

ONLINE
RESOURCES

the if machine

**Philosophical Enquiry
in the Classroom**

Peter Worley

The If Machine

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The If Machine

Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom

Peter Worley

Illustrations by Tamar Levi



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For my parents Ian, Lorraine, and my parents-in-law,
Chris and Jocelyn whose support, at different times,
has been invaluable.

‘Education to independence demands that young people should be accustomed early to consult their own sense of propriety and their own reason.’

G.W.F Hegel (1770–1831)

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Preface

This is a book with a split personality. Is it a method or is it a classroom resource? In the end I have had to concede that it is a mixture of the two. There has to be some explanation before one can commence with the sessions but, given the time teachers have for ploughing through pages of theory and text, I have had to compromise on the extent to which this is a method while trying to retain what Aristotle would call the essential features. For this reason I have tried to sneak the method upon the reader with the use of boxes to introduce techniques and hints during the preparation for each session. The genesis of the book itself has been highly collaborative with the children and with their keen analytic faculties they have often, during the process of taking part in a session, helped me to sharpen some of the questions. For example, in the story ‘The Prince and the Pig’ the Prince’s wish was, originally, ‘I wish I was a pig, then I would be happy.’ One of the children (aged 7) pointed out that: ‘Just being a pig doesn’t mean that he would be happy.’ In other words, and in more pompous language, it does not necessarily follow that a pig will be happy by virtue of being a pig. As a result of this perceptive remark I changed the wish to ‘I wish I was a happy pig.’ There are many other such examples and I am sure there are some that have not yet been detected by my unofficial proofreaders. But this does provide a wonderful example of the level of thinking of which primary school children are capable.

Doing philosophy and the accompanying thinking that this entails is like entering a maze, and at various times in this book I have used this metaphor to illustrate what the role of the facilitator involves. In the Ancient Greek myth *Theseus and the Minotaur*, Ariadne helps Theseus defeat the Minotaur and escape from the maze by leaving him a thread. There are two important features of this metaphor that are relevant to the facilitator’s role. First, Ariadne enables him to keep track of where he has come from even though the maze is complex, and second she is not present while he navigates the maze. Though she provides the tools he has to do the rest himself. With regard to facilitation, these two themes of *navigation* and *absence* are the *idée fixes* of this book and I would urge you to keep them in mind at all times while you read the book. Keep asking yourself these questions: ‘Am I too involved in the discussion?’. ‘Do the children know where they are in the discussion?’. ‘How

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can I facilitate greater understanding without telling them?’ General warning signs are: if they know what you think or if you are telling them what they think then you need to rethink. On that note I shall leave you with this: heed this advice from one of the (lamentably) only two women mentioned in this book.

Table of Sessions

Star Ratings

* Easy

** Moderate

*** More difficult

The star ratings are here to give you a guide as to the difficulty level of the session. This is not necessarily age related. For example, The Ceebie Stories can all be used with children aged 7 and upwards, but some of the sessions will be more challenging than others. The key to dealing with challenging sessions is clarity of presentation. Make sure that you are familiar with the sessions and that you understand them yourself. Do not be afraid to try a more difficult session with your class: you will often find that your class surprise you.

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
The Chair	Things and what they are to us Perception Points of view Names and referring terms	49	7<	**
The Meaning of Ant Life	Purpose and design Existentialism God and religion Value	57	9<	**
Can You Step in the Same River Twice?	Change Arguments Identity Necessary and sufficient conditions Rivers and water cycles	61	8<	*

XIV Table of Sessions

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
Republic Island	Group decision-making Politics Fairness Rules Society Citizenship Islands	66	7<	*
The Ring of Gyges	Power Doing good Moral responsibility	74	8<	**
The Prince and the Pig	Happiness Values Points of view Animals	80	5–11	*
The Ship of Theseus	Identity Personal identity Change	86	9<	**
The Happy Prisoner	Freedom Freedom of the will Moral responsibility	93	9<	**
Goldfinger	Language Meaning Precision and accuracy Happiness Wishes	98	5–9	*
The Frog and the Scorpion	Nature/nurture Free will Choice Moral responsibility Self-interest Self-control Weakness of the will	105	All	*
The Little Old Shop of Curiosities	The future The self Choice Free will	111	10<	**

