

# Leiston Pyramid Evaluation of Thinking Skills ~ Pupil Perception Interviews

## Focus: Philosophy for Children

Interviews took place with Year 4 children from Benhall St Mary's, Coldfair Green and Yoxford primary schools between 21<sup>st</sup> June and 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006. Each pupil group of 6 included a mix of boys and girls and a range of ability from Lower attainers (LA) to Middle Attainers (MA) to Higher Attainers (HA). As the focus was P4C, it was not possible to successfully interview the Year 4 children from Saxmundham primary as P4C has not been a focus for the class this year.

Interviews and MALS are still to be held with children from:

Aldeburgh Primary  
Kelsale Primary  
Leiston Primary  
Middleton and Peasenhall Primaries  
Snape Primary

The questionnaire was constructed by Julie Winyard and Annie Clark.

The pupil responses to each question have been fed back individually to each school and the responses to each question also collated to provide an overall picture from the participating schools to date.

Following this initial feedback the following action will be required:

July 2006

- Complete the P4C questionnaire with Y4 pupils from all the schools;
- Complete the MALS (Myself as A Learner Scale) with all Y4 pupils;

July/August 2006

- FK to collate and analyse the remaining outcomes from the pupil perception interviews;
- FK to analyse the full results of MALS with RLB (Professor Robert Burden).

September/October 2006

- Feedback the full findings from the P4C pupil interviews and MALS;
- Action planning ~ where next?

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### What does thinking mean to you?

Some common responses reflected pupils' awareness that thinking is about learning, sharing thoughts, using the brain to work things out, to ask questions and find answers. Two pupils likened thinking to a 'conversation in your head' and several pupils made reference to the idea that when you are thinking your brain is working.

There was a negative response from a boy who said he didn't like thinking because he doesn't like school although he also said he does like thinking when he is using the computer.

### Do you enjoy philosophy sessions?

Most pupils said they enjoyed philosophy and were able to say why. Their reasons included:

- It helps with thinking;
- Sharing ideas and opinions;
- Being able to say what they think;
- Talking about interesting things;
- Trying to find answers to questions;
- Pondering ideas;
- Having the opportunity to change their opinion;

One group did not enjoy using Matthew Lipman's book Pixie and felt that they would like to have the opportunity to talk about different things. They said that they found the stimulus had become boring and this coloured their view of philosophy generally.

### Tell me about a philosophy session you have enjoyed.

Pupils said they enjoyed sessions when they had questions to discuss or visited a place which generated thinking and discussion. The pupils particularly mentioned:

- A discussion about belief in God
- A discussion about belief in Father Christmas;
- A discussion about UFO's and aliens following a visit to Rendlesham forest;
- Bullying;
- Street fighting;
- A discussion about uses of wood and cutting down forests;
- Creating an imaginary island;

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Again there was some discussion about the book Pixie. The pupils enjoyed the book at first but in future sessions found it difficult to think of questions about the book. The pupils talked of having to stick to the story and one pupil said it was difficult to know what was going on and said, 'It muddles you up.'

### **Why did you enjoy it?**

When asked to give reasons for the sessions they had enjoyed, the pupils responses referred back to the stimulus and/or the quality of the discussion the enquiry had generated.

The pupils highlighted:

- Using personal experience (Rendlesham forest);
- Using imagination to explore possibilities and alternatives;
- Opportunities to 'do a lot of thinking';
- Length of discussion ~ 'we discussed for ages';
- Expanding ideas;
- Challenging their own thinking;
- Empathising with others' feelings and points of view;

### **Tell me one thing that makes philosophy different from other lessons**

There was a general view that philosophy is different from other lessons and pupils' answers included some thoughtful responses. These reflected an understanding that the nature of philosophical enquiry encourages discussion, personal reflection and a search for possible answers.

- In philosophy you can have as many opinions as you like. Everyone has their own opinion. There are lots of different opinions;
- Philosophy is the only subject that doesn't have an answer. You cannot be sure that there is a right answer. It allows you to say what you think;
- In philosophy everybody is right in a way and everybody's wrong in a way. Everyone can say what they think. In Maths it's either right or wrong;
- It's a place where you can share your thoughts with other people. You're still learning while you're doing it. You can use thoughts from other things. You can say things in your own words. Not like Maths words;
- You regenerate the stuff that's in your mind;
- You can disagree but you can't say someone else is wrong;
- In philosophy you get to sit on chairs. We talk more. You think lots and lots more. You get to talk in the lessons. Usually you can't chat.

