

Collaborative philosophical enquiry in the classroom

Teacher handbook

SAMPLE



the
PHILOSOPHY ★ CLUB

www.ThePhilosophyClub.com.au

This is a free sample of content from The Philosophy Club's comprehensive Teacher Handbook.

The complete handbook is provided in our two-day professional development program, *Introduction to Collaborative Philosophical Enquiry*.

The sample offered here comprises the handbook's Contents page, its Introduction, and two sample chapters – Chapter 4: “Why should we do Philosophy in school?” and Chapter 5: “How it works”.

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INTRODUCTION

We're delighted to present to you our *Introduction to Collaborative Philosophical Enquiry*.

After several years of researching and practising philosophy with children, we have tried to distil our most interesting insights and the ideas that have most inspired us in this handbook. We hope you'll find it stimulating, encouraging and above all useful as you go about introducing your students to philosophical enquiry.

Some of the excerpts of student dialogues quoted in this handbook are transcribed from the workshops we have run for children. Other excerpts, and samples of students' work, are drawn from Professor Lynne Hinton's 'Philosophical Inquiry' training materials, and are used with permission. Lynne (formerly a Principal of Buranda State School in Queensland) has shared with us a wealth of knowledge about philosophy in the classroom, and we are grateful for her generous support.

We have also found much inspiration in the work of Peter Worley, CEO of The Philosophy Foundation (UK), whose books we turn to frequently and whom we have quoted extensively in this handbook.

Michelle Sowe & David Urbinder
Co-founders, The Philosophy Club

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WHY SHOULD WE DO PHILOSOPHY IN SCHOOL?

Children who regularly engage in collaborative philosophical enquiry over an extended period develop a sophisticated range of personal, social and intellectual skills that are foundational for their success as students, as active citizens, and as thoughtful individuals who hope to lead a meaningful life.

Personal benefits

I have this strange phrase I use when people ask me why I chose philosophy. I tell them I wanted to become a professional human being.

Alex Pozdnyakov, student

By engaging in philosophical discussions, children develop independent thinking, the confidence to speak their minds, as well as a sense of responsibility for their opinions and actions. Philosophy also raises children's awareness of the ethical issues that touch their lives, and gives them tools to begin developing their own values and principles.

All of this is personally empowering. Through the process of collaborative enquiry, children come to realise the special value of their own contributions and their own capacity for reasoning and understanding. In these ways, philosophy opens children's eyes to a more creative, reflective and personally meaningful way of living. Children learn to reflect thoughtfully on their own experiences.

...participants... are invested in those things they enquire into; they care about the questions they ask and we sincerely want to find their own answers. Philosophical enquiry can help those taking part to find personal meaning in their lives about all sorts of important issues.

Grace Robinson, Creative Philosophical Enquiry: Twelve Tools for Talking & Thinking, CapeUK, p. 9.

Since philosophy gets students thinking more critically, rigorously and sceptically, it also helps them make wiser decisions. With a philosophical education, young people will be less likely to succumb to ill-founded beliefs or be duped by self-deception. They'll be able to challenge faulty arguments and to question claims that are dogmatic, propagandistic, biased, pseudoscientific or downright erroneous. They'll be more immune to spin and rhetoric, and better able to resist media bias and commercial manipulation. They'll become both more thoughtful and more willing to express their views – even when those views run contrary to popular opinion.

[Philosophy] enriches your inner life. You have lots of frameworks to apply to problems, and so many ways to interpret things. It makes life so much more interesting. It's us at our most human. And it helps us increase our humanity.

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

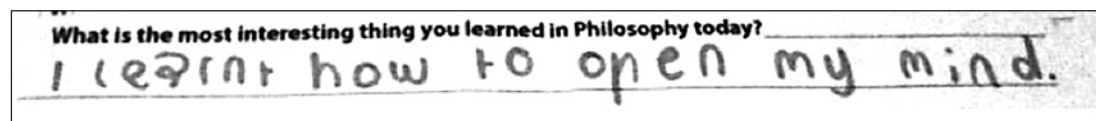
Social-emotional benefits

In philosophical enquiry, children are working together to consider questions from diverse points of view. This helps them develop greater respect for difference and deeper empathy for other people's experiences. They also become more attentive to each other, more fair-minded in their interactions, and more skilled at cooperating and negotiating.

