left-brain hemispheres tend to be logical, analytical and objective, and those dominated by right-hemisphere thinking are mostly intuitive, creative, emotional, thoughtful and subjective. However, what is most important to this paper is that, according to new research, a person’s abilities are strongest when both halves of the brain work together (Peak Performance, 2020).

Would it not be true, therefore, that Albert Einstein (1879-1955)’s love of playing violin, using just one example, was important for him not only for living a satisfying life, but also in his work in physics?

Not surprisingly, Yehudi Menuhin(1916-1999), possibly the greatest violinist who has ever lived and whom Einstein once met and covered with praise, once made a comment regarding how the inherent power in music functions as a harmonizer in dialogue, building virtual bridges above otherwise irreconcilable differences in cultures.

In a 1992 published dialogue, Menuhin said that music is the oldest form of human expression which began with the voice and the need ‘to reach out to others.’... He stated then that music is one of the few fields in which there is little feuding or quarrels, apart from antagonism or competition between artists. His point was that an audience is united with musicians through empathy.... His interlocutor in this published dialogue evokes that Menuhin had previously written ‘music creates order out of chaos,’ and the

maestro agreed a “new order of peace could be produced through the solidarity of ordinary people who love music” (Menuhin & Ikeda, 1992).

As Menuhin was known to take concrete action based on his convictions, he created a project called *Multikulturelles Schulprojekt für Europe* (MUS-E) in 1993. He said the concept was to bring song and dance to schools where there was violence and prejudice. And that the result was children of many backgrounds of race, color and religion would join in singing and dancing folklore of different cultures. According to his observation, the children came to trust each other, and became more interested in school work which improved in an atmosphere of harmony. -- Menuhin’s dearest wish was that all children could start each day with song and dance in this way (Menuhin & Ikeda, 2003).

Besides social cohesion, yet another by-product of the inherent force of Music, Art and Culture is the therapeutic benefit, the popular example being the so-called “Mozart Effect” of certain music on unborn babies. But there is a growing number of other music and art therapies used in diverse situations. More examples are near the end of this paper.

We believe the importance of right-hemisphere learning could be further corroborated using the so-called “Zone” or Flow-State theory of former Chicago University professor, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (b.1934 -). This pioneering thinker emphasizes the importance of cognitive capacity closely related to intuition, because ‘flow’ is the mental state in which someone performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of “energized focus, complete absorption, and a transformation in one's sense of time” (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2001). Flow can be found therefore in the application of many activities including sports, and musical improvisation has been shown to be one of the strongest examples of achieving this optimal state.

CREATIVE THINKING

Having already noted “out of the box” creative thinking is complimentary to critical thinking, it is worth evoking one of the most creative people in all of History, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). France and Italy marked the 500th anniversary of his passing in 2019, as he died in the French town Amboise at Château Clos-Lucé as guest of King Francis I. - It seems suitable therefore to explore why Leonardo’s creativity was so exceptional.

This universal genius was engaged in almost every field, although he is primarily known for painting the Mona Lisa and for the Last Supper fresco.

Yet Leonardo also invented and played musical instruments, even composing and organizing entire musical theater performances. Additionally, he invented armaments and hydraulic machines, and novelties such as a mechanical lion to entertain his patron King Francis I. In addition, daVinci brought medical and natural sciences centuries into the future and wrote on philosophy and every imaginable subject in his *Atlantico* journal. Totally interdisciplinary, the world for Leonardo was not fragmented into separate fields of study; for him, there were no borders between them. - He used medical studies to improve his painting, for example.

Interestingly, this genius was mostly self-taught. Born in conservative 15th century Italy as the illegitimate child of a rich Italian notary and a young servant, Leonardo rose from difficult beginnings to success by staying true to himself and working constantly, following his passion to understand everything and constantly improve.

There are some who believe Leonardo is a model needed today more than ever. According to Ikeda (1994), daVinci's universality is something we need in the 21st century. This paper also suggests that more than any other point in history, Humanity now needs to re-find Leonardo's interdisciplinary approach if we are to solve our complex, interconnected and international problems.