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**Sometimes philosophy starts with a story, a poem, a picture or an object. What do you think makes a good starter? Why?**

The pupils had lots of ideas here which reflected the view that it was important that the stimulus would easily generate questions:

- **Story:**  
It tells you what you are going to discuss;  
It helps you ask more questions;  
We can discuss lots of questions.
- **Video/DVD clip:**  
Watch part of a movie/video and then discussing it. This is like a philosophy lesson.
- **Object:**  
You can pass it round, describe it and feel it;  
Look at it and think of questions;  
You could ask questions to work out what it is.
- **A question:**  
A question can make more and more questions!

**Has philosophy helped you to ask better questions?**

Pupils' responses ranged from no to a little bit to a definite yes.

The majority of pupils were positive and were able to extend their answers when asked to identify how and in what ways philosophy helped them to ask better questions. Responses included:

- You can ask better questions so you can learn more (in other subjects)
- It helps me to think of more complex questions;
- When someone gives me a question or I ask a question I do philosophy in my head.
- I ask more advanced questions now;
- I used to sit listening to other people's questions. No questions came into my head. Now more questions come into my head;
- It makes you more confident ... more outgoing, sharing ideas with others;
- You're not frightened of getting the answer wrong (this related to being able to talk into a space)

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Those who said no qualified their answers by saying that that they did not ask a lot of questions anyway, in philosophy they only talking about one thing or that enquiry questions did not relate to other curriculum areas.

### **Do you think philosophy has helped you as a learner?**

Again there were a range of responses from no to don't know to not really to yes. The discussion included the following responses:

- I ask and answer more questions;
- I think better, I listen carefully and develop ideas more quickly;
- I know how to listen more and not interrupt. I'm a lot more confident because I wasn't (before);
- A bit because you can speak out. You don't have to hold your thoughts in;
- We're learning to learn, listening to learn and learning to listen.

Some pupils referred to their perception that the skills are not transferable to other areas and they cannot say what they think in other lessons.

- Philosophy is fun but you can't stick to philosophy rules. You have to go back to normal rules. You can talk in philosophy and say what you think.
- In class you can't speak out your thoughts; they have to stay in. you can't ask questions.

### **Has philosophy made you think more or think differently about anything?**

Pupils felt that the process of philosophical enquiry had an impact on how they thought about things. They referred to:

- Having a different approach to their work and thinking more about problems in their work;
- Respecting other people's views: it's changed the way I think about people who have different opinions from me. I respect other people's reasons. I used to think they were silly but now I can see they have their reasons.
- Thinking more: it's helped me think more with all different kinds of things. With WALT I go back and think about philosophy.
- Changing their view: it made me think more about Father Christmas. Is he real? The discussion helped me to change my mind.
- It has made me think more about bullying and animals. It's made me think about being a vegetarian.
- Lifestyle changes: it has made me think more about bullying and animals. It's made me think about being a vegetarian.

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### Do you think philosophy is important?

#### Why?

Most pupils responded positively to this question and were able to give reasons for their answers:

- Very important. It gives you a choice so you don't believe one thing. Sometimes in Literacy, philosophy is written down.
- Yes because it makes you think more and it builds up questions in your head.
- Yes because you learn from it. You have a big conversation.
- Yes. It gives you choices about what you believe. You have different choices. It may help other people in their choices.
- Not really but kind of. It makes you think of stuff you don't normally think of. You can think about new things.

Again there was reference to the perception that philosophy skills are not used in other subjects or out of school,

One pupil said, "Sort of, sort of not. It can be important because it helps you share your thoughts but we don't use philosophy skills in other subjects or out of school.

Another said, "No it isn't important because there is nearly no-one who can actually do it. There's no-one in my house I can share my thoughts with."

### How could your teacher improve philosophy sessions for you?

In response to this question the pupils picked up again on the answers they gave to the question:

Sometimes philosophy starts with a story, a poem, a picture or an object. What do you think makes a good starter? Why?

