

Teaching Philosophy at Key Stage 3: An intervention in pedagogical strategies in selective grammar schools

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ABSTRACT

It is currently an interesting time for teaching philosophy in schools in Great Britain.

Philosophy has gained increased exposure due to a number of high-profile reports and publications which have argued that the subject positively impacts on student attainment.

Teaching philosophy and ethics alongside religious studies may have potential benefits to students given the new GCSE RS requirements in the UK. There is in this regard, however, a pressing need for research evidence to test and explore this hypothesis. There is, additionally, a lack of research-informed teaching and learning materials in terms of classroom delivery, at all key stages, key stage 3 (KS3) and GCSE. This study evaluates different methodologies of teaching philosophy at a secondary level, and attempts to construct and evaluate a scheme of work for secondary school that best harnesses both the current research-led, professionally-informed, practitioner-based thinking on the subject.

In collaboration with departmental colleagues, specialist and non-specialist, this study was based on an intervention at KS3. It was designed to establish best practice, and included pre-designed schemes of work. Interviews, observations and end-of-unit assessment data. The findings confirm that teaching philosophy at KS3 has a positive impact not only on students but on teachers.

The study concludes with some professional reflections on the difficulties, theoretical and practical, about what it means to teach philosophy 'successfully' and highlights areas of future development and research for the subject.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is presently enjoying a period of ascendancy in schools in the United Kingdom. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, there has been the gradual adoption of the 'Philosophy for Children' (P4C) programme, first introduced by Matthew Lipman (1977; Lipman *et al* 1980; also, Golding 2011, Vansieleghem and Kennedy 2011a, 2011b). This system seeks to create a 'Community of Enquiry' in the classroom, and facilitates students' critical thinking and arguing skills. The Educational Endowment Foundation (2014) published a study into the use of Philosophy for Children ('P4C') at key stage 2 and found that "P4C had a positive attainment on key stage 2 attainment. Overall, pupils using the approach made approximately two additional months' progress in reading and maths." Secondly, the 'Successful Futures' paper published by Graham Donaldson (2015) for the Welsh Government suggested that Religious Studies be overhauled and re-branded 'Religion, philosophy and ethics.' Finally, the most recent reforms to the GCSE RS syllabus suggests that students now study 'Textual studies and religion, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world.' The recommendation is that students should be able to: "Construct well-argued, well-informed, balanced and structured written arguments, demonstrating their depth and breadth of understanding of the subject...Engage with questions of belief, value, meaning, purpose, truth, and their influence on human life." (p.3)

Most recently, the report by Clarke and Woodhead (2015) called for the subject to be re-named 'Religious and Ethical Studies.' Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with moral issues, and can be taught independently of philosophy. Due to having moral dilemmas at the heart of the subject matter, it is often seen as the most accessible aspect of the subject to teach to students.

As a result of these events, there have been numerous calls to include some aspect of philosophy within the educational curriculum. One of the most notable came from a report conducted by Stephen Gorard (2015) for the Educational Endowment Foundation. The study focused on the results of teaching P4C to year 4 and 5 students for one academic year, and it made the following claims:

There is evidence that P4C had a positive impact on Key Stage 2 attainment. Overall, pupils using the approach made approximately two additional months' progress in reading and maths.

Results suggest that P4C had the biggest positive impact on Key Stage 2 results among disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for free school meals).

Teachers and pupils generally reported that P4C had a positive influence on the wider outcomes such as pupils' confidence to speak, listening skills, and self-esteem. (2015 p34)

The report's findings gave support to what practitioners have long advocated – that studying philosophy has academic benefits across the curriculum, and should be taken seriously. One point of note is that the study focuses on key stage 2 pupils. Much of the Philosophy for Children research often focuses on students in the earlier years of education (Lipman 1978; 1980 also; Fisher, 1998 Rowe & Newton 1994, Trickey and Topping 2004; Anderson et al 2016) My study aims to construct a methodology for teaching philosophy at key stage 3 that equips students with the ability to succeed at GCSE and beyond.

