

## **Douglas College Institutional Repository Report**

Michael Picard, MSc, PhD, RSATF Grant for National Debut at CHSEB of the boardgame Tug of Logic

Tug of Logic, a boardgame I created in the context of the Douglas College Critical Thinking course (Philosophy 1101), was invited to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) to be part of the first national Canadian High School Ethics Bowl (CHSEB), which took place April 24-25, 2019 in Winnipeg.

Almost 100 public high school students from across Canada (mostly Manitoba and BC) converged on the CMHR to explore the Museum, take part in a day of Ethics Games for the Mind, and to watch or compete in the CHSEB (<https://www.ethicsbowl.ca/>). The games are organized annually by the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties (MARL) along with numerous partners (<http://www.marl.mb.ca/>). Formed in 1978, MARL is a non-profit, non-governmental, human rights and civil liberties organization that works toward greater social justice through education and advocacy for human rights and civil liberties. Having adapted the US original to the Canadian context, MARL and partners have hosted an Ethics Bowl in Manitoba for a few years; 2019 marked the first national games.

At the Canadian High School Ethics Bowl, teams of Grades 9 to 12 students collaborate and compete to analyze ethical dilemmas in structured live dialogue. Teams present arguments, respond to each other, and then are interviewed by panels of judges in round robin style competition. Teams need not take different sides, but teams adjust their views in response to comments and questions. Judges later evaluate performances on criteria related to: Communication; Use of relevant information; Critical thinking; Original thinking; Intellectual improvisation; and Collaboration.

As CHSEB has grown to become a national event, it has also expanded to include an extra day of Ethical Games of the Mind. The boardgame Tug of Logic was invited to be played on this extra day, prior to the day-long Ethics Bowl itself. It was invited since it shares many of the pedagogical goals of Ethics Bowl itself. In fact, Tug of Logic was created specifically to address certain logical deficits common in student and citizen dialogue.

Cognitive biases and logical fallacies are endemic in public discourse, exacerbated recently by deteriorating trends characteristic of the post-truth age, such as the increasingly contested boundary between fake and actual news. Students in high school and lower division undergraduate courses struggle to handle basic logical distinctions between e.g. truth and validity, content and form, the acceptability vs. the sufficiency of premise sets. Without such critical distinctions, dialogue is often restricted to mere exchange of opinions, without room or recognition of the necessity for critical evaluation of argument form and evidence, nor for reaching toward common ground. Civil and democratic discourse is also often stunted in similar fashion, as is often the case with Café Philosophy and other forms of public participatory philosophy.

A competitive game of collaborative reasoning, Tug of Logic embodies certain principles and distinctions necessary to logical reasoning by spatializing them on the game board. Developed in the context of first-year critical thinking courses at Douglas College, it has since been adopted in Vancouver area high schools as well. The game requires each player to write down reasons for or against a specified controversial statement and then, through facilitated dialogue, to each in turn seek support for his or her stated reason from all other players, who show where they stand by placing their game-piece in designated areas on the board. This transparency defines the persuasive problem and initiates an inquiry into unstated premises in an effort to build a logically sufficient case. Players, even junior high school students, intuitively grasp abstract distinctions between form

and content, premise and conclusion, acceptability of assumptions and logical sufficiency. At these levels, the game requires initial facilitation by those with greater logical acumen, making the game suitable for teacher training.

The Collaborative, a partner of MARL working to make CHSEB more of a national event in future (by staging provincial Ethics Bowls prior to the national event), has recognized this potential teacher-training application of Tug of Logic, and has adopted the game. The Collaborative

“is an international, SSHRC-funded network that seeks to provide educators from all sectors with opportunities to engage, create and increase their capacity to demonstrate and communicate the value of conceptual tools associated with Humanities, Liberal Arts and Social Sciences: critical thinking, information literacy, deliberative reasoning, citizenship, creativity, empathy, etc. The Collaborative leverages the creation of person-to-person connections between educators teaching in elementary and secondary school and those working in post-secondary education to involve them in co-creation activities that take into account educators’ limited time and resources.”  
(<http://www.yourcollaborative.org/>)

The Collaborative has proposed to adopt Tug of Logic as a teaching tool in their effort to integrate education across high school and university levels. High school graduates are perpetually under-prepared for the changing demands in university education. The Collaborative is working to correct that by involving graduate and upper-level undergraduates students in teacher training. For example, they are helping to organize philosophy graduate students across Canada prepare schools and teachers for the CHSEB. The Collaborative has now adopted Tug of Logic as a training tool for a similar purpose, so that in the coming years philosophy students will be helping teachers to learn the elementary logical theory that explains how to facilitate the game.

These promising developments concerning Tug of Logic came about because of the national exposure the game received under this RSATF grant. Moreover, the adoption of the game by the Collaborative prompted a research grant application to BCcampus Education Technology Fellowship to develop a web app version of Tug of Logic. The plan is to use focus groups of the students and teachers to develop the product, and Internet-mediate, live-facilitated collaborative game of competitive persuasion. The national exposure of Tug of Logic has also led to the game being invited to New York City by City College of New York Philosophy Professor, Lou Marinoff, author of *Plato Not Prozac*, and President of the American Philosophical Practice Association, who has offer to help promote the game in the US.

The appearance in Winnipeg in April did not involve any formal presentation, so no publication is expected out of this travel. However, an account of Tug of Logic, as well as the background concept of Philosophy Sports which the boardgame exemplifies, is being written up as research proceeds. It will appear in *Cafe Conversations*, a book I am editing for Anvil Press, due out in late 2019 or 2020. It will mostly likely also be submitted to the APPA’s peer-review journal *Philosophical Practice* as well.