They suggested:

- A range of stimuli;
- More pupil involvement in choosing questions for discussion (including homework);
- More sessions in Y1 and Y2;
- More frequent sessions generally ~ at least once a week;
- More thinking time;
- More speaking time

COLLATED RESPONSES FROM THREE SCHOOLS

**What does thinking mean to you?**

I don't like it because I don't like school.

I like thinking when I'm on the computer.

Thinking is like two people in my head talking to each other.

I sort of like it and sort of don't like it.

I like thinking about fun things.

Thinking is like talking in your head.

I think it's about sharing your thoughts with other people and how things are done.

Philosophy is about speaking your thoughts to other people.

Thinking is about using your brain to find out answers. You always have to think about everything you do.

Thinking is really learning. Thinking gets easier. You don't do anything your brain doesn't tell you to do.

Thinking hard. You have to think about everything. Memories are thinking back. Thinking is about asking questions.

Thinking is about working something out

You think all the time so you have to use your brain all the time like when you're reading or riding a bike.

You have to think nearly all the time. If you get stuck thinking helps you work it out

You're using your brain.

You're thinking to work things out, thinking to learn. Your brain is working. You think in chess.

Your brain thinks about what to say.

Thinking about what you're doing.

Thinking about what you're going to write.

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Thinking about what people are saying. It helps your learning.

### Do you enjoy philosophy sessions?

Yes. You can get all your ideas out of your head and get ideas from other people. It helps you to learn to listen and add things ... your thoughts.

Yes. You develop ideas from other people's questions. I like trying to find out answers and it helps you think quicker.

You can speak into a space. It helps you to get things off your chest.

Yes. You get to share ideas.

I love philosophy. It's all about talking and I love to talk. You get to discuss really interesting things.

Yes sometimes. I like listening to other people's ideas.

No. I kind of like it. When we started the Pixie book it was good, but then it got boring. I would like something else.

No, it's so boring ~ we always talk about Pixie.

Definitely no because it's boring ~ sometimes you get a headache thinking about what you're going to say. People don't always want to share their feelings.

No. It would be more interesting if we talked about different things like Harry Potter.

No. I don't like Pixie. I would like something different to talk about.

Quite a bit. I like discussing things, finding out answers. I learn more when I talk about it. I like pondering things. If you share your opinions you might change your opinion.

Yes because it makes you think hard to prove your point. It helps you to work things out.

It depends what we're talking about. We all say what we think.

It's alright. It's good when you want to know the answer to a question.

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It's a good thing to do. Sometimes everybody else knows the answer and you don't. People say it and we don't have time to think.

You think a lot trying to figure out the answer. I don't have enough thinking time before someone else says the answer.

**Tell me about a philosophy session you have enjoyed.**

The two I enjoyed the most are:

Do you believe in Father Christmas?

Do you believe in God?

When we talked about an island. We did Mantle of the Expert and philosophy together. We created the atmosphere of an island and everything on it. We discussed what could be on the island.

The one about smugglers. We had a skull. We discussed where things might be.

Why do they cut down forests? We had a big discussion and it was really good

I was thinking about what happens when you cut down forests.

Bullying.

Street fighting.

This morning. It was a book about Michael Rosen's son dying.

I enjoyed the Pixie book when we started because it was new but then it got boring.

We went to Rendlesham forest looking for UFO's. We talked about it twice.

I can't think of questions to ask about Pixie.

We talked about whether we believed in UFO's and aliens. With Pixie you have to stick to the story.

The first session was a surprise because we didn't know what was coming. Then it got really boring. You don't know what is going on in Pixie. It muddles you up.

The one about Rendlesham

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### Why did you enjoy it?

I enjoyed the Rendlesham one because we actually went somewhere.

I enjoyed it because you could talk about what might have been there. In Pixie you are not allowed to go away from the story.

The UFO one was different ~ we actually went to where it happened. We could talk about possibilities.

The UFO was something different. We didn't know what was coming. I couldn't wait for the second session. It was something children like. We actually went there.

We did a lot of thinking. It was really good. I could expand my ideas.

Some people had a lot of good points about why Father Christmas exists. It made me think there was a possibility. It challenged my thinking. With God a few people had good points. The discussion made me believe that there is no such thing as God.

We were creating an island, using imagination and thinking a lot.

It was an interesting discussion. Cutting down forests isn't good because of habitats and oxygen.