The skills that studying philosophy traditionally develop in students – independent thinking, learning to argue, and seeing arguments from different perspectives – are now becoming increasingly important at GCSE, and specifically within Religious Studies GCSEs. The Department for Education reforms of Religious Studies (2015) now states that the subject must:

Develop students' ability to construct well-argued, well-informed, balanced and structured written arguments, demonstrating their depth and breadth of understanding of the subject

Provide opportunities for students to engage with questions of belief, value, meaning, purpose, truth, and their influence on human life.

Challenge students to reflect on and develop their own values, beliefs and attitudes in the light of what they have learnt and contribute to their preparation for adult life in a pluralistic society and global community (2015 p.3)

Given that the change in syllabus for Religious Studies GCSE will effect students at key stage 4, there is natural gap in the curriculum. In order for students to succeed, they have to develop the skills listed above. It is arguable that teaching students philosophy will help improve these skills.

If students are introduced to philosophy at key stage 2, and need to be able to write and argue from different perspectives for the GCSE qualification, then there needs to be a bridge constructed at key stage three. Currently, at my school, philosophy is taught as part of the RE syllabus, by constituting occasional lessons rather than explicit units. My goal in this study is twofold – firstly, to establish distinct taught philosophy and ethics units at key stage three at school. Secondly, it is to set about finding what constitutes the most successful teaching strategies and methodologies to teach philosophy at key stage three, and share this practice with colleagues from departments across the region.

It is my assertion that one of the reasons that philosophy is not taught more at key stage three is that there is a reluctance to try what could be termed 'Higher order thinking' with students between the ages of twelve and fourteen because they are not capable of understanding complex abstract ideas. This idea is developed from Piaget's (1951) psychological model of intellectual development in children. Piaget's theory stressed that only at the end of the 'Formal operational' stage (ages fifteen to sixteen) were children capable of abstract thought and metacognition. During the course of this pedagogical intervention, I will demonstrate that students are capable of thinking abstractly at an earlier age – if given the right tools and guidance. Furthermore, given the changing nature of Religious Studies, I believe that a more effective delivery of the subject will prepare students for the demands of both the new GCSE and A-level syllabi.

Beyond the confines of everyday teaching, educational theorists such as Robinson (2001, 2011) stress the need for creative thinking in 21st century education, and Black et al (2003) have highlighted the importance of metacognition – 'Learning how to learn' – for improving educational standards. These two skills are synonymous with traditional philosophical thinking

In 2015, OFSTED published a report entitled 'Key Stage Three – The Wasted Years?' This report was a scathing report into pupils' progress during the key stage three years, and found that schools were

failing to provide a syllabus that built on key stage two. Two of their recommendations were that schools needed to:

Make Key Stage 3 a higher priority in all aspects of school planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Ensure that not only is the curriculum offer at Key Stage 3 broad and balanced, but that teaching is of high quality and prepares pupils for more challenging subsequent study at Key Stages 4 and 5 (2015 p. 8)

With OFSTED asking that schools placed more emphasis on key stage three, and teach lessons that helped prepare students for subsequent study, I believe that teaching philosophy at key stage three would help my school fulfil this criteria.

This study will consist of the following chapters: Literature review (In which I will determine the specific questions the study will address) the study (Where I shall address why this is important for my institution) the methodology (including the ethical justification for the project) findings and analysis (my interviews, observations, and assessment data.) The final two sections will highlight the implications for future research, and draw conclusions from the project.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To establish the understanding required to construct an effective series of schemes of work at key stage three, this literature review will explore the research in order to answer the following:

1. What are the traditional views of teaching philosophy and how is it taught now in schools?
2. What does 'Teaching philosophy' consist of?
3. What are the possible outcomes of teaching philosophy?