Fortunately, inspiring modern role models do exist. There is UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue, American jazzman and technical wizard Herbie Hancock, who was awarded the Harvard University Norton Chair Prize in 2014 for creativity, for example. In the 5th 'set' of his 7 Harvard lectures, Hancock expresses a humanistic approach to music, life and creativity when he speaks of creating value every moment and staying aware of our mutual inter-relatedness (Hancock, 2014).

Additionally, when Hancock was named UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador in 2011 he created the International Jazz Day movement with this U.N. institution, now celebrated in nearly 195 countries every April 30. The year 2020 marked the first time the JazzDay All-Star concert and related workshops were to be held on the African continent, in Cape Town, South Africa. As an event promoting human dignity and intercultural dialogue -- using an art form (jazz) inspired by African cultures-- this was a milestone decision. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 confinements interfered and the result was a 'virtual JazzDay.' Nevertheless, the event was still marked by many African contributions (International Jazz Day, 2020).

ART AND CREATIVITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CAUSES

International Jazz Day brings us back to a major point of this paper: the existence of ‘engaged artists’ for developing critical and creative thinking with precise objectives regarding social justice, which are often linked to therapeutic uses. There are numerous organizations which use artistic expression in their techniques for humanitarian or human-rights causes. We believe the more they are networked with each other, the stronger their impact will be.

To name just a few : Chime for Change is run by Managing Editor Marianne Pearl, widow of Daniel Pearl the former Wall Street Journal journalist assassinated 2001 in Afghanistan. Marianne encourages storytelling and journalism for women’s empowerment in refugee camp-type environments. Marianne recounts one example : “I went to Iraq to deliver a storytelling workshop for young refugees, mostly Yazidi, who fled ISIS in Iraq. We met in Kurdistan.” At first shocked and silent, she says, the girls opened like blooming flowers day after day. Editor Pearl recently said she has done this twice since that trip, in France and in Mexico. She adds proudly that her ‘Women Bylines’ has already produced 14 films. (Pearl, 2019).

Cité Rouge by Christiane Ben Barek and Anne Coudin was a project involving disadvantaged youth in housing projects outside Paris, set to be razed by the government (Ben Barek, 2006). Ben Barek wished to give a voice to residents and simultaneously, empower them through teaching the art of writing together with her journalist colleague from Radio France.

El Sistema was founded in the 1970s in Venezuela and is now international. This music-education program with social objectives uses peer learning that ends up impacting other school subjects like History, Art and Culture, Geography, and by its very nature, community-building. Tricia Tunstall in New Jersey, USA who works with El Sistema Global, has also published books on the movement, such as *Changing Lives* and *Playing for Their Lives* (Tunstall 2012, 2016).

iMOVE Foundation – Moving Matters was founded by Nikita Shahbazi and is a non-profit using dance, creative movement and yoga for refugees and disadvantaged women and children in Syria’s neighboring countries, as well as the Netherlands. Dancing and creative movement help heal conflict-affected women and children, she believes, and enhance resilience and emotional well-being, facilitate connections within host societies and expand cultural horizons (iMOVE, 2015).

Loba / Ré-Création uses dance which leads to the healing of women raped and mutilated in a war context. These arts help victims ‘reclaim’ their bodies so they can eventually share and overcome trauma together in a supportive environment (Loba, 2020).

MUS-E – International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation was created in 1991 by Mr. Menuhin. The objective was “to remind political, cultural and educational institutions of the central place of art and creativity in any process of personal and societal development.” Menuhin’s vision was to “give a voice to the voiceless through artistic expression” (Yehudi, 2020).

Syria Music Lives, and *Global Week for Syria* were founded by Hannibal Saad, a musician and composer also involved in UNESCO’s International Jazz Day. *Global Week for Syria* is an annual Live and online event, aimed at raising awareness, creating platforms and stimulating artistic co-creations between Syrian, Arab, and local/international musicians in their host communities. The event includes over 340 musicians in over 50 locations, with a music festival, conferences, and workshops in Lebanon and the Netherlands (Saad, 2020).