We discussed for ages. What do trees make? Why do they cut down trees?

We read the book, wrote down our questions and voted for the question to discuss. Why do people bully? It helps you to understand what others might feel.

I liked the book; it was interesting and sad.

I liked talking about why people kill animals.

We were watching a film. We could write down our own thoughts. We got to learn about what bullying is really about.

I liked talking about animals

The discussion about why people kill animals. We discussed things like why do people get into fights and things we could try and stop.

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**Tell me one thing that makes philosophy different from other lessons.**

In philosophy you can have as many opinions as you like. Everyone has their own opinion. There are lots of different opinions.

Philosophy is the only subject that doesn't have an answer. You cannot be sure that there is a right answer. It allows you to say what you think.

In philosophy everybody is right in a way and everybody's wrong in a way. Everyone can say what they think. In Maths it's either right or wrong.

In philosophy you're talking about one thing at a time.

Philosophy is different because you're talking about things.

Philosophy is about talking about the world around you.

You are allowed to share your thoughts with other people. You can talk about things from TV which are the same topic.

In Pixie you have to stay on the same two pages.

It's a place where you can share your thoughts with other people. You're still learning while you're doing it. You can use thoughts from other things. You can say things in your own words. Not like Maths words.

You regenerate the stuff that's in your mind.

You get to tell your ideas and say what you think.

You can disagree but you can't say someone else is wrong.

You have the chance to write questions and then vote.

You write something the teacher doesn't have to mark

**Sometimes philosophy starts with a story, a poem, a picture or an object. What do you think makes a good starter? Why?**

All watch the same clip and discuss it in different groups.

Watching a movie, video then discussing it. This is like a philosophy lesson. A feely bag or box you can't see in to. Go into different groups to discuss.

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An object. You could pass it round, describe it, and feel it. Watch a part of a film over several weeks and discuss it and have a big discussion at the end.

A video clip like Harry Potter, like in the prefects' bathroom. How can you make the water turn different colours like that?

A story because it helps you to ask more questions.

A story; it tells you what you're going to discuss

A story because we can discuss lots of questions.

An object or a picture of an object. You could ask questions to work out what it is.

Read something from a book, think of questions and choose a question to discuss.

A question. A question can make more and more questions

A book because you get an idea of what you could say and questions you could ask.

An object. Look at it and think of questions.

### **Has philosophy helped you to ask better questions?**

Yes and no.

In a way.

It has a bit because ... I'm not really sure

No. I don't know. I talk a lot but I don't ask a lot of questions at school. I like to keep my thinking to myself.

A little bit. You don't butt in. It does in philosophy; you don't ask silly questions.

No because it's just like normal. It doesn't really help your questions ~ you can't share your thoughts in Maths. Sometimes you can share your thoughts in history.

No. All you are really doing is talking about one thing.

Yes. It helps you get ideas and you ask better questions about those ideas.

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I ask more questions and better questions

Does philosophy make you more confident? *He then answered himself. Yes!*

Yes. It makes you more confident so you can ask more questions.

Yes because out of all the sessions you develop more ideas.

Yes. It gives you good ideas.

### **How? In what ways?**

I ask a lot of questions at home but not at school. I don't like school. We are not allowed to go outside unsupervised.

(When I probed I think he meant that he felt he wanted to take his learning outside the classroom)

Sometimes it helps when you go to your lessons. You can ask better questions so you can learn more.

It helps me to think of more complex questions. I think it has helped me a little bit.

When someone gives me a question or I ask a question I do philosophy in my head. I find it easier to ask good questions for discussion

Because when we started I asked boring questions which have got an answer. I ask more advanced questions now

It helps me to get better at sentences. I listen more carefully than I used to. I concentrate better.

I ask more questions. I used to sit listening to other people's questions. No questions came into my head. Now more questions come into my head.

You get ideas from other people and you can add things on.

I feel more confident to talk amongst other people.

You get to talk into a space. You can talk more than in other lessons. You're not frightened of getting the answer wrong.

It makes you more confident ... more outgoing, sharing ideas with others.

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**Do you think philosophy has helped you as a learner?**

Not that sure. It has helped me in discussing things but not so much as a learner.

Kind of because it teaches me that my opinion isn't always right. It helps me to know that my answer isn't always the right answer.