1. Philosophy as a subject is one which is seen as the cornerstones of western civilization, but is largely absent from classrooms in the UK. A reason for this is due to the belief that children are

simply incapable of the mature thought that 'Doing philosophy' consists in (as seen in Levine, 1983, and Gazzard, 1983). This belief can be traced back to the thinking of Jean Piaget, (1932, 1954) whose model for psychological development in children suggested that children's intelligence developed in a series of age-related stages, and that they learned through the exploration of their environment. Children ultimately progressed to a 'Formal operational stage'. This stage occurred between the ages of 11-16, and signalled that children could think abstractly and metacognise. Due to the varying individual level of development, educators have argued that many students pre-key stage 4 will simply lack the mental agility to think philosophically.

In the sphere of ethics, a Piaget's ideas were echoed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1983) who stated that ethical behaviour in humans moved through six distinct developmental stages, with the majority of adolescents and some adults operating in the 'Conventional' stage. Advanced ethical thinking only occurred in the 'Post-conventional' stages, and as such would be beyond the mental agility of most key stage three students.

This is not a new conception of philosophy, however. Looking back to the classical age of philosophy, both Plato and Aristotle argued that philosophy is a subject that should not be taught to students who have not reached a level of maturity. In the *Republic*, Plato argues that philosophy should only be introduced to those who have completed years of study, and only once they have reached thirty. His assertion is that introducing philosophy to a younger cohort will be fraught with difficulties:

And there's one great precaution you can take which is to stop their getting a taste of (philosophical argument) too young. You must have noticed how young men, after their first taste of argument are always contradicting people just for the fun of it: they imitate the cross examiners, delighting like puppies in tearing and dragging around anyone in an argument. (1979, Book 7, 539b)

Aristotle argues that children lack the required life experience to gain insights from his politics lectures. This stands in direct contrast to mathematical knowledge, where truths and proofs can be reached without experience:

One might also investigate why it is that a child can become a mathematician but not a theoretically-wise person or a natural scientist. Or isn't it that the objects in mathematics are given through abstraction, while the starting points in theoretical wisdom or natural science come from experience, so that the young lack conviction there but only talk the talk, whereas in mathematics it is quite clear to them what each of the objects is?
(2014, Book 6, Chapter 8, 1142a)

In the twentieth century, the assertion that philosophy was a subject that was suitable only for older students can be seen in the work of Mary Warnock (1988). Her work *A Common Policy For Education* suggests that philosophy should be a subject for undergraduate study, following on from a suitable grounding in the standard secondary subjects (English, Maths, History). A philosophical understanding should then be applied to these subjects at university. She argues:

I do not think it possible to study philosophically profitably without entering fairly deeply into the history of the subject, and for this there is no time at school, nor could it be a subject that would interest more than a few pupils. Instant philosophy, philosophy that springs into being in the bath or on the television screen is fun, but it can hardly be serious (1988 p57)

What is interesting to note here is that Warnock's belief echoes the notion that work (and working philosophically) cannot equal enjoyment – there is a suggestion that academic work is permanently aligned with seriousness. Clearly there is long-held resistance to studying the subject. Either through the assertion that a student's mental faculties are simply not developed enough to study successfully, or that the students lack the maturity or time to fully engage with the subject.

The contrasting view to this is that which was advocated by Matthew Lipman (1977) and the 'Philosophy for Children' programme. Lipman believed that children were capable of profound philosophical thought and engagement, and aimed to teach 'Good reasoning'. This model of pedagogy has its roots in the work of John Dewey (1859-1952). As a pragmatist, Dewey's ideas were based on the conviction that an emphasis on reasoning was a necessary element of any deep-structural educational reform, and that the introduction of philosophy into the content of schooling

represented the one best curricular and pedagogical hope for bringing that element forth in the culture and practice of schooling.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey discusses what he sees as the inseparable relationship between philosophy and education:

If a theory makes no difference in educational endeavour, it must be artificial. The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice. If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow-men, philosophy may even be defined *as the general theory of education* (1985, p338)

