



Philosophy in Schools
Aims, Case Studies and Testimonials
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Philosophy in Primary Schools



How does a typical session work?

- A session is up to an hour long, depending on age group and concentration. We work with all year groups from 1-6.
- It will include: thinking games, philosophically rich stimuli, plenty of discussion opportunities in pairs, groups and as a class
- The emphasis is on philosophising (doing philosophy) rather than learning about philosophy
- Questions are set for the children to think about between sessions either with their friends, in the classroom, or at home with their parents
- For the greatest impact and sustainability/continuity the classroom teacher is expected to be present in the session

Aims and objectives

- Developing a *disposition* towards good thinking (so that it becomes naturalised) rather than simply providing a skill-set (this promotes life-long learning)
- Improve children's ability to follow a train of thought
- To be able to give clearer expression to their thoughts and ideas
- To develop speaking and listening skills to the level of dialectic (rational, critical and collaborative exploration through discussion)
- To build on each other's ideas constructively and collaboratively
- To critically evaluate each other's, and their own, claims respectfully
- To confer skills of facilitation and enquiry to teachers through Inset and modelling

New Work

- This year we have been working with a target group in preparation for SATs. We can now offer other schools work on SAT preparation, teaching children strategies and techniques for answering questions and building concentration levels

Evaluation

- Frequency of contributions and how this develops (teacher observation)
- Quality of contributions e.g. one-word answers to more elaborate answers
- Recognition of higher order thinking following Bloom's Taxonomy
- The extent to which ideas build and link with each other
- The extent to which the children are able to use formal argumentation to structure their thoughts (implicitly rather than explicitly)

Accessibility

- Enables whole classes to access the philosophy, including SEN children
- Each individual can access the philosophy at their own level and ability
- In the long-term there is the potential to access the entire school: in a year a consultant is able to work with every class and therefore reach every child

INSET

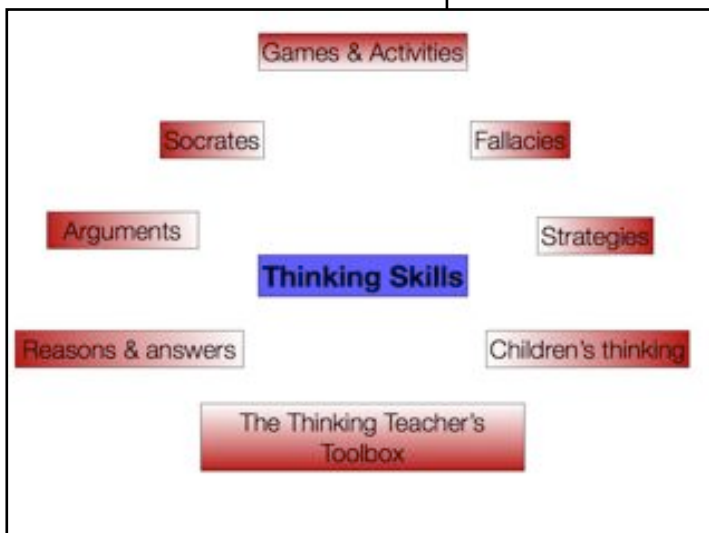
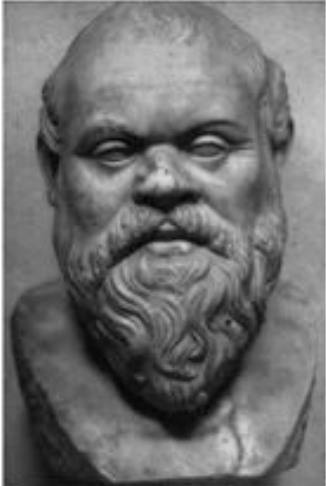
- We offer whole school Inset on Questioning, Thinking Skills, Discourse Skills or Storytelling
 - Questioning skills, covering different types of question (e.g. embedded, leading, conditional questions), questioning motivations, classic questioning errors, and good questioning hints.
 - Thinking skills, including formal argumentation and how to encourage this implicitly in your students, strategies for teaching good thinking, reasoning skills, and how to identify fallacies
 - Discourse skills, this will cover the etiquette of conversation and argument, effective group dynamics, facilitation skills and how to apply the questioning and thinking skills in a class situation
 - Storytelling looks at the art of engaging children in a story, and how to use stories to run Enquires in the classroom
- We run after school meetings, half-day and full day Inset, the days are practical and include an electronic handbook with resources



Socrates

"True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man's mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason."