Taragalte Festival, (which partners with *Playing for Change*), as well as its own school for disadvantaged children from diverse cultures, is found in southern Morocco. It is intercultural, humanistic and artistic (Taragalte, 2020).

CREATIVE DIALOGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CAUSES

To complement the above list of structures using Art and creativity for human rights-related causes, the following are four examples using creative dialogue in human rights, and/or intercultural-dialogue contexts. *Coexister*, based in Paris, was founded by Samuel Grzybowski(1992-) and proposes inter-religious activities, dialogues and voyages, by and for youth (Grzybowski, 2009). *Kindness Matters Youth Initiative* is a movement initiated by UNESCO with the Gandhi Institute, launched August (Kindness, 2019). *Soliya* appeared September 2019 in a Forbes.com article. It is an organization committed to helping individuals recognize the value of diversity and pluralism by exposing students to culturally immersive experiences, and forcing students to have ‘tough’ conversations. *Soliya* has worked with students from over 100 universities in 30 countries across the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Europe, and North America (Janjuha-Jivraj, 2018). And finally, *Youth for Human Rights* based in Santa Monica,

CA, USA, raises awareness among youth on all human rights issues around the world (Youth, 2020).

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUTH

Being conscious that the world of tomorrow depends on the young people of today, in light of the Latin expression of “*Laboramus*” (Let us work) often cited by the great English historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), and similar expressions from Leonardo da Vinci and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe(1749-1832), the research results here suggest it is necessary to have constant projects and civic engagements for leading fulfilling and creative lives. In this regard we would like to share the following suggestions:

The first would be that youth engage in existing structures like those listed above, or make their own. The U.N. initiative called United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI), an integral part of the 17 SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals movement, is another promising example of how students can connect on the international level.

The second suggestion would be to take Massive Open Online Courses. These ‘MOOCs’ are increasingly available through platforms such as some from Harvard and Columbia universities. Because of such learning opportunities often free of cost, as long as there is internet connection, *learning throughout one’s lifetime* becomes ever-more possible.

The third suggestion for youth would be watching TED or similar such conferences, debating and discussing with others or writing papers *pro* and *con*. Many subjects touching on innovative solutions for modern challenges, for example that of Sir Ken Robinson on “Changing Education Paradigms,” lend themselves to practicing critiques (Robinson, 2010).

SEEKING THE UNIVERSAL

In the abstract of this paper, I note that “seeking the universal” should be an important element for creative and critical thinking, as well as a gauge for intercultural dialogue. Because this point is by nature abstract, to demonstrate it I propose a translation of an extract from *La maladie d’Islam*, a book written in response to the New York Sept 11, 2001 Twin Towers attack by the late Franco-Tunisian intellectual Abdelwahab Meddeb (1946-2014), who wrote at that time:

(We need to have) an integration of Islamic heritage at the source of thought and creation (as much as we use the sources of Greek, Latin, Hebraic, Japanese, Chinese and Indian). It would be a supplementary gage for constituting the common

stage, which should be that of a world culture, where the products would be works of the spirit, *situated above and beyond traditions, without interrupting the dialogues between them (...)*. [emphasis added]

Mr Meddeb continues by explaining where this ‘Universal Literature’ is to be found, voicing his conviction that universal values in Art and human beings can be found in diversity itself. And what’s more, in order to recognize the universal, one must first know well one’s own traditions, languages and history. Meddeb explains:

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was already persuaded at his epoch that a universal literature (*Weltliteratur*) was in the process of being born, and further, that it was necessary to hasten its arrival. Along this line, he reflected on the relationship between the particular and the universal. (He quotes Goethe): “It is in each particularity where the universal shines... It is necessary to learn to know the particularities of each language and each nation, because it is by these that the exchange operates and is realized in all its magnitude. In this way, we will arrive at a conciliation and at a reciprocal appreciation... (Meddeb, 2002, p.205).

