

Philosophical enquiry in schools

Philosophical enquiry aims to develop a community of enquiry in which individuals are respected and their ideas are considered with care. At the same time there is an ethos of questioning, exploration and the search for truth and meaning. The medium of enquiry is a combination of constant questioning and conceptually-rich dialogue. Regular enquiry will have benefits in many subject areas when pupils are expected to think for themselves and explore meaning. In all subjects, philosophical enquiry will encourage higher levels of curiosity, collaboration and conversation.

School Subject	Examples of the applications of philosophical enquiry
1. English language	Philosophical enquiry improves the quality of speaking and listening, particularly exploratory talk, in groups. The concentration of philosophy on argumentation and making conceptual connections through language can also (potentially) improve writing skills and media literacy. Expect better collaboration and group work in lessons.
2. English literature	The concentration on analysing 'big concepts' allows for the exploration of those opinions and perceptions of the world that are often implicit in literary texts. It is worth creating space to allow pupils to consider their own philosophical understandings of concepts like: love, democracy, fairness, justice, goodness, power and anger. This enables not only a more interesting analysis of texts but also the more perceptive making of connections between pupils' own opinions and emotions, the texts they read and the lives they live.
3. History	History is the story of humankind. In it we learn what humans are capable of for good and ill. A philosophical dimension in history helps pupils to connect historical events with their own developing political, moral and emotional perspectives. It will also encourage better argumentation and interpretation because the community of enquiry is rigorous in the pursuit of meaning and truth (or at least the best criteria for truth). The community of enquiry is also the ideal environment for discussing controversial or emotionally-charged issues in history.
4. Geography	The community of enquiry provides a forum for reflecting on diversity in all its forms and for developing moral and political opinions in dialogue with others. Philosophy also develops the argument skills that are essential in geographical analysis. As 'Philosophy for Children' is a worldwide movement, there is scope for dialogue with pupils in South America and Asia about concepts such as social justice and globalisation.
5. The arts	Philosophical enquiry is an excellent tool for reflecting on the meaning and significance of artistic performance, production and exploration. It inserts some valuable thinking time between making or witnessing something and evaluating it. The community of enquiry method enables teachers and pupils to make links between works, emotions, attitudes and beliefs.
6. Religious education	Philosophical enquiry is very appropriate to RE and popular with many RE teachers. The community of enquiry is a forum appropriate for the comparison and exploration of spiritualities, religious traditions and beliefs. It also allows for the open yet rigorous discussion of moral perspectives and the 'right' relationship between emotions, appetites, actions and ideologies. Philosophical enquiry helps pupils become aware that in some areas of life, there are no easy answers.

<p>7. Design Technology</p>	<p>People’s capacities for designing and making are essential elements of their humanity. But what is the significance of each of the products people make? How do we judge whether a design is good or bad or whether a product is useful, worthy or contemptible? Philosophical enquiry allows a space for dialogue to evaluate designs and products using concepts such as purpose, economy, value, elegance, simplicity, effectiveness and originality. It helps students develop the conceptual equipment that will guide their work and their evaluations.</p>
<p>8. ICT</p>	<p>Philosophical enquiry helps pupils to reflect on distinctions between ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’ and to evaluate digital products from many perspectives using concepts such as entertainment, legality, morality and aesthetics. The opinions and beliefs explored in philosophical discussions provide pupils with ideas for digital projects such as websites or podcasts on significant issues.</p>
<p>9. Citizenship</p>	<p>Philosophical enquiry is the ideal companion to citizenship education. The three strands of citizenship -- political literacy, community involvement, social and moral responsibility -- are best explored or assessed through a community of enquiry (COE). The collaborative yet rigorous dialogue that is distinctive of the COE enables the development of those enquiry and communication skills required in the citizenship curriculum. Enquiry also leads to a better understanding of concepts such as rights, duties, justice, fairness, freedom, welfare, community and enterprise that re-occur in public discourse.</p>
<p>10. Maths</p>	<p>Philosophy complements mathematics in that it encourages the generation of alternatives and their analysis. It also encourages patience and persistence in the face of problems. Some maths teachers have used the community of enquiry approach (with less philosophical emphasis) to stimulate pupils to generate problems (eg with social significance), critique problems, and compare solutions. There are also philosophical questions lingering behind concepts like ‘number’ and ‘solution’ if maths teachers wish to explore them with pupils ‘for fun’.</p>
<p>11. Modern foreign languages and community languages</p>	<p>Philosophical enquiry could be useful for exploring the cultural background of other countries and topical issues in the news.</p>
<p>12. Science</p>	<p>Philosophical enquiry can help pupils to develop their own reasoned ethical and political perspectives on scientific issues. It promotes curiosity, questioning and collaboration. It can also help students to explore some essential concepts for scientific thinking such as evidence, experiment, cause, effect, proof and alternative. Philosophy could help pupils relate science to their own lives, to what they read in the media and to other subjects in the curriculum.</p>
<p>13. Physical education</p>	<p>Philosophical enquiry can compliment physical education in that teachers can use some of the techniques of the community of enquiry in ‘time out’ moments of reflection on performance and attitude around questions like: What is the point for me trying if I always lose? What makes a good team? Why does my team always argue? What is wrong with cheating if you end up winning and don’t get caught? Does everybody have will power to keep fit? Why shouldn’t I be honest and tell people if they are rubbish at sport?</p>