

BASICS – INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Issues:

- What is Philosophy and why is it valuable as a practice? What is the difference between being wise and being clever? What do we need in order to make good choices, decisions and judgements?

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding difference between being wise and being clever.
- Identifying judgements (choices, decisions) and that justifying (giving reasons) to support these.

Contents:

- Lesson plan
- Notes and Suggestions
- Resources - Choice cards



Lesson plan

Activity	Activity Content	Aim
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Think-Pair – Share</p> <p>Feedback and Discussion</p>	<p>Explain that the word ‘Philosophy’ comes from the Ancient Greek terms, <i>Philos</i> meaning love and <i>Sophia</i> meaning wisdom.</p> <p>What we mean by ‘wisdom’? Prompt: Think of examples and images of wisdom. Other terms we associate with being wise.</p> <p>Identify the key words used to explain wisdom (e.g. knowledge, intelligence, logic, being smart, being old, being like an owl, etc.). It may be useful to use a flipchart to annotate some of the suggestions to act as a visual reminder.</p>	<p>Exploring the meaning of wisdom.</p> <p>Identifying related terms.</p>
<p>Think-Pair-Share</p> <p>Feedback and Discussion</p>	<p>Is being wise is the same as being clever? Prompt: Find examples where a person may be clever but acts unwisely.</p> <p>Share examples in order to consolidate the difference. Note that examples of cleverness may include both skill-based knowledge (e.g. being good at maths), but also sneakiness. If this latter is raised, it is worth highlighting for future discussions.</p> <p>Share with the class the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle’s observation that we can be clever without being wise, but being wise requires some degree of cleverness, as you need the appropriate knowledge to formulate the reasons that support making good decisions.</p>	<p>Distinguishing wisdom from cleverness.</p>
<p>Introducing Key Terms</p> <p>Think-Pair-Share</p> <p>Feedback and Discussion</p>	<p>Highlight the observation that being wise involves making good decisions and choices. Introduce the term ‘judgement’ as interchangeable with ‘decision’ and ‘choice’, and incorporate this into the discussion.</p> <p>What makes a good judgement? Prompt: Think of good and bad judgements that you have made and what made them good and bad.</p> <p>In discussion, it is common to associate good and bad judgements with outcomes. Make it clear to the class that this is what they are doing and ask them to consider not just the consequences of their decisions (what came <i>afterwards</i>), but what happened <i>before</i> they made their judgement. Highlight where it is noted that a good judgement is preceded by thinking things through. This is the process of justification – having and being able to give reasons for our judgements and decisions. Introduce the term ‘justification’ and incorporate it into the discussion. Encourage the class to identify where a bad decision has been made. This will usually be where they have acted on impulse or been governed by an emotional reaction to a situation. In other words, where they have not thought things through. The distinction between reason and emotion/desire is key here. Whilst the latter often plays an important role in our decision-making, it should never dominate our ability to reason things through. When we are able to give justifications for our judgements, we know that we have let reason rule.</p>	<p>Introducing ‘judgement’.</p> <p>Identifying criteria for good and bad judgements:</p> <p>Noting the importance of thinking things through rather than being governed by emotional reactions.</p> <p>Introducing ‘justification’</p>

<p>Game</p>	<p>The class can practice making judgements and supporting these with reasons (justification), with one of the following 'choice games'. Ask the class to think about one of the following questions:</p> <p>(1) What is the most important thing in life? (2) What is best job to have?</p> <p>Place the <i>choice cards</i> around the circle so that all can see them. Ask the children to make a judgement about which of these is the best answer. Allow a few minutes of thinking time for this. Ask them to move to stand next to the answer they most agree with. Invite groups or individuals to share the reasons they had for making this judgement.</p> <p>When reasons are given, children from other groups may be invited to offer a challenge. Allow children to agree and disagree with each other (using the protocol), as this is where the high quality discussions may begin to take shape. Don't be afraid to probe and ask children to explain further or invite other children to offer alternate points of view.</p>	<p>Making judgements and providing justifications.</p> <p>Evaluating justifications.</p>
<p>Reflection and re-evaluation</p>	<p>Note that a good judgment is one that we consider carefully and are prepared to re-examine. Give the group the opportunity to move to a difference card if they have changed their mind. If there is time, ask them to explain what made them change their mind.</p>	<p>Re-valuation.</p>
<p>Recap, Reflection and Planning</p>	<p>Note that to be wise, strong thinkers we need to take the time to think things through and always be ready to give reasons for what we believe. Examining our reasons are important because they enable us to discover whether our beliefs are well-justified or not, and this allow us to make informed judgements. Conclude by asking the class to consider where and when they make good and bad judgements, and to be especially attentive in the coming week to their decision making. If an when they make a bad decision, they should try think through why this happened and learn from that experience.</p>	<p>Reflecting and setting goals for development.</p>

