



Does philosophy for thinking improve pupil outcomes in KS1?

Orchard Primary School Lower Phase

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to measure the success of philosophy in the KS1 curriculum on children's ability to ask questions, discuss and reason ideas and to communicate more clearly. Not long in to the project, it became clear that the more pertinent question to be answered was around how philosophy can be effectively introduced to the KS1 curriculum as the benefits of philosophy are already well documented. philosophy was rolled out in a staggered start: introduced in the staff room; exposing children during Early Morning Work; embedding into curriculum units. Feedback from teachers early on suggested that the EMW sessions were effective and children were thinking a lot about the questions they were asking. When embedded in the curriculum, children found it hard to disengage their questions and ideas from the curriculum content – wanting to give correct responses, rather than talking freely about the stimulus. The results suggest that for philosophy to have most impact, the stimulus needs to be as abstract as possible to allow free thinking and the most philosophical responses/ thoughts to be explored. Links can still be made to the curriculum, but this must take second place to the possibilities to engage philosophical thinking. Generating philosophical questions at this age proved very difficult for the majority of children; therefore the focus at this age should be on discussion rather than questioning.

Introduction

Orchard Primary School is a large primary school situated in Hackney that is in the process of becoming a three form entry school. Currently the school is three – form from Nursery – Year 2, and two form entry in Year 3 and above. The proportion of

pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are much higher than national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is also higher than average. A significant number of children enter Nursery and Reception below the expected level for their age across a number of areas of learning. This demographic of the school is changeable year on year, reflecting the change in demographic of Hackney as a borough.

Current research has found that not only does the use of philosophy in schools help with confidence to speak, develop patience when listening to others and building self-esteem, it has also been linked to significant improvements in KS2 reading and maths outcomes, with disadvantaged children showing greatest improvements, Education Endowment Foundation (2015). The intention behind philosophy is not to introduce another subject in schools, but to use philosophical approaches to enhance the student overall educational experience, and to get them thinking both creatively and critically. In addition, philosophy focuses on teaching children how to apply their thinking skills and to *'develop the general disposition to think better'*. By starting this process in KS1, the impact should be far greater, Global Dimension (2011).

While the majority of the current research focuses on impact of philosophy as part of the KS2 curriculum, this action research focused on the delivery and integration of philosophy into the KS1 curriculum, with a focus on barriers and success of embedding into current units of work.

In order to identify any potential barriers and challenges, class teachers from Y1 – 3 began to deliver and record sessions that took a range of forms from responding to a question based on a provided stimulus to formulating and discussing their own questions, based on a stimulus link to their current learning. As philosophy requires a fairly sophisticated level of thought process, it is expected that the introduction into KS1 will face different barriers and challenges than in KS2: developing the children's understanding around the difference between standard questions and philosophical

ones; being able to think in a more abstract manner to that they are used to and to be able to listen and respond to other children's thoughts and ideas effectively.

Research Process

The process was organised by the KS1 phase leader and delivered by 8 class teachers. All children in the classes were involved in the study – rather than a focus group. Whilst outcomes of the sessions were looked at and analysed for impact, the main focus was on the successes and challenges teachers faced when delivering the material and facilitating the following discussions. In order to gain this information, discussions were had on a weekly basis. Best practice for making the process more effective were discussed and shared. All feedback from the class teachers was gathered, collated and common themes identified.

The implementation was rolled out in a series of phases; this was to allow both the teacher and pupils to become familiar with philosophy before attempting to embed it in the curriculum. The first phase of the project took place for half a term in the staff room; this involved a stimulus being provided each week with example of philosophical questions and responses. It was thought to be vital that teachers had a good understanding of the type of discussion they were expected to facilitate in order for the best results. Buy in from the adults was key for the sessions to be successful in delivery, (see appendix 1). Phase 2 involved class teachers providing the class with a stimulus for the children to either ask or answer philosophical questions. An example of a question was provided for each stimulus to support their understanding of what makes a question philosophical or not and modeled answers were also provided to help structure the children's responses. This was to avoid a reliance on closed questions and simple responses, (see appendix 2). The final stage involved class teachers running sessions linked to the current topics they were studying in their classrooms. The stimulus would be displayed; the children would generate questions and the question would then be discussed as a class, (see appendix 3). During this session, teachers would facilitate the discussion, encouraging children to respond appropriately to their peer's ideas. The sessions were recorded in a variety of ways: individual questions collated; final thoughts recorded and kept in the class

special book or a more extended piece of writing could be completed to express their ideas on the discussion (see appendix 4). Throughout the research, class teachers discussed the successes and challenges of implementing the philosophy sessions. These thoughts were collated at the end of the project and were analysed for common themes suggestions going forward.