Lipman follows Dewey in viewing the process of education as an ongoing inquiry, rather than teaching the final outcomes of someone else's enquiry. The programme consists of a series of children's novels that feature philosophical problems intertwined with the protagonist's everyday lives. There is a novel for each academic year that Lipman developed the programme for; twelve in total, with the first aimed at 5 year-olds, and the final volume aimed at 17 year-olds. Lipman's first (and most cited) novel is *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (1993) which is aimed at primary school students, aged 9-10. Most of the curriculum materials published by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) focuses on teaching philosophy to this age group. In terms of pedagogy, Michael Pritchard (2014) describes the Philosophy for Children method in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* thus:

What is required is the ability to facilitate philosophical discussion. For this, it is much more important that teachers have some philosophical curiosity themselves than a familiarity with academic philosophical literature. Like their students, teachers unfamiliar with the discipline of philosophy may nevertheless have an aptitude for philosophical thinking—or at least a knack for recognizing when others are engaged in philosophical thought. Facilitating a Philosophy for Children discussion does not mean dominating it; it is important for teachers to allow their students to develop their own ideas. Teachers are not expected to provide, or even have, answers to all the questions. They can share puzzlement with their students, be open to

unexpected but suggestive responses to the questions they and their students pose, and take pleasure in observing the exchanges students have with each other. This means shedding the traditional role of teacher as lecturer and answer-giver. (2014 p10)

This effectively sums up the paradigm of Lipman's Philosophy for Children, and also signposts how it is most commonly taught in schools today. Philosophy for Children courses remain popular as continuing professional development (CPD) exercises for teachers, and these courses often consist in one-day training seminars. During the seminars, teachers are introduced to the idea of the 'community of inquiry' in which a stimulus is given, and through a democratic process, the teacher merely facilitates the discussion.

Philosophy for Children has undoubtedly been a success in the forty years since Lipman's original conception, and Montclair State University in New Jersey, USA is home to the IAPC. However, there is contention as to whether Philosophy for Children is the best means to teach the subject to students. In a dialogue with Maughn Gregory (2011) the co-founder of the Philosophy for Children programme Ann Margret Sharp described Lipman's view on what philosophy was in the following way:

'I want to introduce children to philosophy because I think that's the way to improve their judgment.' And when I asked him, 'What is philosophy, to you?' he said, 'Philosophy is the search for wisdom'. Mat saw the whole conversation of philosophy, going back to Socrates, as a quest to help us to lead qualitatively better lives. (*Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, vol. 45, no.2 p.200)

This raises an interesting question – what is for philosophy *for*? Lipman's view was that philosophy was a tool, a praxis with a means to an end. However, not everyone agrees that this is what the end product of studying philosophy should be, and I will examine this in the next section.

Beyond the Philosophy For Children program, there have been a number of thinkers who incorporate philosophy into Religious Studies curriculums in order to provide students with the tools to achieve autonomy of thought in later life (Oliverio 2012, Gregory 2011, Hand 2006). These approaches emphasise the importance of dialogue, much as P4C does, but also place emphasis on

the ability to think independently, and to encourage independent thought. Gregory (2011) notes that such programmes have been open to criticism from social conservatives who do not want to see children questioning traditional values and psychologists who do not believe that children are capable of thinking philosophically. (p 199). As a consequence, the concepts of dialogue and independence of thought are seen as central to teaching philosophy – even if the pedagogy is not universally accepted.

Briefly looking beyond the English educational system, it is interesting to note that many European schools include philosophy as a distinct part of their secondary syllabus. The 2009 UNESCO report revealed the following countries were teaching philosophy: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway Portugal, Romania and Spain. It is clear that in comparison to the rest of Europe, we do not place the same emphasis on philosophy – but of interest to my investigation is that the European systems often do not offer the subject until the equivalency of key stage 4. In Spain, the subject is split into two: History of Philosophy and Philosophical Concepts. The Spanish model suggests that the subject needs to be in two distinct topics; one which encourages the more discursive elements of the subject, and one which focuses on the more classical model of learning facts and related concepts. This schism is one which repeatedly occurs in conceiving how philosophy should be taught, and one which will also be addressed in the next section.

