Philosophy for Children (re-grant)

This page covers the second (effectiveness) trial of Philosophy for Children, testing a scalable model under everyday conditions in a large number of schools. To read about the first (efficacy) trial - testing whether it could work in schools under best possible conditions - [click here].

‘Philosophy for Children’ (P4C) aims to improve children’s reasoning, social skills, and overall academic performance. The programme consists of a one-hour session each week, facilitated by the classroom teacher, in which children discuss an interesting philosophical question. Example questions might be ‘Is it fair to have a winner?’ or ‘Is it ok for children to hit teddy bears?’ The teacher encourages children to take a clear position, justify it, and respond to each other’s contributions. The project does not aim to teach children philosophy; instead it equips them to ‘do’ philosophy for themselves.

A major part of the programme is showing teachers how to generate good discussion with and between children – a skill that is likely to improve their teaching across the board. Through handbooks and training (two days initially, with the option for extensive follow up), teachers are shown how to structure a good conversation between children, how to ask effective open-ended questions, and how to prompt children to think more deeply about their positions.

Why are we funding it?

Since its development there have been a number of studies reporting on the benefits of P4C, including a meta-analysis in 2012 that indicated an effect size of 0.4 standard deviations (or an additional six months’ progress).

The previous EEF efficacy trial showed that children taking part in P4C made an additional two months’ progress compared to pupils receiving ‘business-as-usual’ classroom teaching in reading and maths. The trial was robust, with the results being seen on Key Stage 2 assessments and the trial receiving an evidence strength rating of three padlocks. This project will now test the programme in more schools and over a longer timeframe, providing a more robust estimate of the impact.

How are we evaluating it?

Ben Styles from NFER will lead the evaluation. The effectiveness trial will be school-randomised, with 75 schools being randomised to receive P4C and 125 randomised to act as business as usual control. An EEF effectiveness trial tests programmes as they would be delivered at scale in a large number of schools.

The primary outcome measure will be attainment measured by combined Key Stage 2 maths and English scores. The trial will also look at the impact of the programme on a character measure, likely to focus on social skills (such as asking questions and taking turns).

When will the evaluation report be due?

The evaluation report will be published in Spring 2021.