Along similar lines, Ikeda notes that in an early scene of his *Faust*, Goethe (1749-1832) has his protagonist rapturously declare, ‘into the whole how all things blend, each in the other working, living.’ Ikeda says that if we accept this marvelous statement of the interconnection of all living things, then Art becomes the primary modality through which humans discover their bonds with humans, humanity with nature, and humanity with the universe (Ikeda, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Returning to Socrates and a number of persons cited in this paper, these are not dogmatic individuals but people who have seen themselves as living inside a community of human beings, rather than inside abstract truths. On the other hand, binary (black vs. white) thinking and discourse inevitably creates animosity and violence, and breaks communities.

Nevertheless, my solid conviction is that through humanistic value-creating education with a powerful focus on the arts, there is the possibility of nurturing individuals such as the critical thinkers mentioned here in this

paper. Moreover, we posit that Africa is a vastly untapped, infinite source of inspiration for the entire planet.

In a published dialogue between SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock titled *Reaching Beyond* in Africa on the Rise, Chapter 9, Dr. Ikeda says that Africa is the spiritual home of jazz and the cradle of humanity, declaring the 21st century as the Century of Africa and promoting increased exchanges with the continent. He goes as far as to say the 21st century cannot prosper if humanity's place of origin does not. Insisting that those who suffer the greatest deserve the greatest happiness (Ikeda et al., 2017).

Because of the existence of recent, powerful initiatives related to the continent, such as the Abidjan Principles for education, officially announced on the Ivory Coast in 2019, the new cycle of the U.N. Human Rights education initiatives (Human Rights Education HRE 2020) and SDG awareness activities with dynamic African youth leading the discussions, as well as this year's UNESCO's JazzDay initiatives in South Africa, this paper suggests African youth have a unique role to lead Humanity to a more just and peaceful world in the areas of education and critical thinking.

As for the role of artists and critical thinking everywhere, not long after the 2015 terrorist attacks in the Paris concert hall *BATACLAN*, Herbie Hancock and fellow musician Wayne Shorter penned *Open Letter to the Next Generation of Artists*. Their ten points exude a will that young artists stay confident and fiercely independent in their thinking. Their concluding point shares advice on how to be creative:

...As we accumulate years, parts of our imagination tend to dull. Whether from sadness, prolonged struggle, or social conditioning, somewhere along the way people forget how to tap into the inherent magic that exists within our minds. Don't let that part of your imagination fade away.

... All that exists is a product of someone's imagination; treasure and nurture yours and you'll always find yourself on the precipice of discovery... Be the leaders in the movie of your life. You are the director, producer, and actor. Be bold and tirelessly compassionate as you dance through the voyage that is this lifetime (Hancock & Shorter, 2016).

To conclude, the following extract from a poem written by Soka University founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda after the 1990 Los Angeles race riots

of 1991, could provide inspiration for intercultural dialogue thanks to its universality. Ikeda (1993) notes:

As each group seeks its separate roots and origins society fractures along a thousand fissure lines. When neighbors distance themselves from neighbors, continue your uncompromising quest for your truer roots in the deepest regions of your life. Seek out the primordial roots of humankind (Ikeda, 1993).

He uses the metaphor of roots as if to describe each human being as a kind of tree, which we can imagine with infinitely different shapes, colors and sizes. But Ikeda also sees profound roots at the source of these human trees which are invisible but connected, pushing up from the virtual 'Earth' of humankind. It is these roots he urges us to find.

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MICHÈLE DE GASTYNE is the president of *Musique Universelle Arc-en-Ciel*. The association uses music and the Arts, in the framework of human rights and intercultural dialogue, through various events including conferences, festivals and concerts. Email: mdegastyne@sfr.fr

Manuscript submitted: January 29, 2020

Manuscript revised: July 26, 2020

Accepted for publication: August 10, 2020