

# School pupils learn about practical philosophy

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Children could learn valuable lessons in responsible citizenship, such as making moral judgements and informed choices, through taking part in philosophical dialogue, according to researchers at the University of Strathclyde.

A study of more than 130 primary and secondary [pupils](#) found that taking part in practical philosophy sessions improved the children's [listening skills](#), gave them greater respect for other people, encouraged them to consider other perspectives and ideas they may not otherwise have thought about and helped them analyse problems so that they are thought through before making decisions.

The sessions, following an approach known as Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI), involved pupils being given a [stimulus](#) such as a picture, a piece of writing or a [piece of music](#) and being asked to come up with questions prompted by it. A question was chosen and a structured dialogue followed, facilitated by a teacher trained in CoPI.

Dr Claire Cassidy, a Lecturer in Education at Strathclyde, led the research. She said: "Doing practical philosophy in this way provides children with tools to enable them to participate as active citizens.

"Teachers in Scotland are being encouraged, through Curriculum for Excellence, to foster responsible citizenship in pupils, although discussions are continuing on what citizenship actually means. We wanted to assess how effective the Community of Philosophical Inquiry

approach can be in supporting children towards achieving the aims of the curriculum. While doing philosophy doesn't necessarily guarantee citizenship, it goes some way towards providing the necessary tools that a citizen requires.

"When pupils taking part in the study were asked what they thought [citizenship](#) meant, they emphasised that it related to representing the views of others, being environmentally aware, being law-abiding and sitting on committees, as well as having good manners and being respectful to others and their views.

"They found they were able to debate and discuss reasoned argument without conflict and often continued their discussions after their sessions had finished. They felt CoPI got them thinking deeply- as one pupil put it, thinking like they had never thought before."

The study involved more than 130 primary and secondary pupils around Scotland being presented with a series of scenarios in which people faced moral choices, including what to do with money they have found and choosing which charity to give funds they have raised.

They were asked what course of action the people might take, what they would have done themselves and their reasons for their decisions.

After taking part in a series of CoPI sessions over eight to 10 weeks, the pupils were presented with similar scenarios. Their answers this time tended to be considerably more detailed and offered far more justification for their responses.

**More information:** The research was presented at the recent EARLI (European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction) conference 2011, held at the University of Exeter.

Provided by University of Strathclyde

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