

***Media Education as Critical Education across the Curriculum:
Towards a Cross-border Pedagogy?¹***

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**1. Instead of an Introduction:
Performing a dialogical game**

Performers: Two educators

***Ed.1:* Hello, I heard you are teaching Media Education (M.E.) in secondary schools.**

***Ed.2:* Hi, that's right! And you are a consultant to the Minister of Education, which means you are a professor in tertiary education, if I am not mistaken?**

***Ed.1:* Yes, that's right too. Can you tell me what it is that you do when teaching M.E please?**

***Ed.2:* I teach students how to use the camera and the video, to analyze TV ads, soap operas, news, etc.**

***Ed.1:* I wonder what your aims are when you teach this subject. Can you tell me?**

***Ed.2:* Well, first of all, my aim is to teach students how to read TV and media texts critically and thus not be influenced so much by the media. Then, I must admit, I myself like to use technology and do something different. Finally, I think that, as a M.E. practitioner, I protect others.**

***Ed.1:* Have you ever thought that you might like to be part of the media-heroes, the media mythology and because perhaps you are not able to be a 'hero', you have undertaken a role of an anti-hero who now wants to protect others?**

***Ed.2:* Listen! I am not a psychologist! I am just a media practitioner. I only deal with the media.**

***Ed.1:* Of course you are not a psychologist! But as a teacher are you not interested in who the students are as persons, as identities, as selves?**

¹ Δημοσιεύεται στο: Kosmidou-Hardy Chr. (2002), "Iconic Communication Today and the Role of Media Education", in A. Hart and D. Suss (eds), *Media Education in European Countries: A Comparative Study of Teaching Media in Mother Tongue Education in Secondary Schools*. Zurich: E-Collection of Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich.

Βλ. και Kosmidou-Hardy, Chr. and Hardy, Rus. (2006), *EICON (Education in Information and Communication through Original Networks*. Athens: Format.

Aren't you interested in who they think they are, what their values are and how these and their perceptions shape their identities and the way they look at the world, at reality, at media texts?

Ed.2: I help them analyze values in general, but I wouldn't say that I have been interested in the students as personalities. And why should I be interested in an issue like this?

Ed.1: Well, first of all, because you are an educator. Education means 'formation'. Formation of human subjects; of persons and not of objects which are there to be filled with subject matter! *In*-formation as education is also important because it *forms* individuals, realities and the world. Second, I think that you should be interested because you are supposed to promote critical reading of texts through M.E..

Ed.2: Yes, of texts, not of selves!

Ed.1: But the person *is* a text! A complicated text. So you need to support students first to deconstruct their own personal texts; the texts of their identities: that is, the texts of their self-concepts which influence perception, ways of seeing and ways of reading other texts or messages with which they interact.

Ed.2: Oh! Is that why they say that communication is a *social interaction through messages*?

Ed.1: Of course! So the reader of texts interacts with the text: that is, she or he is not just a passive receiver, but accepts or rejects meanings according to the values s/he has acquired through culture; values about what is true or false, right or wrong, normal or abnormal, ethical or unethical, beautiful or ugly.

Ed.2: You mean that s/he reads texts actively according to who s/he is and, therefore, that we need to help students know themselves so that they can better understand the world of images transmitted through the media? You mean then that what Socrates said, that is the well-known "know thyself", can be promoted through education?

Ed.1: Of course! Don't forget that Socrates *was* an educator. A real educator! Not a technician and not just a Sophist who wanted to impress those who did not have his knowledge. He wanted, instead, to lead students find the knowledge they had inside themselves. Self-knowledge was what people had to discover; self-awareness they had to acquire.

Ed.2: But, isn't this something very difficult? Self-awareness, critical thinking! Do you know how much work all that means? What are you suggesting to me? Aren't you perhaps an arrogant theorist who thinks

that things in practice are so easy? After all, practical things don't require theory. Leave me alone please. You and your theories!

Ed.1: Listen! First of all, practical things do require theory because theory and practice are dialectically related. But try not to stay entrapped in the logic of ease. After all, what seems to be easy finally blocks your road to understand things in any deeper sense. Ease perpetuates the problem, because it focuses on the shiny surface and fails to reach the core. It deals with just the tree, and misses the forest. It emphasizes the part and misses the whole. Yet, in this way, the easy in the end becomes hard, because it doesn't do away with the problem. It self-limits you.