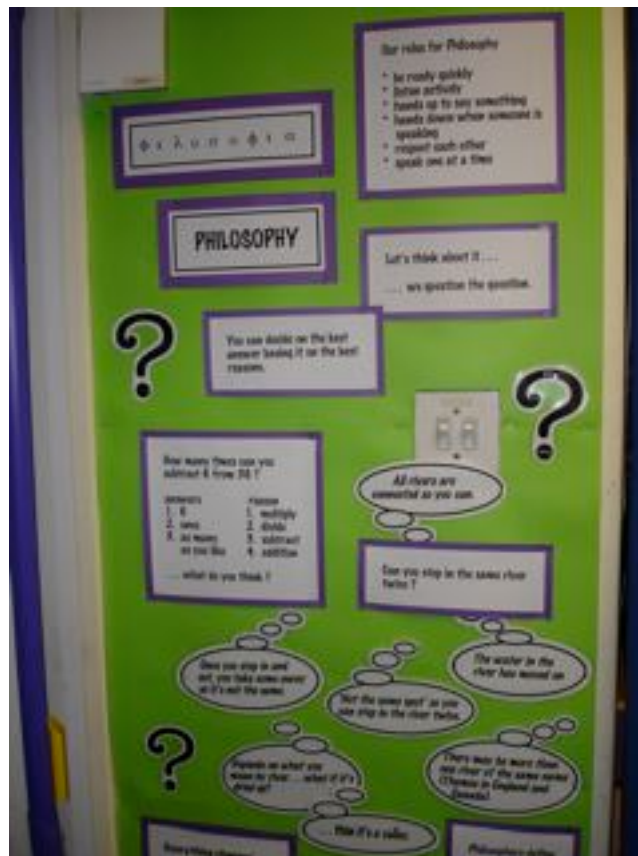
Plato's Meno



Case Study 1

Anger Management at Holy Trinity Primary School

I received an email regarding a pupil with occasional but severe anger management problems. The pupil had been seen to respond very positively to the philosophy sessions and this had been noticed both by the parents and the teachers. The school then approached us with a request for advice on how to exploit this interest with the pupil. We made a list of reading material both for the child and the child's parents so that the interest could be pursued outside of school and by involving the parents. Sessions have also been planned for the class that address questions of self-control and that might offer strategies for managing self-control of emotions. I have been put in touch with the parents so that we can discuss ways that the pupil can be involved in philosophy groups in their own time, such as joining one of the free after-school clubs that we offer.



Case Study 2

SAT preparation at St Mary's Primary School

Given the thinking skills associated with philosophy one school has asked us to work with booster groups of bordering children. For these sessions, we have moved away from the more open ended discussions that philosophy sessions often involve and have set logic problems and puzzles so that we could identify strategies and techniques for solving them. The reason for this was that it seemed logic underlies all elements of SATs tests: science, maths and English. The sorts of strategies we noticed emerging from the sessions were:

- How to simplify a complicated question, or parts of a question
- How to identify that which is known in a question
- To start with what is known
- The If Machine: this is a procedure where you begin with what is known and proceed, step-by-step, to establish what can be inferred from what is known until you reach the answer. It reduces all problem solving to an 'if...then...' structure.

One child then used these strategies to answer a difficult question in a mental maths paper (to be answered in 15 seconds or less). He began with what he knew and worked step by step to the answer:

Question: I start with a number and then minus 10 from it. I then double the number to leave me with 44. What is the original number?

He began with 44 and then inferred that he must reverse the operations, so, he halved 44 as it was doubled before. This gave him 22. If 10 was subtracted before then he inferred that he must add it this time giving him 32, which is the original number.

The If Machine analysis:

- If the ending number is 44 and we double the number before then, to find out what this number is, we need to halve it. Half of 44 = 22.
- If we minus 10 going forwards then we must add 10 in reverse. $22 + 10 = 32$.

The child was able to explain how he had done this clearly and added that the philosophy sessions had helped him with the question.



Case Study 3

Year 2 at Hither Green Primary School

Below is a report on Peter's work with a Year 2 class at Hither Green. Here you will read about the problems at the beginning of the sessions, how we overcame these problems, and finally the impact the philosophy sessions are now having on the class.

