

Doing Philosophy in Schools



An evaluation report prepared by the Institute of
Education, University of London

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The Philosophy Foundation is supported by the following organisations:

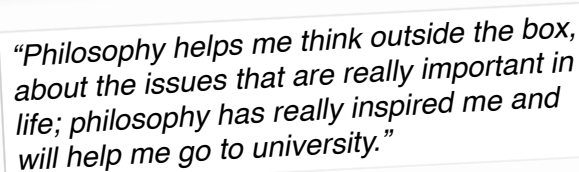
The report presents findings from an evaluation of The Philosophy Foundation's (TPF) work in schools. The evaluation was carried out between August 2012 and December 2013 and was made possible due to funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The research collected quantitative and qualitative data from 18 inner London primary school classes with intervention and control groups over 1 term of philosophy.

The overarching research question set out to investigate was:

What is the impact of doing philosophy with primary school children?

HEADLINE FINDINGS

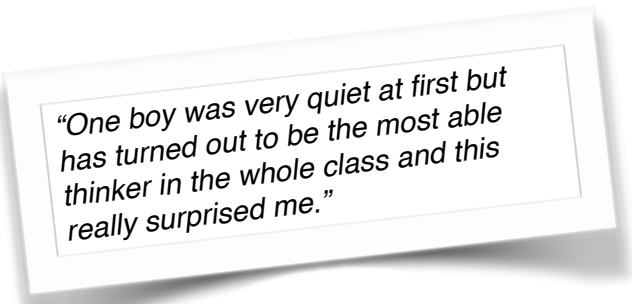
- A term of philosophy improves the reading ability of children on Free School Meals and girls. The reading tests used primarily assesses understanding, but also inhibitory control and the ability to distinguish relevance.
- Teachers, and headteachers noted improvements in **verbal reasoning**, **higher-order thinking** as well as developments in **oral communication**, **confidence** and **behaviour**.
- All 8 headteachers would highly recommend The Philosophy Foundation to others. All re-booked TPF for the following year.
- 11 out of the 12 teachers interviewed said they would highly recommend philosophy to other teachers and leaders.
- Boys (86%) enjoyed the philosophy sessions, girls (81%).
- 83% of the children who had philosophy (250 took part in the research) wanted more of it - both in written feedback and focus groups.



"Philosophy helps me think outside the box, about the issues that are really important in life; philosophy has really inspired me and will help me go to university."

Teachers' view:

The teachers who watch the sessions and headteachers of the schools all claim a benefit in doing philosophy. Typically they mentioned the impact on children's **higher-level thinking** in terms of their ability to **reason**, **justify statements** and **formulate questions**. They also stressed the impact on 'soft skills', namely progress in **speaking** (with children's answers becoming longer and more thoughtful), **improved vocabulary**, the ability to **ask questions**, general **listening** skills, **concentration**, **confidence** to talk in front of the whole class, **greater respect**, **empathy** and **tolerance** of other people's opinions and experiences.



"One boy was very quiet at first but has turned out to be the most able thinker in the whole class and this really surprised me."

Sitting in on the philosophy sessions offers class teachers a rare opportunity to observe their class without the distraction of having to teach or manage behaviour. Teachers stated that they were able to transfer the pedagogical approach of the philosophy teachers into their general

teaching, for example by trying to challenge the children to think more deeply and giving children more opportunities to ask questions.

It should be noted that the researcher noticed that impact was raised in the classes where the teacher was present throughout the philosophy sessions.

Pupils' & Parents' views:

- Over 75% of children interviewed said they had gained learning improvements from philosophy.
- The pupils who took part in the philosophy sessions felt they had gained, largely in their cognitive skills but also in their soft skills.
- 70% of pupils talked about the philosophy at home and outside the classroom, and this was backed up by parent questionnaires.
- 60% of parents interviewed also cited positive gains for their children from doing philosophy, identifying improvements in putting their point of view across, listening, reading and concentration.

IOE Commentary

“English et al (2002) reported that only 10% of primary children’s oral contributions during “literacy hour” were more than three words. The results of IOE’s evaluation of TPF philosophy sessions argue the case that providing young children with the more chances to talk, collaborate and ask questions benefits their learning in general. Children are naturally inquisitive and few educationalists would quarrel with the idea that some key objectives of education are to open up children’s minds, to give them a sense of wonder and the chance to think about their world more deeply.

Philosophy specifically sets out to boost children’s reasoning and conceptual skills by questioning, challenging and evaluating ideas, but the qualitative evidence from this research strongly suggests that the PhiE method of enquiry also has a particular success rate in developing children’s learning in the areas mentioned above.”

The Philosophy Foundation comment

One of our aims as a charitable organisation is to have an impact on underprivileged groups of pupils whilst still being inclusive, so to hear that we have a positive impact on the reading skills of FSM children shows us that we are achieving some of our aims with just a term’s worth of philosophy sessions.

The reports of teachers and pupils’ views were also in line with our aims. Although we want children to achieve academically we also want them to develop skills that we believe are life-long and transferable, such as good reasoning and advanced discursive skills.

We have learned from the study that the tools we use to capture a child’s development, such as standardised testing, do not necessarily capture the whole picture of what is going on in a philosophy class. We are now developing our own tools to evaluate children’s progress in cognitive skills, ‘soft’ skills and philosophical aptitude.