Ed.2: Oh, O.K. but I don't think I can cope with difficult things. After all, I feel tired! The "digging" is deep and I've only got one life to live.

Ed.1: One life to live?! Nice phrase! A key-phrase! That's exactly why I'm suggesting to you the promotion of self-awareness through education.

Ed.2: But other teachers, colleagues, just teach the subject matter too. How can I do all that on my own? I'm so alone!

Ed.1: First of all, the road to self-awareness *is* a lonely one. It requires solitude. But it lacks the depression of loneliness. You slowly discover your very best friend: that is, yourself. You don't get alienated from yourself. But self-awareness and love for yourself does not mean narcissism. True self-awareness definitely leads you to care for others as well: to accept them, to communicate and to cooperate with them for the creation of wider connections: wider unities. And this, according to our friend Freud, means *eros*. *Eros* for life, for being open to things that are different, for communication, for cooperation. Closing up in one's self, due to fear or insecurity, leads to alienation, to lack of communication and renewal, to decadence. And this is a form of death or *thanatos*. I think it's time for you to open the door of your heart and your mind. Time to listen to yourself, communicate with yourself and also reach out to the teacher in the next classroom.

Ed.2: "Self-awareness, communication, cooperation, love, *eros* ...", let's just say that you've convinced me. Let's just say, hypothetically! Don't get encouraged here! I'm just hypothesizing. Will the others accept it though? They'll surely think that this is all crazy. I'm afraid they won't want to.

Ed.1: It is important to face just what we fear with courage. It might be the only outlet from the dead-end of fear. The more you wrap yourself in fear, the more it dominates you; it fights you, and so much the more

will you fear and trap yourself. You won't be liberated. Take the first step. And then you will see that the teacher in the next classroom probably has the same fears. Reach out. Give her or him the message. And you might be surprised when you slowly discover a whole circle of people just like you around you. And then you might decide to break the vicious circle of ease.

Ed.2: It sounds rather good but very difficult.

Ed.1: Well, as I said, the most difficult thing is the 'logic' of what seems to be easy because it blurs your sight; it blocks your vision; you live in a hazy 'oneiric' climate; you live in the kind of cave Plato, another important educator, referred to ages ago. You thus see 'shadows' of things and you don't aspire to any deeper knowledge.

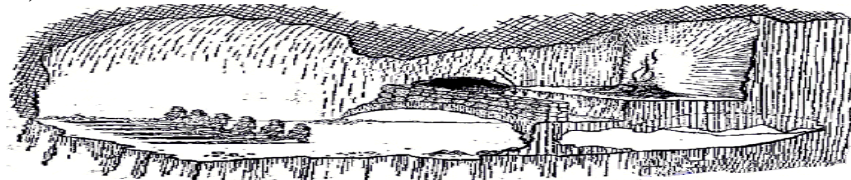
Ed.2: Plato? Cave? 'Shadows'? What do you mean?

Ed.1: Well, listen to what Socrates is saying in Plato's Republic:

"Socrates: And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: Behold! human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets".

Glaucon: You have shown me a strange image and they are strange prisoners.

*Socrates: Like ourselves, ... and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave" (Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave", *The Republic*, Book VII, also Plato, 1984)*



Source: *Storm's Journal*, Internet

Ed.2: And what does all this have to do with the media and ourselves then?

Ed.1: Well, in a way, we may be 'prisoners' of the media due to the manipulation of an elite which has power over the media. Thus our

minds make our chains through the false images cast by this elite. So, on the ‘wall’, or the screen of TV, we can see “marionette players”, just the ‘shadows’ of events, of the reality represented to us by those who have access to the real world, outside the ‘cave’, whereas they block our vision, our own ability to see the ‘light’ which is outside the cave.

Ed.2: What can we do then?

Ed.1: In a way, education means turning our vision and soul in the direction of the light that deeper knowledge can offer us, becoming conscious of and freeing ourselves from the ‘passions’ of stereotypes and limited perception.

Ed.2: And do you think we can manage something like that? Is there any possibility?