Above all, children enjoy themselves! They get great satisfaction from investigating what they find puzzling; they love having their ideas taken seriously; and on the whole, they enjoy the cut and thrust of a juicy philosophical discussion.

Collaborative philosophical enquiry is known to bring about significant and measurable improvements in students' social skills (see 'Measuring the impact' below).

Intellectual benefits



Philosophy helps children develop the ability to make thoughtful and considered judgements. Through philosophical enquiry, children build skills in reasoning, critical reflection and creative thinking; the capacity to examine their own beliefs and to express them clearly to others; and a thirst for lifelong learning.

Philosophy develops reasoning skills, so children become better at building logical arguments and rationally defending their views. It also encourages kids to question the assumptions underlying different points of view, making it possible for them to challenge dogmatic beliefs. And rather than focusing on 'quick right answers', philosophy cultivates deep and deliberative thinking, so children get a chance to explore the nuances of complex ideas.

Thinking and reasoning are even more basic than the traditional “three Rs” (reading, writing and arithmetic). Reasoning – the fourth “R” – and the concepts involved in reasoning underpin all other intellectual disciplines. Mastering reasoning will therefore help students across the curriculum in all their academic subjects.

Collaborative philosophical enquiry is known to bring about significant and measurable improvements in students’ intellectual skills (see ‘Measuring the impact’ below).

By applying critical thinking tools, you might be able to see exactly what is wrong with a politician’s argument for their fiscal policies even if you don’t know much about economics. You might be able to read an article about parenting techniques and understand where it goes wrong without having a degree in child psychology. You might be able to give more persuasive arguments for your own views, and do a better job of explaining how somebody has misunderstood you... good critical thinking has the power to help us make better decisions, to form more defensible beliefs and be more responsible democratic citizens.

Christina Majoinen

Societal benefits

It’s always a good thing...to be able to think critically. To challenge your own point of view. Also, you need to be a citizen in this world. You need to know your responsibilities. You’re going to have many moral choices every day of your life.

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

Unless students are explicitly taught how to think well and how to communicate their thinking clearly, they’ll grow up to be ill-equipped to evaluate, construct and communicate arguments about issues of individual or public concern. Philosophy has a unique capacity to empower students to think more clearly about issues in their own lives, to reflect more deeply, and to reason more soundly about matters of public policy.

When schools develop a culture of thinking, we can expect better civic engagement in the long term. Students will be equipped for active citizenship and will be rational players who are able to contribute to a higher calibre of public debate.

Philosophy for children is therefore part of larger mission to improve reasoning skills in the general public. That mission is motivated by a belief that broader and more intelligent participation in public debates, more subtle articulation of arguments and more sensitive consideration of alternative views will eventually lead to more sophisticated and civic-minded policy positions.

Read more at: <http://thephilosophyclub.com.au/2014/10/28/three-questions/>

Measuring the impact

Research into the impact of regular philosophy sessions on students' academic results has shown improvements to literacy, numeracy, and verbal and non-verbal reasoning. Recent studies have shown that doing philosophy improves students' performance in other subjects. Interestingly, these academic benefits seem to be greatest for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Philosophy has also been shown to measurably improve students' socialisation, classroom participation and wellbeing. Reported effects for students include improvements to emotional intelligence, emotional self-regulation, social behaviour and relationships, as well as increases in empathy, confidence and self-esteem.

A study is currently underway at Kings College London investigating the impact of regular philosophy sessions on the development of students' intellectual virtues, such as:

- » How to structure their thinking well.
- » How to express their thinking in a way that helps others understand.
- » How to work collaboratively to address controversies and problems.
- » How to use evidence in an argument.
- » How to think critically about their own ideas (as well as about other people's ideas).
- » How to decide when to commit to a particular point of view, and when to reserve judgement.
- » How to decide when it's appropriate to defend an idea, and when it's appropriate to revise or reject it.
- » How to evaluate different ideas and discern which ideas are the most helpful or true.
- » How to be resilient in the face of criticism and opposition.
- » How to reflect on the quality of their own reasoning, and how to improve it.