Findings

The findings of this research project highlight several key areas that need to be taken into account when moving forward with the implementation of philosophy into the KS1 curriculum: the regularity and time dedicated to philosophy; differentiation for the least able / EAL children; the confidence of the adults facilitating the discussions; the context in which the stimuli were presented and the ability of children in KS1 to generate questions.

Regularity and time handed over to philosophy, in the opinion of all teachers that took part in the study, was key. Where teachers had a definite time slot in their time table dedicated to the philosophy session, they found the responses and discussions had by the children were of greater quality. Children were able to build on their discussion skills/philosophical ideas week on week. When the philosophy sessions were rolled out into the curriculum, with no set slot, the momentum was somewhat lost and the children became less confident in applying the philosophical skills they had previously been working on (see appendix 5 for comparative outcomes from the EMW sessions and the sessions embedded into the curriculum).

Accessibility of the stimuli for the least able/EAL children in the class was something that the class teachers found was a challenge when implementing philosophy into a KS1 classroom. These children wither struggled to access the stimuli/discussion due to conceptual difficulties or simply through lack of acquired language. Stimuli that were most effective were those based wither around a story that the children could follow, or one that they could more easily identify with. Where the images were more abstract/ had less obvious discussion points, these children found it hard to both

engage with and generate higher order/more philosophical questions. Teachers felt that limited life experience also played a large factor in certain children struggling to

engage in the discussion (regardless of ability/EAL status); when implementing philosophy into the lower key stages, it will be imperative that this is taken into account.

A key factor in the success of the implementation of philosophy into KS1 during this study was the class teacher's confidence and dedication to the project. In classes where teachers had prior experience of/ a passion for philosophy, the questions and responses generated were of higher quality/more philosophical. This is not an unexpected finding; however, vital to take into account when moving forward with the implementation of such a scheme. Passion and confidence from the facilitator for a subject such as philosophy will inevitably result in better outcomes from the children. With this in mind, training on facilitating sessions and continued support with resources will be needed to drive the implantation successfully forward.

In all classes taking part in the study, children of all abilities struggled to generate their own philosophical questions. Even with large amounts of directing from the class teachers, coming up with their own questions proved very difficult. This is likely to be due to the stage of their cognitive development. To be able to take stimuli and generate questions that are not directly linked to the image/ stimuli in any way is a high order skill: possibly one that very few children in KS1 are able to access at this stage. Sessions that had philosophical questions already provided allowed for a far higher quality of response from the children in terms of their discussion and philosophical debates.

The final finding of relevance to the implementation of philosophy into the KS1 curriculum is that of context. During the third phase of the project, attempts were made to embed philosophy into the current curriculum. The topics being covered during the half term were looked at and relevant stimuli were provided to match these units of work. Before the study began, it was assumed that having this context for their discussions would make the questioning and discussions easier to access,

as it would help address the concerns around lack of life experience mentioned earlier. However, it became clear very early on that this link to the unit of work being studied in other subjects in fact hindered the children's ability to think philosophically about the stimuli. Questions became more literal: children's discussion points were more factual. The children appeared to strive to give answers that were correct, based on their knowledge of the topic, rather than embracing the concept that in philosophy there is no right or wrong answer as long as you can justify/ explain your point of view. With this in mind, in order to start developing the philosophical mind in the young children of KS1, it is important that there is a big enough separation between the stimulus and other topics being taught to allow children to see the sessions as a 'free thinking' time, rather than attempting to provide answers that are correct.