Ed.1: I think there is! But, in order to manage this, I suggest that we need to undertake a process of *self awareness* as well as *social awareness*. We need to base education in general and Media Education in particular on a holistic, critical model and thus free ourselves from the ‘bonds’ of fragmented methods and tools.

Ed.1: Do you really think so? Do you think that's the way it may be?

2. Towards a Cross-border Pedagogy?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I tried to introduce you into the suggestions of this paper through a performance, because *performance* and not the transmission and reception of messages is regarded to be *the most important element* in Communication Studies. Since the '60s, the term performance has not just been used in the context of traditional theatre but is also used to describe a variety of activities (Diamond, 1996). Performance is thus used in order to describe an enormous range of cultural activity such as: popular enjoyment, speech acts, anthropology, political demonstrations, people's behaviour at conferences and meetings, daily rituals, as well as practices used by a community in order to initiate its members into a particular culture and influence the way in which they construe their selves, their experience and the world.

In the conclusion of the performance presented earlier on we referred to the need for M.E. to be based on a model of critical education: an education that promotes *self and social awareness*. But what does self awareness mean? In our approach, a self-awareness process means that we first of all explore our internal, personal 'cave'. In this way we can initially become aware of ourselves: of our positive and negative aspects, values, attitudes, stereotypes, etc. It also means that the human being, as a dynamic and complex entity, is able to undertake a process of *holistic and lifelong* development and thus move closer to the 'light' of Plato's allegory. This development is necessary for helping us cope with the uncertainty of our times due to changes in external reality and for facing effectively transitions in life.

What is also necessary for healthy and dynamic transitions today is *critical social awareness*. This awareness can promote a stance for actively searching our external 'cave'; for *critically reading* information texts of any form –iconic, verbal or non-verbal-, for organizing information and for being able to apply it in different contexts. It can also promote a stance towards our awareness for the *broader social context* in which we are situated or 'thrown' (Heidegger, 1962) and which influences our decisions and transitions. Broader awareness of our socio-economic, cultural and time-space globalised environment increases our possibility to prepare more

timely and effectively for our synchronization with it, developing our potential in a flexible and polymorphous way. Finally, the development of critical *social awareness* promotes the development of *self awareness* and vice versa, because the relationship between *self and social awareness is dialectic* (diagram 1).