2. One of the central problems in teaching philosophy is getting a sense of consensus as to what it is that is being taught, or should be taught – unlike other subjects, it can be a nebulous idea. For example, Kirstie Dotson (2012) claims that philosophy must become more open to diverse practitioners, and alternative forms of philosophical engagement. She stresses that teaching the subject requires a shift to a *culture of praxis* – “What creates philosophical communities is a concern for contributions made according to one’s interests and community involvement, rather than a shared set of justifying norms.” (Dodson, 2012, p19).

There has also been the assertion that philosophy as a subject is entirely unique, and shouldn't be taught or assessed in the same way as other subjects. Judith Suissa (2008) states:

Philosophy cannot be conceived of, and structured like another curricular subject with its own 'bits of data'. If it is subject to the same kinds of curricular guidelines and assessment regime as other subjects, its contents will inevitably be turned into 'Facts'. If philosophy classes are to truly enable children to engage in speculative, imaginative exercise, it would be problematic to restrict them by means of exams and predetermined syllabi. (2008 p142)

In direct contrast, there have been a number of thinkers who stress the need for philosophy to be taught with fact and text at the heart of learning in the subject. Higgins and Baumfield (1998) note that students need both subject knowledge and general thinking skills to develop a level of competence in the subject. Richard Rorty (1999) in critiquing Dewey, highlighted the need for substantial curriculum content:

I doubt it ever occurred to Dewey that a day would come when students could graduate from an American high school not knowing who came first, Plato or Shakespeare, Napoleon or Lincoln, Frederick Douglas or Martin Luther King, Jr. Dewey too hastily assumed that nothing would ever stop the schools from piling on the information and that the only problem was to get them to do other things well... (1999 p121)

So there is an obvious discrepancy as to what is actually being taught when a student is being taught philosophy. It is arguable that this fracture as to what constitutes teaching philosophy can be explained via two differing paradigms. On one hand, there is the Platonic view, which can be seen as championing the role of discourse and discussion as the core of philosophical practice. In broad terms, Dewey, Lipman and Freire (1970) with his model of problem-posing education can be seen to be part of this tradition, all placing a great deal of emphasis on the spoken word and discourse. On the other hand, thinkers such as Rorty and Jacques Derrida (2001) who emphasise the primacy of text and the written word.

Derrida in particular claimed that the act of examining text and writing was the way in which an individual claimed an identity rather than gaining something as elusive as 'Knowledge': "The self does not exist, it is not present to itself until that (topic) which engages it in this way (of reading)...It exists through it (writing)." (Derrida, 2001, p.61)

One possible solution to what teaching philosophy consists in comes from Jana Mohr Lone and Michael D. Burroughs (2016). Lone and Burroughs argue that what is required is *philosophical sensitivity* – "A general capacity to engage in questioning and reflection about the unsettled questions underlying the human condition and the world in which we live." (2016, p.41). Using this model, it is not important for a lesson in philosophy to be taught by a specialist, or someone with an explicit understanding of western thought, but rather the ability to lead a discussion, to recognise a philosophical question; one which asks a fundamental question about the human condition. This stance is supported by Peter Worley (2015) writing for the Philosophy Foundation, who argues that in schools, what should be taught is not 'philosophy' – the subject as history, or Dotson's justifying norms, but a means to open up and introduce the importance of dialogue:

When I train teachers I don't teach them to do philosophy because I believe – as did the originator of the P4C movement, Matthew Lipman – that it requires specialist knowledge and training in philosophy. I train... what I might call just *dialogue*. This does not exclude discussions of a philosophical nature, but neither does it demand them. So, at TPF, we train philosophy graduates to do *philosophy* in schools; we train teachers to do *dialogue* with their classes. The difference between philosophy and dialogue is the content. Sometimes discussions using dialogue is philosophical, but it doesn't have to be; it could be a discussion about how many decimals there are between 1 and 2, what symmetry is, or what growth is or friction. These discussions may *become* philosophical. (<https://philosophyfoundation.wordpress.com/2015/07/24/>, accessed 14/9/16)