Notes and Suggestions

- Activities can be changed to fit class interests and can be given as much time as you feel is necessary. In certain circumstances it may be worth exploring in greater depth the issues that affect our ability to make good judgements and decisions, for example, when we act out of fear, anger, impetuosity, selfishness, etc. In this case you may want to defer the choices game for a later session.
- If you are focussing on the choices game, you may want to have the class perform both exercises adding choice cards of their own. A higher level exercise involves comparing the decisions made in both choice games for consistency. The issue here is whether the values selected (most important things) are the kinds of thing that can realise in the kinds of job chosen.
- It is important to give the children adequate time to think about what it is you are asking them to consider, especially when you seek reasons from them.

Key Concepts:

- **Justification** is central to all forms of critical dialogue, not just philosophy. It is crucial to highlight the importance of thinking carefully about things, as well as articulating reasons for ones beliefs and actions. Thinking deeply about our beliefs can be difficult for both adults and children. Since Plato, Western Philosophy has adopted the ground rule that when making an assertion you must be able to give some back up for your claim. It's not sufficient to simply say 'this is my opinion', and leave it at that. In a philosophical discussion there will always be the requirement that you respond to the following question: why do you believe that; or, in other words, what is the justification for your belief? The notion of justification spans quite a wide spectrum: ranging from simply offering a few personal reasons that have lead you to hold a belief, to a full scale scientific report that attempts to attain the certainty of a mathematical theorem. A philosopher may be sceptical that a justification can equate to an absolute proof but will still insist that beliefs be supported by some justification: for this is the way to make us question our thoughts and assumptions.
- **Wisdom:** for the Ancient Greeks philosophy is the activity that strives to befriend wisdom; for Immanuel Kant we should 'dare to be wise'. But this leaves us with the question: what exactly is wisdom? The philosophers of past ages have often warned us not to equate wisdom and knowledge. The wisdom strived for in philosophy consists, not so much in a body of knowledge, but in the capacity to stand back and question: to approach life as a chain of open questions. But it is key to note that this questioning, to become wisdom, must go hand in hand with a happiness and joy towards life. This is probably the principal reason why philosophers see an overlap between themselves and children. Children seem to have naturally what the philosopher must learn: how to combine the endless questioning which keeps dogma at bay, with the lightness and vitality that goes hand in hand with living a happy life. With Philosophy for Children the wise teacher learns from the children that she teaches.

Further Reading:

- Bertrand Russell, The Value of Philosophy in The Problems of Philosophy. Opus Books.
- Mary Warnock, What makes someone a Philosopher? In Philosophy Basic Readings, ed. Nigel Warburton. Routledge, 1999.
- Brendan Wilson, What is Philosophy? in Simply Philosophy. Edinburgh University Press. 2002. (1912) 1980.

Resources

Choice Cards. These are sample suggestions. They are a good place to begin and have been proven to work well in most classes. You should however feel free to add and remove cards as is fitting.

It is recommended that these cards be written out on separate sheets or photocopies and enlarged so that each fits onto an A5-size paper.

The most important thing in life is....

having good friends
earning lots of money
being famous
getting a good job
being fit and healthy

The best thing to be is a ...

teacher

scientist

sports person

artist or writer

musician

computer programmer

shop keeper

vet

pop singer

bank manager

farmer