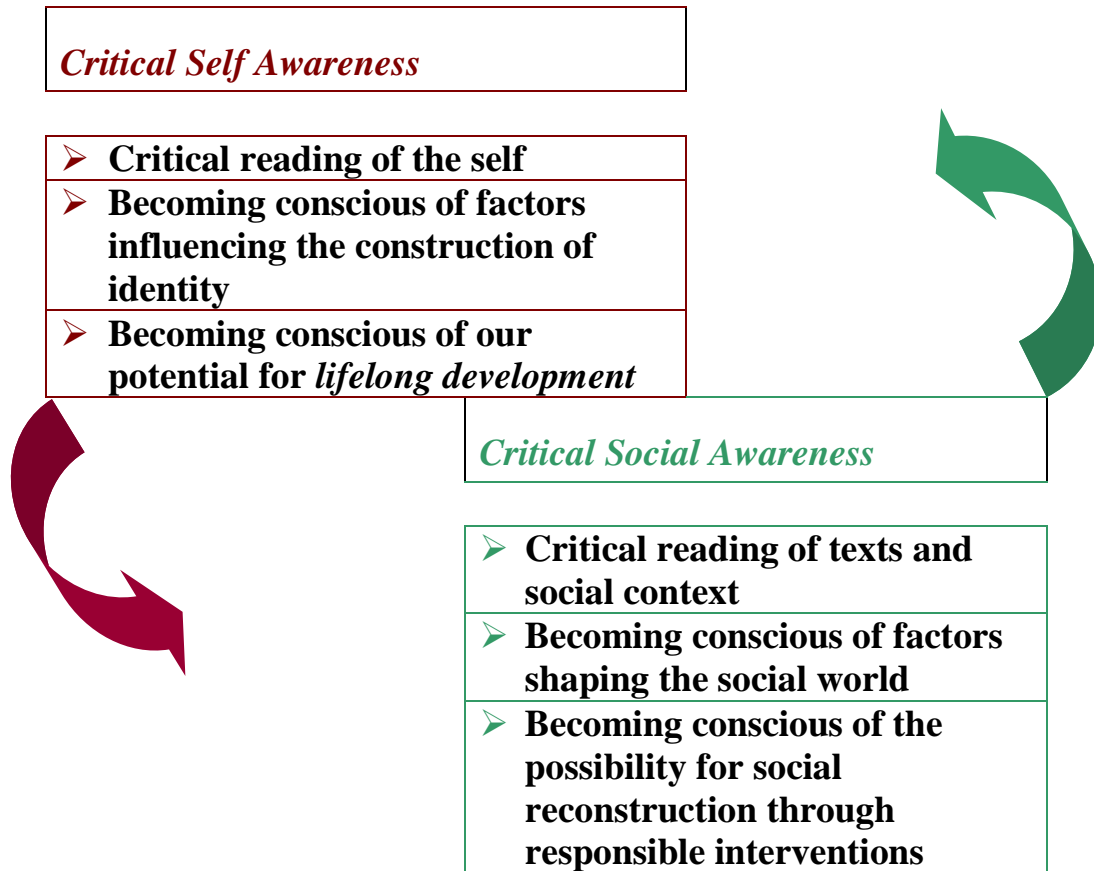


Diagram 1.

The key-aims, to which we referred above only in summary, are recognized today as important educational aims in the context of the *Common European Framework of Reference* related to curriculum development, as well as internationally. The critical education model suggested in this paper as a basis for M.E. also recognizes and promotes these very aims. Below (diagram 2) basic parameters of this model, are briefly presented.

A Model of Critical Education

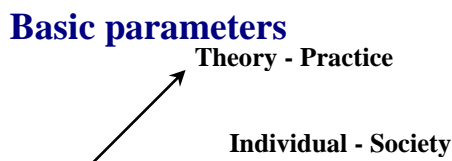




Diagram 2.

According to the critical model of education we have developed²:

- 1) **The teacher, as a professional, needs to recognize the *dialectic relationship between theory and praxis*. This means that s/he needs to become conscious of her/his *personal theory*, look at it critically and enrich it in an interdisciplinary way. It also means that s/he critically analyzes the educational praxis in which s/he is involved with the attempt to enrich and revise the teaching practice through critical and responsible interventions.**
- 2) **S/he needs to become conscious in particular of her/his view concerning the *individual - society nexus*, analyze it critically and promote a dialectical relationship between the two. In this way s/he can recognize that, on the one hand, individuals are defined by the influence of external, social factors. On the other hand, however, what s/he can also recognize is the fact that they have the possibility to influence the construction of the social *milieu* through responsible interventions when they are in a process of *critical self and social awareness*.**
- 3) **The teacher as a professional also needs to use *experiential learning* critically (Kosmidou and Usher 1992). The careful and critical use of experiential learning can contribute to the promotion of personal development and person / learner centred approach to teaching, a basic aim of which is the person's empowerment and the personal development of students who can experience a situation *consciously*, be actively involved in it and analyze it critically in the safe environment of the school classroom.**
- 4) **Finally, the teacher needs to follow an *interdisciplinary approach to teaching*.**

According to our research, the majority of teachers seems to approach teaching as *technology*³ some basic characteristics of which are: *the emphasis on methods / techniques, subject matter and external behaviour*.

² Analytically presented in Kosmidou 1991, Kosmidou-Hardy 1999, 2000b.

³ See also Elliott, 1991.

In the context of our suggested critical model of education, without devaluing the usefulness of technology in the teaching / learning situation, we promote the idea of *teaching as moral practice*. In this approach to teaching emphasis is given to the teacher and student as persons, to their self and social awareness and development.

For the development of self and social awareness, an interdisciplinary approach is needed. The disciplines which are of particular importance in this approach are *Counselling*, *Communication*, and *Research* and to these we will briefly refer below.

Counselling: The teacher as counsellor. The teacher, as the students' *significant other*, can and should encourage and support them in their attempt to know themselves better and to proceed to a creative lifelong process of development. In such a process the students' support to develop a positive self-concept is important both, for their personal development, as well as for reading texts critically. A positive self-concept leads to a higher self-esteem and this is a prerequisite for promoting genuine and intercultural communication too, avoiding defenses, being open to what is *other or Other* (other cultures, religions, languages) and accepting difference. The students' self-concept also plays an important role in the learning process. Research⁴ has shown the importance of the self-concept and self-esteem for academic achievement and development.

