



The Philosophy  
Foundation  
THINKING CHANGES

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## Philosophy for its own sake

### 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021

On March 4<sup>th</sup> the Education Endowment Foundation released their [latest results into research](#) measuring the impact of SAPERE's P4C ('Philosophy for Children') – which a [previous efficacy trial](#) had shown to possibly increase reading and maths skills in primary school aged children. This larger scale study shows no impact on children's reading, maths or character development, the three core elements of the study they were assessing. But studying philosophy isn't done to get better at other subjects – it should be studied for its own sake. This is because thinking better, deeper and more clearly is intrinsically worth doing, as well as for the impact better thinking can have on all aspects of learning and living.

So, what are the benefits of doing philosophy itself? Arguments for having philosophy as part of a child's education include the development of critical thinking skills, giving them space to think, giving them time to think together with others, finding their democratic and social voice, and improving their ability to think about their learning and progress through metacognition.

An important part of education is to learn knowledge, but what is often missed is that once you have learnt something you need to reflect on it, to apply it conceptually and to assimilate it into the way you think. One of the best ways to do these things is to think philosophically around new knowledge. So, if you've learnt about sound in science primary key stage 2 – then you can think around this by considering the well-worn philosophical question 'If a tree falls in the forest and there is no-one around to hear it, does it make a sound?' This question is often used to parody philosophy but, actually, is a really great way to show teachers what their class have understood about this particular curriculum content they have learned. You can see children aged 8-11 discussing this question here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcVQWlXJsnk>

So, if the key elements of doing philosophy in schools are to develop philosophical skills then, surely, we should be looking at whether philosophical enquiry develops these important learning tools. The Philosophy Foundation, in partnership with King's College, London in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 looked at exactly this question.

The results from the research, specifically looking at critical thinking (CT) and metacognitive (MC) skills, as well as philosophical aptitude, showed that a terms worth (12 weeks) of philosophical enquiry, along with the teaching of critical thinking and metacognition, improved children's ability to successfully use these skills in classroom philosophy conversations. Over the 12 weeks the control groups, who received philosophical enquiry alone, increased their successful use of CT skills and MC skills from 20.75 in week 1 to 26.25 in week 12. This is a 26% increase. The intervention groups, which received philosophical enquiry, plus a new intervention by TPF on teaching critical thinking and metacognition during the enquiry, raised their successful use of CT and MC skills from 24 in week 1 to 39.25 in week 12, a 63% increase.

Although a small-scale study used by TPF to help improve and understand their practice, it did seem to show that philosophical enquiry – both with and without the explicit teaching of metacognitive



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skills – improved pupils' abilities to think metacognitively. It also showed that the explicit teaching of MC skills improved the use and successful use of MC skills – by 30% in this case.

In Peter Worley's (TPF Co-CEO) latest book, [\*Corrupting Youth Volume 1\*](#), he makes an argument for the benefits of doing philosophy beyond any instrumental value:

"My colleague, Andy West, worked with a boy (whom I will call 'David'), who was terminally ill [at Great Ormond Street Hospital School], for whom there were to be no long-term benefits of doing philosophy. He loved doing philosophy and insisted on continuing with it to the very end of his life.

In this story, there is both a confirmation and a challenge to Socrates who said, 'I am afraid that other people do not realise that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death' (Phaedo 64a). Perhaps there was a sense in which David was coping with his terminal situation by doing philosophy, but what my colleague and I drew from this was not his preparing for death but David's 'present' engagement in the precious little of life left to him. There are those who live much longer lives who fail to be as present."

If there are any beneficial impacts from doing philosophy into other aspects of the curriculum or children's lives more generally, then all well and good, but philosophy, like music, is worth doing for its own sake. If Socrates' philosophy can be boiled down to two recommendations, 'think for yourself' and 'create yourself' (Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living*) then philosophy is worth doing for these reasons alone.



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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

The Philosophy Foundation research into teaching critical thinking and metacognition: <https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/validation-research>

Co-founder and Co-CEO Emma Worley's talk at RSA (short version) on the critical thinking and metacognition results: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGUfdTdbVBk>

Co-founder and Co-CEO Pete Worley's talk at RSA (short version) on intrinsic value of philosophy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ5OyFm-bu8>

Philosophy in School Conference at the RSA – talks on why philosophy in school (beyond improvements in reading and writing skills):

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoE4agedSVOYn9pJ-E4s1yA/videos?view=0&sort=p&flow=grid>

**ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY FOUNDATION**

The Philosophy Foundation's (TPF) mission is to bring understanding, wisdom and flourishing to the heart of education for children and adults. TPF train philosophy graduates to conduct philosophical enquiry with nursery, primary and secondary school children, older students and adults. Since forming as a social enterprise in 2007 they have worked directly with over 52,000 young people in schools - nursery, primary and secondary - helping them to develop vital cognitive and affective skills that enhance their schoolwork, and their life beyond school. Over 90% of TPF schools have more than the national average of children on free school meals (with 56% of TPF schools having double the national average) and are in areas that serve communities with a wide mix of language and educational needs.

TPF have maintained an average re-contract rate with schools of 91% since 2010 (when they became a charity) - and this year maintained 92% of their schools. This demonstrates the high level of impact and value schools place on their work, as schools pay for it from their own budgets on the whole.

TPF also work in prisons (where a large proportion of the population come from very disadvantaged backgrounds) and community settings with adults and the elderly. They work in some unique settings where education is not straight forward, including: Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital School; Special education needs schools, with looked-after children and with the homeless.

**For more information, please contact**

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