Yes ... it is a time to say what you think.

It's helped me to listen to other people's questions and answers and learn from them.

Yes ... it helps me get more sense in my head. It helps me think a lot better. I can look back and remember something from philosophy.

It helps me to think of sentences because we discuss things in sentences. Now I try sentences on my white board first.

Don't know.

No. I don't like learning. Yes and no ~ I like doing the fun bits of learning.

Not really. Philosophy is fun but you can't stick with philosophy rules. You have to go back to normal rules. You can talk in philosophy and say what you think.

A bit because you can speak out. You don't have to hold your thoughts in. In class you can't speak out your thoughts; they have to stay in. You can't ask questions.

You're learning to listen. If you think about something, you're learning how to think.

Yes it has. We're learning to learn; listening to learn and learning to listen.

Yes ... now I know how to listen more and not interrupt. I'm a lot more confident because I wasn't (before)

Yes. The questions. I ask and answer more questions.

I think better. I listen more carefully and develop ideas more quickly.

Yes. Listening, not talking when others are talking. Listening to others and not being silly.

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**Has philosophy made you think more or think differently about anything?**

You can't share your thoughts in other subjects. You can't show the things you are thinking in other subjects

It helped me think about different things and have a different approach to some of my work. It helps me think about a problem.

It does help me think differently because it helps me to think about what I should do if I'm stuck.

No (definite shaking of head)

Philosophy has made me think differently. The discussion makes me think more in situations.

It's changed the way I think about people who have different opinions from me. I respect other people's reasons. I used to think they were silly but now I can see they have their reasons.

It made me think more about Father Christmas. Is he real? The discussion helped me to change my mind.

It makes me think more because I'm thinking for myself.

It's helped me think more with all different kinds of things. With WALT I go back and think about philosophy.

It made me think differently. It helps to change what I think. Because we discuss it all, it makes me think more.

Think more about things that happen in the world and what will happen in the future. It makes me more aware.

It has made me think more about bullying and animals. It's made me think about being a vegetarian.

I think more. It's made me think about stuff that's really important. I listen better.

I think more about the questions I'm asking and being asked. With bullying I understand how others feel.

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I think better about certain things we need to take care of

I think more about ...

**Do you think philosophy is important?**

**Why?**

It's a thinking skill.

It's a learning skill.

It's a listening skill.

It's thinking to learn.

An activity for your brain; it makes your brain more active.

Yes. It helps you think and listen more.

Yes because it makes you think more and it builds up questions in your head.

Yes because you learn from it. You have a big conversation.

We're learning about the world; what we can do, what there is to do.

Very important. It gives you a choice so you don't believe one thing. Sometimes in Literacy, philosophy is written down.

Yes. It gives you choices about what you believe. You have different choices. It may help other people in their choices.

It's quite important because it helps with discussions. It gives you a wide selection of opinions and how you live your life. It can give you new opinions and you can choose your life.

No not really because it doesn't help me and it doesn't help my dyslexia.

Not really but kind of. It makes you think of stuff you don't normally think of. You can think about new things.

Sort of, sort of not. It can be important because it helps you share your thoughts but we don't use philosophy skills in other subjects or out of school.

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No it isn't important because there is nearly no-one who can actually do it. There's no-one in my house I can share my thoughts with.

**How could your teacher improve philosophy sessions for you?**

I don't really know

Start with a video or DVD and discuss it. Start with a video or DVD and discuss it.

We could watch a video instead of doing Pixie

We have to read Pixie round a circle.

Include a video/object/feely box and say your thoughts about it. We need to change it.

Using film rather than a book. Different books.

Children choose questions to discuss. Everyone needs to get to say what they think

Each week ask a child to find a story. Homework to think of a question to discuss. Everyone's question is discussed. Everyone's opinion is heard. Sometimes the discussion moves on before someone can say their opinion. Whiteboards for jotting.

We should do it once a week. Give us choice about what we talk about. If you have to wait a long time you forget what you're going to say.

Do more sessions in Years 1 and 2. Put your hand up if you want to talk. You need to get to finish your sentence; sometimes you don't.

Give us more time to speak. We should sit in a circle and go round, giving everyone a chance to say what they think

I like the way it is but we should do it more often.

Having more exciting starters. More time for thinking.

More sessions; twice a week.