For the support of students to develop a positive self-concept, a higher self-esteem and, in general, to start a process of self awareness, the teacher as *counselor* who is congruent, without putting on masks and facades, can create the genuine and warm pedagogical relationships which are needed in the classroom and at school level. In these relationships, it is important for students to be supported in order to:

- be recognized as personalities and accepted unconditionally for what they are,
- feel their personal 'world' is understood and trusted,
- start a process of conscious exploration, recognizing and facing their multiple (not unitary) selves,
- be given the opportunity to express their values and feelings,
- increase the degree of their self acceptance and develop a higher self-esteem,
- develop a democratic individuality in relation and interdependence with others,
- become conscious of:

⁴ For example, Burns 1982, Kosmidou-Hardy 1991.

- a. *the way in which sociopolitical and cultural factors may influence the construction of the personal (identity), and*
- b. *the way in which the person may influence the construction of the social.*

Communication: The teacher as communicator. In the discussion about Counselling we referred to its contribution for the promotion of more genuine and democratic relationships. An intersubjective relationship involves communication. The pedagogical, as well as any other *encounter* is indeed a complex communicative relationship and as such it can be facilitated through knowledge about communication.

Relationships at school –and in any other social context- are a complex communication web and, therefore, what needs to be carefully studied, especially in the context of M.E., is communication, which, after all, is of particular importance in the era of information, of mass, electronic and *iconic communication* (Kosmidou-Hardy, 2002). In the context of our critical model of education a *holistic* communication approach is adopted. As we have seen in the dialogue, communication is considered to be *a social interaction through messages or texts* (Fiske 1982, Kosmidou-Hardy 1996). In this interaction the *critical reading* of information and texts is based on semeiotic analysis and promotes a *radical* deconstruction of texts. One of its aims is the uncovering of the transmitter’s intentions and the supporting of the *critical reader* to develop the knowledge and skills needed so that s/he is not influenced by the transmitter and avoids an uncritical conforming to her/his will.

Two key themes, which need to be recognized and emphasized within this approach to communication, are: *representation* and *communication as performance*. Knowledge on the former theme helps critical reading and questioning the power of those in control of the production⁵ and dissemination of texts through particular ways and techniques used for representing (thus reproducing and, to a certain extent, creating) the world for us. Knowledge on the latter helps the reader to realize that many messages are more effectively transmitted through the performances a culture uses in order to influence its members’ understandings of themselves and the world and to thus coordinate their behaviour. It can also help her or him to critically examine others’ as well as her/his own performances.

Research: The teacher as researcher and producer of knowledge through collaborative Active Research. For the systematic exploration of our

⁵ An important issue in Media Education is that of *ownership* because owners of one medium of information production and transmission usually are also owners of other powerful organizations.

internal and *external* world, for our *navigation* in today's complex societies and the world of the media, researching information and the broader social environment is fundamental. Through participation in critical *Active Research* projects the teacher as researcher can develop at a *personal and professional* level and contribute to social development as well. Finally, the undertaking of research on the part of the teacher is important for the production of knowledge which is a prerequisite for upgrading her/his position. Knowledge is connected with power (Foucault, 1980, 1982)⁶ and the teacher's involvement in knowledge production can lead to her/his empowerment. Critical deconstruction of texts and institutions presuppose our ability to systematically carry out research and be in a position to suggest our theses based on knowledge of ourselves and of the social world.

Collaborative, Active Research aims towards the improvement of a situation and development (personal, professional, social) through a strategic plan of action⁷. In the context of an *Active Research* project teachers can be facilitated to:

- **become conscious of their *personal theory* –or *tacit knowledge* (Polanyi, 1983)- concerning educational issues as well as issues to do with human nature and society,**
- **explore their own as well as their students' needs and help them to become clear of their expectations as well as of their own 'personal theories', values and stereotypes,**
- **realize the importance of the social context in which they are acting (the classroom and school context, educational bills, decrees, etc., and the broader social context),**
- **become clear of the particular aims and objectives of the school subject which they teach as well as of the aims and methodology of the other school subjects,**
- **realize the curriculum model which best expresses their approach to education.**

As can be seen in diagram 3, in the context of our critical education model –to basic parameters of which we referred above very briefly- the epistemological fields of *Counselling, Communication and Research* are dialectically related interacting between them and can systematically promote *self and social awareness* and development.