This now presents us with three distinct models of philosophy – philosophy as explicit discussion (the Philosophy for Children model) philosophy as ground in textual study, or

philosophy purely as a means to facilitate more deep and reflective modes of thinking. For this investigation, I plan to take a hermeneutic view of 'Teaching philosophy.' I do not think that there is a sole, correct interpretation of the subject, and as such, I feel all of the models highlighted here should play a part in forging a new syllabus at key stage three. Philosophical focus, discussion and text should all play a part in constituting schemes of work for philosophy, and rather than favoring one, I intend on using them all.

3. In terms of general outcomes for teaching philosophy, there are three main sources. The first one is obviously the 'Philosophy for Children model. This, as we have seen places the emphasis on philosophical discussion, and Lipman (1977) describes it thus:

The distinguishing features of the model of philosophical education advocated by the IAPC are (i) the use of philosophical stories as stimuli to philosophical discussion and (ii) the 'community of inquiry' pedagogy, which gives pupils responsibility for setting the agenda for discussion and casts the teacher in the role of facilitator rather than instructor. (1977, p87)

This model is built on by both Fisher (1998) and Dorothy Howie (2011). Howie argues that if philosophy is being taught in schools, then what is of core importance is the learning environment. Howie states that it must be one which is: capable of providing adequate challenge to all learners, and must be open to change and experiment (2011, p. 30-31). Howie's view is that philosophy can be taught as part of small groups and large – but these principles require differing teaching skills. Fisher (1998) suggests a model for teaching which comes close to the 'All-inclusive' model that I hope to be able to create in my department's lessons. He sees the teacher of philosophy as performing three distinct tasks (which by extension suggests three different types of lesson):

Teacher as expert – There are many situations where teachers need to take on the role of expert, sustaining the attention of individuals or groups.

Teacher as facilitator – Teachers often organise situations where children work in groups. In this role the teacher has a management function rather than a direct teaching role.

Teacher as participant – discussion between pupils can often be useful, but talk is generally enhanced by the active participation of a teacher or experienced adult...One of the aims of teacher as a participant is to get pupils to talk and listen to each other, rather than directing all their talk through the teacher. (1998 p.43)

Fisher's model stresses that there will be times where the teacher needs to be the expert – they will need to be able to convey knowledge, or make a value judgement. This is a position shared by Ann Gazzard (2012) who states: "Some answers are simply and plainly wrong, some are better than others, and a background in philosophy is an enormous asset to know the difference and teach philosophical thinking to children." (2012, p.52)

Christopher M. Clark (1995) characterises the different methodologies of teaching the subject in *Thoughtful Teaching*. He claims that there are three distinct models that characterise good teaching within the subject. These are: the Process-Product approach, the Teacher Thinking approach, and the Teacher Knowledge approach. (p.9) The Process-Product teacher. "The good teacher in this framework, is one whose students achieve the highest scores on tests of knowledge and skill, following instruction." (ibid) This model is the one which is most valued in secondary education, and it forms the basis of OFSTED judgements on schools: *what grades are students achieving, and how far have they progressed?*

In conducting the literature review, it became clear that there is less published literature that focuses on teaching philosophy at key stage three, than there is teaching the subject at primary level (Trickey & Topping 2004; Hand, 2008; Stokell, Swift and Anderson, 2016; Demissie 2016) or undergraduate level (Kenkman, 2009; Lewis & Robinson 2016; Haynes, 2016). One possible explanation is that at key stage 4, RE GCSE becomes the focus of the curriculum, and as such there is less room in the timetable to teach philosophy, and as such

it has become less of a fertile area for research. Birch (2014) claims that more focus is placed on primary school children and philosophy as they are more pliant and easier to bewitch – and seeing that education is a ‘race against time’ to produce desired outcomes, it is better to start earlier with students. (p.2-3) Suissa (2008) goes so far as to suggest that perhaps it should not be taught as a conventional subject; “The secondary school curriculum is not the place to provide a systematic, thorough training in philosophy, but to introduce children to philosophical ideas.” (p.276)

This idea of using the class time to introduce philosophical ideas and methodology is the focus of the literature that highlights the ‘Philosophy for Children’ model, which once again - provides teachers with means for getting students to think philosophically, but does not place any emphasis on how these skills can be assessed by teachers.