At the beginning of the Spring Term I was asked to work with the Year 2 classes. The classes were thought to be immature and displayed a low emotional intelligence. The aim was to introduce philosophy to see if that could impact on this.

I met with the teachers and we discussed strategies for implementing the philosophy. The strategy we decided upon was to start with a short session – no longer than 30 minutes – and see if we could build towards longer sessions over time, rather than start with the full 45 minutes and then reduce it if necessary. Problems were expected with attention span and concentration, plus speaking and listening.

The first session proved to be very difficult. The main problem I was faced with was that the usual strategy of working with this age group did not work. Normally, I would break the session up with games and activities so that the children do not have to sit still for too long at a time. Unfortunately the children were unable to follow procedures involved in the games I had planned without losing concentration. Also, when I asked them to work in pairs and speak about the topics of discussion they would fall apart and it was then very difficult to regain their attention. In the first session one of the classes completely fell apart when Talk Time was introduced and it resulted in children rolling around the floor and hitting each other and shouting and screaming. In short: a disaster. The Associate Head teacher had to be called in to speak with them about their behaviour and the second week had to be prefaced by a stern warning from the Associate Head. This had the desired effect of calming them and focussing them long enough to re-engage them.

I had to re-think my strategies entirely. There seemed to be a time limit of 25 minutes, at which point the children would become very restless, so we decided to bring the sessions to a close after 25 minutes. The children that showed an ability to concentrate for longer were chosen for an extra target group of philosophy following the class sessions to make use of the full time that I was in the school. I could not use procedural games and I could not use Talk Time, and the children had to be engaged with me directly for the entire time at the early stages of the sessions. The usual technique for doing this is the use of stories and picture books, but even these proved difficult for some of the children when read from books. I decided to employ a new method for communicating stories for these children: *storytelling*. I dispensed with books altogether and memorised the stories so that I could tell the story in an engaging way that made use of eye-contact throughout and utilised the full space between me and the children. I noticed, that for duration of the story, they were entirely engaged. Beginning the sessions in this way enabled me to maintain their attention for the remaining time much more easily.

Now that I had their attention I could think about developing other aspects of the sessions, such as extending their capacity for thinking and discussing and encouraging them to think more deeply. I experimented with Talk Time and noticed that they were becoming better at this but still took a good few minutes to settle again in order to share ideas with the group.

In terms of the discussions my first aim was to simply get them talking and listening together at any level of thinking. After a few successful sessions from this point of view, I noticed that they began to demonstrate higher order thinking. For example, in a discussion about *how we know things* they made a good list of ways that they thought we are able to know things: “we can see things”; “we can hear things”; “teachers tell us things” etc. but then they began to critically evaluate these suggestions and one or two children said that “we might have heard something but really only imagined it”, and, “sometimes, when it is dark we might see something but we might be wrong, it might be something else”. This was a significant breakthrough: a clear indication of higher-order thinking. In this session, an

activity was also played with the entire class where order was maintained and the children remained engaged. It was a game called 'what's in the bag?' where one child came up and placed their hand in a bag and were only able to describe the object inside by the way it felt. The other children had to try to say what the object was. There were some successes.

The sessions have improved from session to session. The high point was the last session (22/04/09) in which I told them a story called *Billy Bash*. I wrote this story myself especially for these classes. It tells the story of a boy who always hits people and is visited by an old lady who gives him a potion so that he can't help but hit people so that he doesn't have to feel bad about it. He is happy for a while but notices that he still gets into trouble and has no friends even though he doesn't feel bad anymore. She visits him once more and gives him another potion that stops him from hitting people. This results in him eventually making friends and no longer getting in to trouble. He is re-visited by the old lady some time later and she reveals that the potions were in fact only water.

This story stimulated some really involved discussions about anger, self control and ended with the children sharing strategies for overcoming anger and violent tendencies. In the second group they followed one of the children's ideas that you need to *learn* how to be good, which invited a meta-discussion about the nature of goodness and our control over how this develops in us. In both classes, the discussion so engaged them that 1) even the children who normally struggle to stay engaged stayed with the discussion and made relevant contributions and 2) the discussions went on for 45-50 minutes (including the story) without a break and without the children losing concentration. A minor miracle when you consider that they were unable even to sit still a term earlier.