⁶ Also Kosmidou-Hardy, 1995.

⁷ Analytically presented in Kosmidou 1989, Kosmidou-Hardy and Marmarinos, 2001.

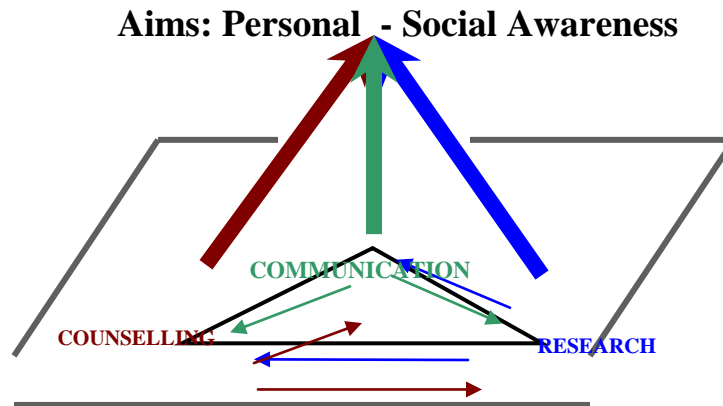


Diagram 3.

The relevance of the three epistemological fields for Media Education practitioners seems to be quite obvious. The field of *communication* is, of course, more clearly linked to Media Education as a subject. The reflective practitioner of M.E., who is not suffering from a ‘craze’ for technology and does not adopt a linear communication model, certainly needs to adopt a holistic and critical model such as the one which has been described above.

With regard to *Counseling*, it is certainly a field of knowledge which can support the teacher promote *self awareness*, so important for reading texts critically. The M.E. practitioner, therefore, needs to develop her/his knowledge concerning *the person* who is involved in communication and *Counseling* can facilitate such knowledge.

Finally, with regard to *Research*, the teacher as a reflective practitioner recognizes the link between teaching and research. The M.E. practitioner in particular needs to recognize the fact that analyzing images and producing alternative texts through creative practice should be organized systematically as a project where practitioners and students *plan, implement, observe and evaluate, reflect and produce knowledge and theory*.

3. Instead of an Epilogue

Media Education as critical education can be promoted across the curriculum as a '*cross-border*' pedagogy and not be confined on the border of the school curriculum or within the limits of a 'frozen syllabus' (Spriggs, 1972, p.222). M.E. as a *cross-border pedagogy* can be embraced widely by teachers and students, since its 'subject matter' is the media, which is our '*significant other*' and is so powerful nowadays.

In Plato's allegory to which we referred earlier on, the 'shadows' of the idols of things and beings on the screen which the 'prisoners' in the cave are able to see, can be compared with the 'idols' or the images projected by the media to the 'prisoners' of our new times. These images do not exactly reflect or represent reality. They are rather its shadowy distortions produced by the centers which, owning the media, have the economic and political power to shape identities, reality, democracy and the world.

It seems then that, for the new 'prisoners' to break their chains and bonds and be guided towards the 'light' where they can see and understand the essence of things, the hidden messages of the media and the interests of the centers which transmit them, new teachers like Socrates are needed: teachers who are themselves characterized by *self and social awareness*; teachers who can go beyond the technicalities, beyond the 'grammar' and 'syntax' of media technology; teachers who can support students and citizens at large to understand their stereotypes, attitudes and values, to learn to know themselves better and to read critically what is going on in the world of the media, as well as in the surrounding and globalizing world.

Such teachers, as active citizens and not as passive spectators of 'shadowy' performances and representations which others ('big brothers'?) manufacture and transmit, can promote an emancipating education based on a '*cross-border pedagogy*' and leading to a 'journey upwards' as Socrates suggests. As an *epilogue*, let us just conclude with Socrates' thoughts:

Socrates: ... the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according

to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed, whether rightly or wrongly God knows. (Plato, *ibid*)

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