Today, the ‘Philosophy for Children’ programme stands as one of the most popular methods of introducing philosophy to all levels of compulsory education. However, the programme suggests that philosophy is a unique subject, and should be treated differently. For example, the P4C website suggests that the subject should be taught as part of the curriculum, rather than as an independent subject. It also outlines how the subject should be taught:

The basics of philosophy for children are straightforward. Children, or older students, share some reading, listening or viewing with their teacher. The children take some thinking time to devise their own questions. They choose a question that interests them and, with the teacher's help, discuss it together. The teacher aims to get children to welcome the diversity of each other's initial views and to use those as the start of a process that encourages children to question assumptions, develop opinions with supporting reasons, analyse significant concepts and generally apply the best reasoning and judgement they can to explore the question they have chosen. (<http://www.p4c.com/> accessed 14/9/16)

In the longer term, the teacher aims to develop children's skills and concepts through appropriate follow-up activities, thinking games and the orchestration of connections between philosophical discussions, life and the rest of the school curriculum.

Currently, this method of teaching philosophy is embraced by many schools as part of their gifted and talented programmes. Rather than a subject in its own right, philosophy is sometimes called 'Thinking Skills'. Davis, Rimm and Siegel (2011) describe it thus:

Problem solving includes teaching students to identify assumptions and values, examine different sides of an issue and possible actions, and make decisions; or else teaching students to define a problem, select pertinent information, recognise assumptions, formulate hypothesis and draw conclusions. (2011 p.268)

Once again, there is much emphasis on the benefits and skills gained by students in studying critical thinking, but there is little focus given as to how the students can be gauged to have progressed. This is arguably due to philosophy being taught as an extra activity. However, at Coastal Grammar the subject is part of the core curriculum, and as such needs distinct assessment criteria. Exploring how this could be made viable will constitute a professional necessity for myself and the department.

A critic of the Philosophy for Children programme is Karel Van der Leeuw (2004). In writing on Lipman's programme, he highlights that Lipman places too much emphasis on analytical reasoning as a guarantee for critical thinking. He says: "In the novels, but especially in the accompanying manuals, stress on analytical skills, reasoning, categorizing, ordering, and so on, is pervasive. It is not immediately apparent, however, how improvement of analytical skills is conducive to the discovery of meaning." (2009, p111) Van der Leeuw is sceptical of the goals of teaching philosophy to children in separate, individual classes:

Reflection and reasoning can't be realized when we only reserve separate hours a week for a collective exploration of philosophical questions....We

expect people to be able to reflect rationally on human life, which includes a view of reality, of the place of the individual in society, of values and norms, of the meaning of life and so on. [And] ... we expect them to be able to communicate these views to others, because we live in a common reality, and this common reality must be the subject of common discourse, and can even be regarded as a common construct (2004 p.112-13)

So philosophy in school is not seen by Van der Leeuw as a lesson where students get particular 'Answers' or an ability to reasoning, but as a process where students can decide what the important questions of the day are, and how they can ascertain their own answers through being able to think for themselves, and others in a communal setting. As a result, he suggests that a whole school programme is required, which places emphasis on integrated thinking across the curriculum. (ibid.)

Another argument for consideration when considering what a philosophy scheme of work should entail comes from Karl Popper. Popper's view, described by Bailey (2000) was that children did not learn through a process of induction or by instruction; rather they actively engaged with their environment. Popper stressed that children should not be seen as passive receivers of information – but also that they should not ignore the traditions and history of which they were a part. Popper advocates a position which would see lessons made up of a balance of instruction and exploratory styles, the choice determined by the content of the lesson.