References

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In their own words: Primary students reflect on the value of philosophy

The comments below are from senior primary students (Years 4 – 6) who have participated in The Philosophy Club’s workshops.

Philosophy is transformative

“I learnt how to open my mind.” (Eli)

“It gave a new view on life.” (Jack)

“I went from an ordinary person to an extraordinary person through thinking and having discussions.” (Cazerlyee)

Philosophy changes how children think

“I thought it was very interesting exploring ideas. I never really realised that this would be Philosophy. It’s kind of strange, to discover a whole new way of thinking.” (Bella)

“Doing philosophy has changed the way I react to questions and think about them.” (Thida)

“Now I go deeper into the question.” (Leila)

“I learnt to think more wisely.” (Sahnly)

“I think more outside the box now.” (Jesharma)

“Philosophy has made me think differently towards questions that that leave me confused and puzzled. It’s made me happier about knowing there isn’t always an answer.” (Kaylah)

Philosophy develops children’s creativity

“I think I might have become more imaginative because I thought of a lot of things when we were having discussions.” (Arpan)

“I think more deeply and creatively now.” (Riya)

Philosophy ignites wonder and curiosity

“The sessions were about topics I haven’t considered or thought about, and it intrigued me.” (Raven)

“It really opened up my eyes to some extremely interesting things and I loved it so much. I thought it was very interesting and thought provoking.” (Maria)

“You have taught me many things about philosophy – and believe me, I have wondered so many things. I wonder a lot about the future. I have a lot of questions...” (Arpan)

“It made me think about lots of things I hadn’t thought of before. I will not stop thinking about all the topics we went through. I think

philosophy will really help me in the future.” (Jaskeerat)

“I really liked talking about who we should give the immortality pill to, and the magical invisibility ring. I’m still wondering if a person can know what it is like to be a bat.” (Lichun)

Philosophy helps kids reflect on their opinions and construct reasonable arguments

“I would like to thank you for challenging me against my opinions.”
(Caila)

“You have made me think deeper, so my arguments can be convincing... All the lessons have made me think deeper and reason [justify] my opinions. That will help me a lot in my future as well.” (Jaskeerat)

“Philosophy really made me think. Every time you say something back I have to think so I can respond properly. Philosophy has made me back up my opinion.” (Justin)

“Philosophy helped me argue my point of view.” (Chongjie)

Philosophy develops social-emotional intelligence

“Philosophy has changed the way I socialise. I now think about the consequences and benefits before I say what I think.” (Caila)

“The highlight was listening to everyone’s different opinions and points of view.” (Darcy)

Philosophy builds confidence

“Philosophy has changed me, in a way. I was so shy that I couldn’t even talk. After a few weeks I got so confident speaking what’s on my mind.”
(Krystina)

“Philosophy has changed me by speaking confidently around people. I am more confident in a big class now. I have started to contribute more ideas and this will help me in other group discussions.” (Daryl)

“Philosophy made me more confident at speaking to a group and also made me think more and change my mind.” (Lichun)

Philosophy is fun!

“The philosophy project always made me smile and brightened up my day. I loved going back and talking to my friends about the program and what we’d done each week. I learned so many new things, even during games!” (Kaylah)