Impact and Conclusion

- Selection of stimuli is vital for the implementation of philosophy into the KS1 curriculum to be effective. If this done effectively, not only will it allow children of all abilities to be able to successfully engage in the discussions/ generate questions, but will also encourage philosophical, rather than factual, thinking about a topic.
- It became very clear that the generation of questions in KS1 should not be a focus: discussion should be. This is due to the nature of the higher order skill required for this to happen and the majority of children not being ready for this in terms of their cognitive development at this age.
- For children's philosophical skills be developed, sessions need to be happening on a weekly basis.
- Stimuli need to lend them self to 'free thinking' rather than too closely linked other academic subjects to allow children to explore and embrace the ideas that there is no wrong answer.
- Passion and confidence when facilitating the sessions is vital to ensure that children value the discussions and teachers know how to best nurture children's philosophical thinking skills, as this is somewhat different to teaching of other subjects in the curriculum.

As a result of this research, decisions around the effectiveness of embedding philosophy into the curriculum need to be made. The findings clearly show that embedding philosophy may not be effective - in the early stages at least - of introducing philosophy as a subject as it can restrict the exact thinking that it is designed to promote.

References

Philosophy for Children Evaluation report and Executive summary (2015) Education Endowment Foundation

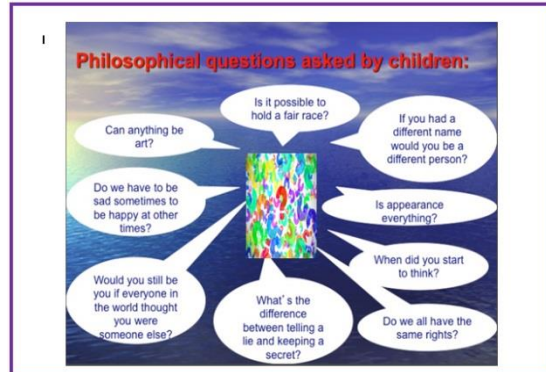
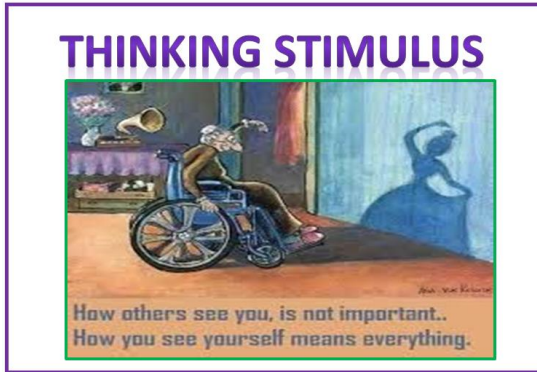
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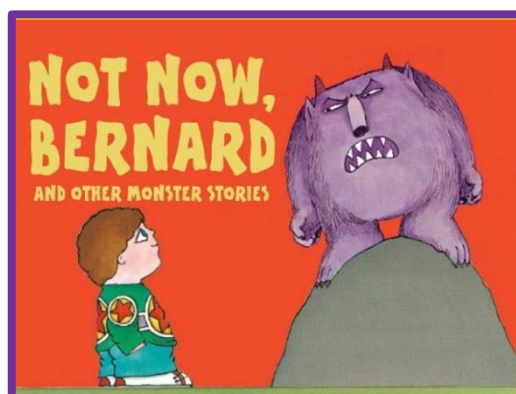
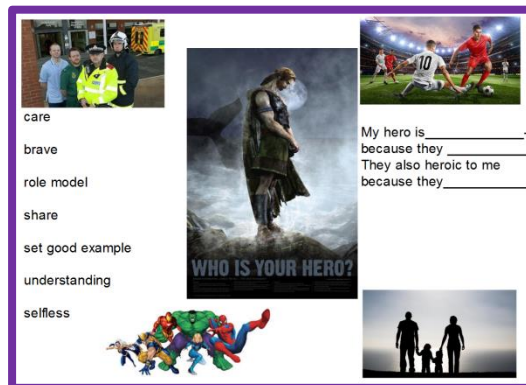
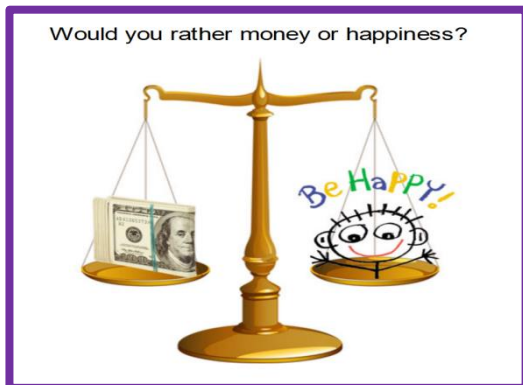
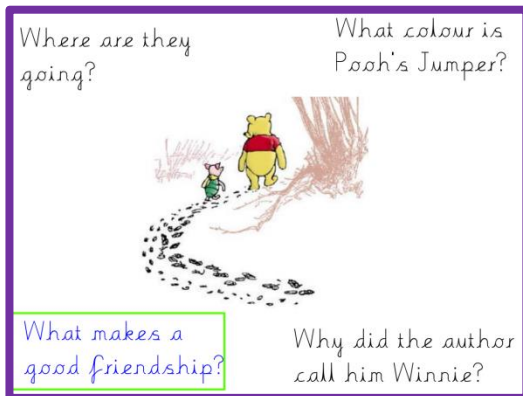
<https://globaldimension.org.uk/philosophy-for-children-philosophy>