Table of Sessions **XV**

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
The Shadow of the Pyramid	Arguments Wisdom Problem-solving Sophistry	117	9<	**
Billy Bash	Self-control Emotions Belief Happiness	128	6<	*
Thinking About Nothing	Existence Language Reference Meaning Numbers Maths Ancient Greece	135	8<	**
Yous on Another Planet	Personal identity Identity Humanity	139	10<	***
The Ceebie Stories: Friends	Friendship Relationships Empathy	144	7<	*
The Ceebie Stories: The Tony Test	Artificial intelligence Computing Thinking Language	149	7<	**
The Ceebie Stories: The Robbery	Responsibility Knowledge History Choice	155	7<	***
The Ceebie Stories: The Android	Being human Analogy Personal identity	162	7<	*
The Ceebie Stories: The Lie	Dilemmas Decision-making Values Friendship Lying	166	7<	***

XVI Table of Sessions

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
The Ceebie Stories: The Rebuild	Change Personal identity Materials	172	7<	**
The Ceebie Stories: Finally Human?	Being Human Analogy Personal identity Self-conception	176	7<	**
To the Edge of Forever	Arguments Infinity	178	7<	**
Where Are You?	Personal identity Who am I? Minds and brains	182	8<	**
Get Stuffed: Fun with Metaphysics	Materials Science	186	8<	***

Section 1:

How to Do Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom

Introduction

Who is this book for?

This book has been written as a resource for anyone who wants to do philosophy with children in schools, youth groups or other settings. The material has been gathered from nearly 10 years of experience doing **philosophy** (you will find words in bold briefly explained in the glossary on page 191) with children from ages 5–13, and is suitable for use with children of this age and range of abilities. If you have not studied philosophy then please note that this book and online material have been written to provide an introduction to the relevant philosophical material. This aims to give you a basic philosophical awareness so that you can feel more confident and get more out of the philosophy sessions in your class. This book also aims to serve as a general introduction to philosophy as a subject, and hopes to spark your interest to learn and read more about it.

One great thing about philosophy is that children do not need to be familiar with it to be able to do it. To be able to facilitate philosophic discussions, however, it helps to have a basic awareness of the philosophical topics and debates that surround the sessions provided in this book. This will help you to encourage – or to identify – philosophical insights from the children. These, in turn, will help you to navigate the philosophical direction of the sessions. It is important to be aware that philosophy is much more than simply talking together and sharing ideas: it is a certain *kind* of thinking about certain *kinds* of topics (see ‘philosophy’ in the glossary). The kind of thinking that philosophy practises, however, can be applied to almost any subject. At the beginning of each session I have included a quick summary introduction of the philosophy that lies behind it, and at the end a guide to further reading available on the companion website that accompanies this book.

Do remember that the information about philosophy you find in this book and the companion website is *not* information to be taught to children in the philosophy sessions; it is there to help you develop a philosophical awareness