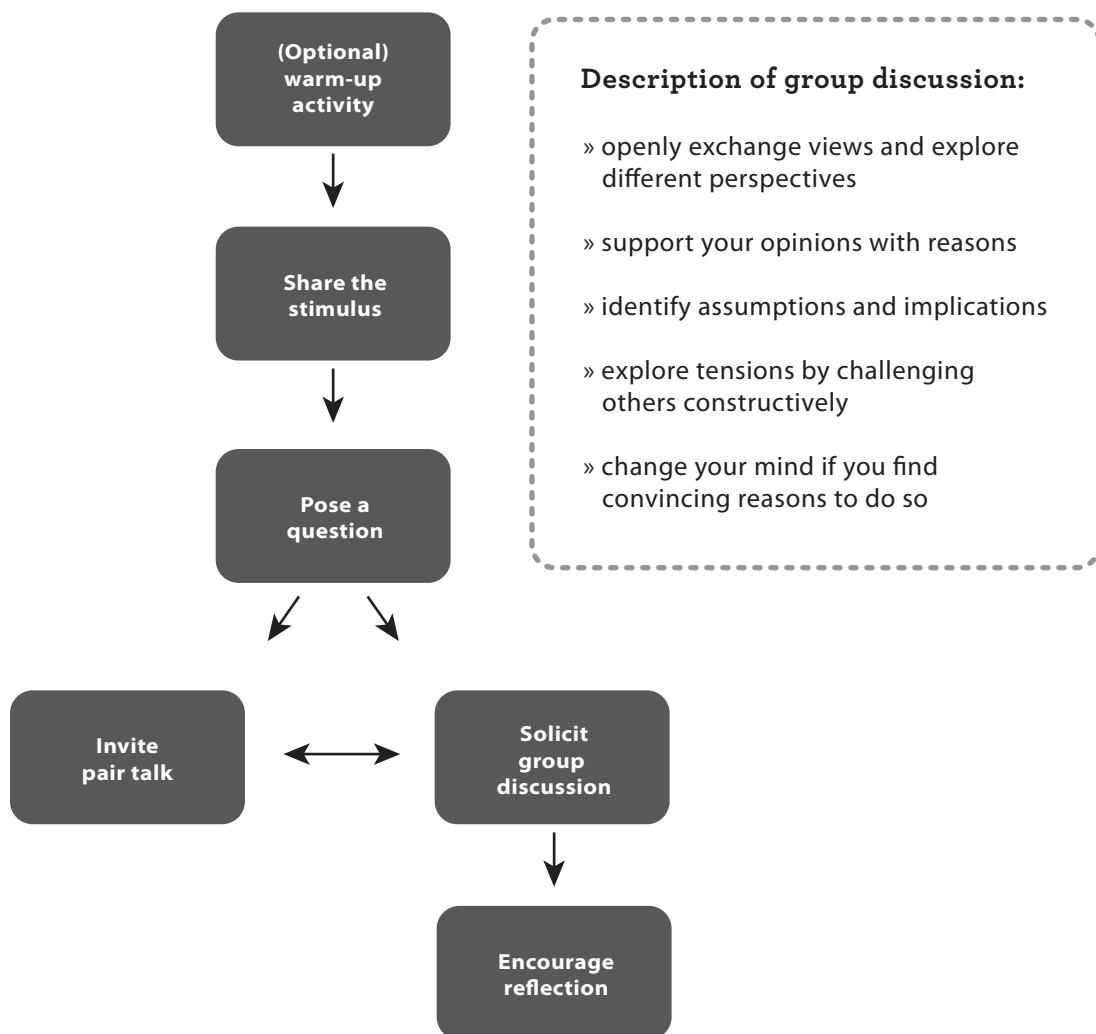
“What I liked most was talking about the questions that have no answers.” (Eleanor)

“It was a great opportunity to tie your brain in a knot then squash it into a pancake while it’s still in a knot. Then you untie your brain and mould it back. It’s very fun... I enjoyed all of it.” (Lily)

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HOW IT WORKS

Outline of the collaborative philosophical enquiry process



The community of philosophical enquiry

A community of enquiry is achieved when a group of people engage in a cooperative search for understanding through dialogue.

Robert Fisher, Teaching Thinking, p. 40.