The following session showed even greater improvements: longer concentration from the class as a whole; more sophisticated discussion, and an ability to cope with games and activities. Following the success of the previous sessions I decided to try to re-institute the usual structure of the philosophy sessions with activities. Both classes sat for the full hour with only minor loss of concentration from some members and Mrs. Fraser was able to sit out of the group and observe. I began with the focus exercise and followed this with the Sitting Down game in which they conducted themselves very well. They were also able to quickly re-focus after the game (simply impossible for them at the beginning stages). I then told them a story about a boy without any friends whose father builds him a computer-robot friend. The robot is destroyed through an accident but then an exact copy is rebuilt. Mrs. Fraser's class discussed whether the robot was alive or not. The children successfully engaged with meta-level and second order thinking, creating a dialogue between all children in the class that built on each other's thoughts and ideas. Overall: a very successful culmination to a term's work with the two classes.

Classroom Teacher's Comments

"The main thing for me has been their willingness to sit and remain focussed for longer periods of time as the sessions progressed. Many members of the class who are often reluctant to speak have really engaged with the materials that you have used and so want to be involved with the Q & A sessions. These children rarely volunteer in class. These sessions have sort of replaced our circle time activities as many of the issues and dilemmas are in keeping with it.

I have been impressed with certain children in terms of the progress that they have made in their thinking. Child A really impressed me all week especially with your session. She clearly has a lot to say for herself and is starting to let her guard down with us in the class as well. T's progress is remarkable: she is almost fluent now having started in September with few words in English but I have been impressed with how she has gained greater confidence and speaks out all the time.

I have really enjoyed the sessions too and have learnt lots by getting the chance in the first couple of weeks to watch them without being directly involved."

Jenny Fraser
Primary Teacher

Testimonial 1

Philosophy in Y5 at Holy Trinity

Philosophy sessions are always a highlight in our week in Y5, although no written work ever takes place, the amount of learning being undertaken is immense.

Sessions always begin with a 'calming' circle which signals to the class a time to focus and clear heads of day to day worries. This chosen starter calms many of my pupils down, especially those with SEN and behaviour issues, (child N and child H). Over the weeks I began to notice that the concentration span of certain children began to increase, and the language being spoken in session time was being thought through on a more regular basis before being offered to the group.

Within all classes there are dominant speakers, and outgoing children often take the lead – especially within such practical sessions. Philosophy however, allowed other children to take a chance and have vital input into sessions. After talking to the class child R explained that “I didn't mind having a guess, because there wasn't really a right or wrong answer, it was just fun to have a go” This child is an EAL speaker, and would usually allow lessons based around discussion take place around him, rather than join in.

The other major change I began to see, was that my class of very 'prickly' children began to build off of each others ideas quite happily, as well as being able to challenge class mates thinking in a mature way. There was no suggestion that any child had 'copied' an idea, and many children often complemented another child's thinking in their own comment. A higher level of respect was found towards those who normally opt out of joining in, and for those who were nearly always right in academic subjects, a new light was shone upon learning (even if it caused much frustration, and a lack of final answers!)

Philosophy traits spilt over into other curriculum areas, most noticeably in our RE and Science sessions. During RE we began to look at the topic of creation. The children were asked, “What came before the big bang?” What should have been a 45 minute lesson turned into a 2 hour in depth discussion on God's teachings, the big bang theory, the theory of evolution and the story of Adam and Eve. Child H was excellent at challenging his classmates ideas – a real devils advocate and independent thinker, something which I have seen him develop as the sessions have progressed. He started by saying “How do we know there was anything there at all? What if there had been nothing?” He then went on to question “What is a big bang? And “How do we know there was one?” “Why do Christians say that God is the creator of all things, when it is people that make stuff?”

Questions and ideas flew around the room that afternoon, I only wish I had written them all down. In the end we came up with no solid ideas to what came before the big bang, only a sense of happiness that we were all here and able to enjoy our learning.

As for the science – “How do we really know that the American landed on the moon, what if they had made it all up?” (also child H) “I believe that life does exist out in space, because they have found water on the moon, but I'm not sure what kind of life form it will be” (Child H) “Just because there is water, does not mean to say there can be life, what will they breath on the moon?” (Child A) “Not all living things need oxygen, plants breath different gases, perhaps the life forms can adapt, just like animals adapt on the Earth” (Child H)

I now use a 'calming circle' in many lessons to get the class focussed, children are actively encouraged to ask questions and challenge. In a society which strongly focuses on the correct and incorrect (especially with so many exams and tests in schools) I feel it important to show children there is another way of learning and finding out, and those who have mastered the art of questioning are on an exciting life path.