Appendices






Appendix 1) Phase 1 –Staffroom discussion stimulus examples








Appendix 2) Phase 2 – Early morning work stimulus examples




Appendix 3) Phase 3 – Embedding philosophy into the curriculum

Year Group: Year 1			Term: Spring 2		
Dinosaurs					
Plants; When dinosaurs were alive; Coding; Relationships; What is important to Muslims?					
Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
Plants	Dinosaurs	Relationships	Islam	PSHCE	
<p>Starter When it's sunny I... When it's rainy I... When it's</p> <p>Suggested activity:</p>  <p>Can anything/ anyone survive on their own?</p>	<p>Starter Fizz Buzz</p> <p>Suggested activity https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEIPo7-DvFs</p>  <p>Does size matter?</p>	<p>Starter Swap seats if you have...</p> <p>Suggested activity:</p> 	<p>Starter I went to the shops and bought...</p> <p>Suggested activity</p>  <p>What makes a supportive family?</p>	<p>Starter Pass the smile</p> <p>Suggested activity Not Now Bernard</p>  <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p1ST-5w6IU</p>	Reflection session about half terms discussions

'Island Life'					
Uses of everyday materials; Island Life; Online; Relationships; Why do Christians celebrate Easter?					
Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
Objective: Materials	Objective: Online	Objective: Island Life	Objective: Relationships	Objective: Easter Story	
<p>Starter Switch seats if you have...</p> <p>Suggested activity:</p>  <p>What makes a home? What would life be like with out metal or plastic? Can life be this simple?</p>	<p>Starter Instead of play on my computer I can...</p> <p>Suggested activity:</p>  <p>What would it be like to be alone? Do we need to be connected to be happy?</p>	<p>Starter When I am alone I like to...</p> <p>Suggested activity:</p>  <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJvosb4UCLs</p> <p>What do we need to survive?</p>	<p>Starter A good friends....</p> <p>Suggested activity:</p> 	<p>Starter If I were to give something up, I would give up...</p> <p>Suggested activity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3UKd8LQKng</p>  <p>Many options here about betrayal, friendship etc</p>	Reflection session about half terms discussions

Appendix 4) Phase 2 outcomes from the children

LE To respond to a philosophical question




CT	OA	Indep
Peer	Self	CT/OA

Why did Bernard say there's a monster in the garden and it's going to eat me in a I don't care voice, because he should be really scared? Why would Bernard go into the garden if he know the monster would eat him? Why went Bernard's mother and father listening to him because it could be something really important?

18/1/17

LE To respond to a philosophical question with reason

Would you rather money or happiness?




CT	OA	Indep
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I would rather have money because with money I can make people happy by buying them things then they'll be happy. If people are happy im happy.

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LE To ask philosophical questions about an image




Are they best friends?
 Why are they making footprints?
 What makes a good friendship?
 How did the author think of the names?
 How did they make friends?
 What are they going to do?

LE To respond to a philosophical question with reason

Would you rather?

- 33 Live forever
- 34 Be famous (eg singer, sportsperson like a footballer, actor/actress, Prime Minister)
- 35 Travel round the world with a friend
- 36 Go to space and discover new galaxies



I would go around the world with my best friend because I get to spend my time with her. I would go to space and see new planets in space and I like learning in school because I will be good.