

"The greatest obstacle to progress is not the absence of knowledge but the illusion of knowledge."
[Daniel Boorstin, 1914-]

Workshop Description

We live in a strange and perplexing world. Despite the explosive growth of knowledge in recent decades, we are confronted by a bewildering array of contradictory beliefs. We are told that astronomers have made great progress in understanding the universe in which we live, yet many people still believe in astrology. Science claims that the dinosaurs died out sixty-five million years ago, yet some insist that dinosaurs and human beings lived simultaneously. Apollo 11 landed on the moon in 1969, but is rumoured in some quarters that the landings were faked by NASA. A work of art is hailed as a masterpiece by some critics and dismissed as junk by others. Some people believe in capital punishment, while others dismiss it as a vestige of barbarism. Millions of people believe in God, yet atheists insist that "God is dead." Faced with so many different opinions, how are we to make sense of things and develop a coherent picture of reality?

The aim of this workshop is not to tell you what to believe, but to look at a range of tools that can help you decide for yourself. The workshop will be interactive in nature and will consist of a range of mini-lectures, case-studies, video-clips and hands-on exercises.

Topics Covered

1. **Scepticism and Gullibility** Since we inhabit a global market of competing ideas, we need to establish criteria for deciding what to believe. There are dangers not only in being too gullible, but also in being too sceptical. We perhaps need to find a balance between the two and develop an attitude of critical open-mindedness.
2. **The Psychology of Belief** This session focuses on the nature and sources of belief, and the question of whether our beliefs are determined more by reason or emotion. In particular, we consider how authority, perception, reason and intuition sometimes mislead us and result in false beliefs.
3. **Science and Pseudo-science** In this session, we look at various criteria for distinguishing between genuine and spurious science. With the aid of various case studies, we then discuss why this distinction might matter and what hangs on it.
4. **Dogmatism and Relativism** The world is increasingly divided between those who are convinced they are in possession of "the Truth" and those who believe that any opinion is as good as any other. The underlying error of both of these outlooks is to equate knowledge with certainty. Perhaps we do better to focus on cultivating good judgement.

Dr. Richard van de Lagemaat runs an educational consultancy service called *InThinking* (www.inthinking.co.uk) which promotes critical thinking skills in international schools. With twenty five years experience in international education, Richard has run workshops for schools and organizations in fifty countries. (For a list of clients and recommendations see: <http://www.inthinking.co.uk/richard-van-de-lagemaat.htm>) His book *Theory of Knowledge for the IB Diploma* published by Cambridge University Press has sold more than 20,000 copies.