The term 'community of enquiry' has its origins in the writings of 19th Century American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. The term was also taken up by Peirce's colleague, John Dewey, who shaped the thinking of the founders of the Philosophy for Children movement. In Peirce and Dewey's time, it was popularly believed that knowledge came about through a solitary individual's quest for unchanging truths about the world. Peirce's innovation was to highlight both the *social* nature and the *contingent* nature of the search for knowledge. Peirce recognised that knowledge is always embedded in a social context: it arises within a community of enquiry. And he argued that knowledge acquires its legitimacy from *intersubjective agreement* among members of the community.

In Philosophy for Children, 'community of enquiry' describes a cooperative group of co-enquirers engaged in collaborative philosophical enquiry, with the shared aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the questions being discussed.

Both to build a sense of community in your classroom, and to investigate the nature of a community of enquiry, you might conduct a group enquiry about what rules should apply in an ideal philosophical community. We will set out suggested rules and procedures later in this handbook, but it can be interesting to see what your students come up with themselves.

Below is a list of rules agreed upon by a group of 10-year olds:

1. Give everyone a turn at speaking
2. Don't interrupt when someone is talking
3. Give support and help them add things
4. Don't say anything mean, stupid or unpleasant
5. If people don't want to say anything they don't have to
6. Don't laugh unkindly at something someone has said
7. Think before you ask a question

Robert Fisher, Teaching Thinking, p.47.

This is similar to our list of suggested rules and procedures, although the above list has a greater emphasis social cohesion and a lesser emphasis on intellectual standards. You may wish to show your students our rules after they have developed their own, and ask them whether they would like to modify or supplement their list.

Stimuli for philosophical enquiry

Stories, storytelling and ‘storythinking’

Beyond their sheer entertainment value, stories can provide effective prompts for thinking. They can unlock worlds of wonder and contemplation. They can stimulate empathy, test the reliability of our intuitions, and provoke us to re-think our values. So, engaging with stories can be a fruitful way for children to challenge their thinking and to rehearse for real-life situations.

“ [C]hildren put together causal pictures of the world by creating fictional, possible worlds.

Peter Worley, Once Upon an If

Stories can act as flint to spark students’ conceptual, critical and ethical thinking, and to foster collaborative dialogue about controversial issues.

When selecting a stimulus for enquiry, look for a story (or a film, poem or dramatic scenario) with one or more ‘big’ philosophical themes. These kinds of stimuli will give rise to contestable questions about problematic concepts.

Storytelling is a wonderful way of engaging an audience’s attention and emotions. In *Once Upon an If: A storythinking handbook*, Peter Worley introduces a range of techniques to “lift the story from the page” – techniques for achieving the kind of spontaneous freshness and immediacy that breathes life into a story. The book explains:

- » how to tell stories by heart, while avoiding mere recitation.
- » how to convey meaning unmistakably without getting mired in lengthy descriptions.
- » how to involve audience members in a story and activate their imaginations.
- » how the audience’s sympathies can be shaped by the storyteller’s choice of tense and narrative point of view, and how characters’ motivations can be made vivid and believable in the telling.

There’s also specific advice on the nuts-and-bolts of storytelling such as breathing patterns, eye contact, pacing, vocal tone, dynamic variation, gesture and movement. These techniques help to demystify what often appears to be a magical art: telling a compelling story with improvisational fluency and confidence.

“ [Storytelling produces] a wow-factor ... to really hook them before the philosophy begins.

Peter Worley, Once Upon an If

The chapter on ‘storythinking’ from *Once Upon an If* presents elements of logical thinking (such as conditional reasoning, justification and hypothesis testing) in a straightforward and accessible way. The storythinking strategies encourage children to formulate their own arguments in support of their beliefs, and to try to resolve ethical dilemmas for themselves. These strategies also help you pivot from the concrete details of plot and character to more abstract levels of enquiry.

[S]tories can be used to create controversies with which children can then think more deeply.