Karen Large
Primary Teacher

Testimonial 2

Philosophy at Grinling Gibbons

I have been fortunate enough to participate in Peter Worley's philosophy lessons at Grinling Gibbon's School for the last 3 years. I have seen him work with many classes of children ranging in age from 8 to 11 years.

Even from the very first session the children grow in confidence when they realise that the primary resource for the group is not regurgitated fact, but rather their own independent opinions. Their delight and absorption in coming to use their analytic skills is obvious, and their quick adaptation to the individuality and originality that real thinking requires is impossible to miss.

It seems strange that our education system requires so little reflection, and in watching the quality of introspection and deliberation that Peter elicits from the children so easily, one cannot but feel he is meeting a valuable and overlooked need on their part.

He brings to them a wide range of subjects for attention –classic philosophical issues from epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and philosophy of mind. And all the while training them to attend to the quality of each journey and exploration, instead of this or that particular destination. They learn to relate differently to their thoughts –to value them as things of intrinsic worth, to listen to them and to savour them. They also widen their sense of the scope of thinking: it is notable how comfortable they become with the ambiguous, the open-ended and the unknown.

Children need practice at thinking, just like everything else and Peter models for them and leads them into a wide variety of its forms. Quite frankly these sessions are clearly so empowering for them that at least once in every single one I find myself wondering why on earth this type of education is not occurring simultaneously in every school in the country.

Eugene Romain
Primary Teacher



Testimonial 3

Philosophy Year 5/6 St Mary's Primary School

Peter has been running sessions with all of our split year 5/6 classes since the beginning of the autumn term 2008. Each class had a block of 5 sessions which built on the previous sessions and linked in to our current curriculum work (Numeracy, Literacy and PHSE). The children hugely enjoyed the sessions (so much to the point where all children were on time for Peter's Wednesday session!) and it was extremely interesting as a class teacher to see how the children's thought process grew over the sessions when dealing with abstract concepts. The lessons were delivered in a lively way that fully engaged all pupils and consolidated their speaking and listening skills along with group working skills. Also I myself learnt an awful lot about the phrasing of questions to children from watching Peter teach. Since the sessions ended I've noticed a marked improvement in how children think before they answer more complex questions across the curriculum. I'm looking forward to working with Peter again in our next sessions which will be linked to our SATS preparation.

Peter and Emma delivered an after school INSET to all teaching staff which dealt with philosophy and the questioning of children. The whole session was lively and engaging for all staff regardless of which year group they taught. I firmly believe all staff left the session with a greater understanding about the importance of both questioning students and thinking about what the root of the learning intention is. The majority of the staff stayed behind for at least 20 minutes after the session questioning Peter further, which shows the high level of interest in the session (unheard of after a long Monday dealing with our students!). A pack full of interesting questioning techniques and further reading was left which all staff requested a copy of. We hope to see evidence of this session reflect in our teachers planning in the future weeks.

Dean Houson
Primary Teacher



Testimonial 4

Philosophy Year 6 John Ball Primary School

The greatest impact on the class as a whole has been to improve their ability to think about issues in terms other than absolutes of right or wrong, fair or unfair, good or bad. The follow-on effect of that has meant that even children with significant special needs have felt confident in expressing opinions and thoughts about quite complex ideas that they might never have been given the opportunity to consider in any other area of their lives.

Amanda Crook
Primary Teacher

Testimonial 5

Philosophy Year 4 Brindishe Primary School

These sessions have been extremely helpful with my class. They are much more willing to listen to each others views and comment on them in a positive way. They have thoroughly enjoyed the memory techniques that they were taught and we have used them in the classroom.

It was also an ideal opportunity to be able to observe the children in a different learning environment. I am very interested in continuing to use the strategies and ideas that I have observed - philosophy is now firmly on my weekly timetable.

Jane Walker
Primary Teacher

Testimonial 6

Collaborative

The collaborative we worked with told us that some of the money from G&T was used for the philosophy sessions, and all the schools in the collaborative agreed that the philosophy has a much wider impact on all children than other G&T initiatives. It has helped SEN children, behaviour management issues, low achieving individuals as well as help them recognise other children missed by traditional methods of deciding G&T children. As a result they will be carrying on philosophy next year, in place of other initiatives.