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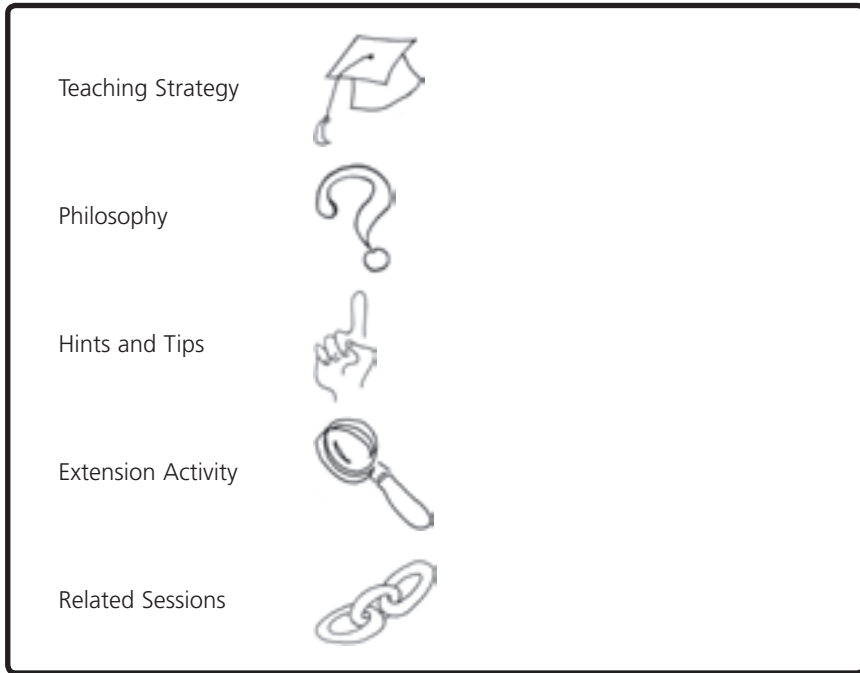
to help with the facilitation of the sessions. In other words, it assists you to be able to spot the philosophy in the sessions and guide the discussion appropriately. From this point on, while you are reading this book and doing philosophy with children, you are not a teacher, you are a ‘curious facilitator’. By this I mean that you are as interested in the ideas being discussed as the children and will do all you can to help the children explore ideas, but you will not be teaching them as you would in your normal role as ‘teacher’ and you will not be expressing your own ideas.

If you do philosophy regularly with your class and become familiar with the methods and teaching strategies (page 29) in this book you may find it can impact and inform your normal class teaching. This happens by developing transferable skills in the children such as speaking and listening, reasoning, questioning, autonomous learning, as well as critical and creative thinking. The teaching strategies should also help you to develop your teaching by giving you greater confidence with questioning and discourse skills, engendering a more collaborative relationship with your class and an atmosphere of active learning and **enquiry**. These areas of development have been shown to play a crucial role in creating independent learners in students.

The structure of this book

This book has two sections and a companion website. The first section, ‘How to do **Philosophical Enquiry** in the Classroom’, begins with an introduction to the subject of philosophy with children, and outlines my philosophical enquiry method (PhiE). There is then a full and comprehensive list of the teaching strategies that are covered in this book. These strategies can be used in any educational setting to help deepen thinking by developing questioning skills that will elicit more from the children, and engage the children critically with the material and with each other.

The second section, ‘The PhiE Sessions’, contains 25 sessions on different philosophical topics. The sessions are designed to last 1 hour, and can be extended over more than one session depending on how much discussion is generated by the questions and enquiries. Some sessions such as *The Chair*, *Republic Island*, *Billy Bash* and *Shadow of the Pyramid* are designed to span more than one session. Where this is the case, it is clearly marked at the beginning of the session. Each session includes a series of boxes that draw your attention to various features. These features include Teaching Strategy, Philosophy, Hints and Tips, Extension Activities and Related Sessions. These can be easily identified by the icons shown below.



The companion website that accompanies this book includes a comprehensive explanation of key terms used in the book, a guideline list of criteria for philosophical aptitude that children can develop through doing the philosophy sessions, and a sample PhiE session with descriptions of facilitation and Speaker Management methods to give you a context for their use. Illustrations that accompany the sessions can be downloaded as a visual supplement for the stimuli, and you will find some selected arguments, indicated in the book, also available for download. Additionally, the website provides an introduction to the philosophy that inspired the sessions. These ‘philosophy nuggets’ include the following.

- Philosopher and topic: the philosopher and the topic behind the session.
- Biography: a brief outline of the history of the philosopher.
- Big idea: a bite-size version of the relevant idea associated with the philosopher.
- Main publication(s): a reference to the most well-known publication(s) or the one most relevant to the topic. Interested readers are advised to seek these as further reading.
- Useful quote: a short quote from a primary source that captures the philosopher’s view on the relevant topic.