Peter Worley, Once Upon an If

Fictional scenarios and ‘thought experiments’

In philosophical enquiry, we frequently imagine counterfactual scenarios – scenarios that require conditional thinking. Whenever we ask “What if...?” we are using conditional thinking. Philosophers call these What-if scenarios *thought experiments*. They require us to imagine sometimes quite outlandish situations, and consider the implications. This helps us to test out our philosophical intuitions. We ask questions like these:

- » If somebody developed an immortality pill that enabled you to live forever, would you want to take it? Should you be allowed to take it?
- » If you could plug yourself into a machine that enabled you to experience a perfect simulation of anything you could possibly desire, would you do it? If so, would you be missing out on anything?
- » Is it possible to imagine what it’s like to be another animal, like a dog, or a bat?

Here is an example of a thought experiment, told simply and without frills, with some accompanying questions.

Imagine Tom discovers that he was once someone else called Jeff. Jeff was a bad person who committed all sorts of crimes but an operation was performed on him to remove Jeff’s memories and to have them replaced with a new set of fictional memories of an entirely different kind of person: those of Tom. Tom is a good, law-abiding citizen.

- Who would you consider this person to be: Tom or Jeff?
- And, should Tom be held morally responsible for any crimes committed by Jeff?

This thought experiment has been designed to test our conceptual intuitions about a specific issue: it leads us to think about how we conceive of the self and to consider what role memory plays in our understanding of ourselves.

Peter Worley, The If Machine

At the very start...

Here are some suggestions for things you might say to introduce philosophy to your students for the very first time:

What is philosophy about?

Philosophy is all about *thinking together* about big questions and interesting ideas.

We're going to begin with a story that will spark some questions for us to think and talk about.

In philosophy, there isn't just one right answer.

It's OK to *disagree* with each other, as long as we explain *why* we disagree.

It's OK to *change our minds* if we hear new ideas that make us think again about what we believe.

You can always *take your time* to think.

Our rules

- » We listen closely
- » We think carefully
- » We build on each other's ideas
- » We give reasons for our views
- » We ask each other questions
- » We stick to the point
- » We respect each other

A printable poster of these rules is included in the online supplementary materials.

You may wish to open up a group discussion about these rules. You might tell them that the rules will only apply if the group agrees they are valuable. For each rule, ask the students whether they can think of good reasons for why it should be adopted, or whether they think the rule should be modified. You might also ask whether they would like to add any additional rules to the list.

Our procedures

Who speaks? We use a Speaking Ball and only one person speaks at a time. You don't have to speak if you don't want to.

Hands up, hands down If you want a turn to speak, wait until the person has finished speaking, and then raise your hand. When someone else is speaking, put down your hand.

Looking While you're listening, look at the speaker. While you're speaking, look around at everyone in the group. (Don't just look at the teacher.)

At the very end...

It is helpful to dedicate the final minutes of a philosophy session to closing reflections, in which the students can share their impressions of what they've discovered through the process of collaborative enquiry.

Here are some suggestions for how you might encourage reflection at the conclusion of a session of philosophical enquiry.

For younger students

It's time for us to reflect on how we've been doing today.

Ask the group to respond collectively with each student indicating "thumbs up", "thumbs down" or "thumbs sideways" to the following questions:

- » How well have we listened to what other people have said?
- » How well have we understood each other?
- » How well have we built on each other's ideas?
- » Have we come up with good challenges to each other's ideas?
- » Did we stick to the point?

For older students

It's time for us to reflect on what we've been doing today, and celebrate the great contributions that people have made and the interesting ideas we've shared.

Go round the circle. Ask each student to choose one of the following reflection prompts and gives a response.

- » Something you have changed your mind about
- » An argument you found persuasive
- » Something interesting or surprising that somebody said
- » Something you feel more or less certain about

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to sample our 100+ page Teacher Handbook, which accompanies our two-day program, *Introduction to Collaborative Philosophical Enquiry*.

Visit our website:

- ▶ *The Philosophy Club*

Learn more about our PD programs:

- ▶ *Introduction to Collaborative Philosophical Enquiry (2-day program)*
- ▶ *Ethical Understanding (90-minute seminar)*
- ▶ *Critical and Creative Thinking (90-minute seminar)*
- ▶ *Tailored professional development services*

Please get in touch with us to discuss how The Philosophy Club can assist your school.

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