Beyond the argument over what philosophy actually *is* it is clear that there is a number of different perspectives on what should be taught and how it should be taught. It seems that there is no 'Right answer', and it is difficult to say if any particular method is more 'Correct' than the other. This is partially due to the lack of firm quantitative data on the subject. As mentioned at the abstract, the Educational Endowment Foundation study from 2014 was lauded in the mainstream media, but closer examination of the figures shows that the trialists pre-specified two primary outcomes but only reported one, which showed no difference. They pre-specified seven secondary outcomes which showed no differences either. However when they altered their analysis plan after seeing the

data they noticed that two of the secondary outcomes showed a tiny shift in mean change scores favouring the intervention.

What this points to is a lack of definition within the subject: There is no consensus on what the subject should consist of, and there is no overwhelming evidence to indicate that one particular methodology is better than another. Trickey and Topping (2004) conducted a review of ten different controlled studies of teaching philosophy, but from those ten, only two focused on students over the age of twelve. One gained data by means of a reading test, whilst the other used 'Videoed discussion'. (p.376) Both showed positive improvements, but it is difficult to establish a firm correlation from the data. This presents a challenge for any researcher looking to investigate the effect of philosophy in schools, and suggests that an intervention is the best fit for this study.

3. In terms of potential outcomes for teaching philosophy at key stage three, the work of the Philosophy for Children programme dominate the literature of the subject. Rather than content, for the most part, the literature on the subject examines the role of the teacher in delivering the philosophy lesson. Robert Fisher (1998) presents an in-depth methodology of the philosophy for children programme in *Teaching Thinking – Philosophical enquiry in the classroom*. As we have already seen, Fisher offers an interesting model for delivering philosophy as a subject, but undoubtedly his emphasis is on the discursive method of teaching the subject: "(This book) is not about teaching the subject of philosophy, but how to engage them in a special kind of discussion – philosophical discussion, teaching them in other words how to *philosophize*." (p.1) Fisher calls his methodology 'Socratic thinking', and it is clear that in terms of assessment, he values the discursive model rather than the written. In answering how to assess progress in philosophical discussion, he states: "The best way to analyse evidence is to record the session on video or audio tape, then to transcribe and analyse elements of the discussion." (p.260).

Lipman's own preferred schemes of work focused, as mentioned above, on a series of novels which introduce a philosophical area and then act as springboard for further discussion. One criticism of the Philosophy for Children model is that there is no clearly defined developmental progression within the topics studied. This is an issue that the intervention will need to address. In Britain, Sutcliffe (1993) adapted Lipman's *Harry Stottlemeier* novel with notes for provoking further philosophical discussion and back-up material. This has been developed by groups such as the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPRE), and whilst the material is extremely popular, it lacks the assessment opportunities and progression that characterised Lipman's schemes.

In this investigation, the focus is on key stage three, (years 7-9) and Lipman's suggestions for these years are: 12-13 years should focus on *Ethical enquiry* and moral education. 14-15 years should make *reasoning* – explaining how and why – the focus. There is a correlation, in very broad terms between what Lipman suggests, and what the intended schemes of work in this intervention will be. Year 7 will focus on ethics, whilst a key part of the year 8 study will be making informed judgements, and explaining why.

A further suggested scheme of teaching philosophy comes from David Birch (2014). Birch's views are even more ambitious than Lipman's. Birch suggests that classes should not be set up in a single pre-determined way but whichever way will best enable discussion. Students should then be selected at random to respond to a philosophical stimulus provided by the teacher. Whereas the Philosophy for Children programme suggest very distinct topics for discovery, Birch states:

A further option is to ask no questions at all. You may simply want to present the story, or whatever it is, and then let the discussion loose. Alternatively, once you've got the hang of philosophy you might discard the book and present nothing. I sometimes go with no pre-prepared material and begin by asking the class what they have been thinking about in the past week (2014 p7)

Birch's method is admirable, but it does require a developed relationship with a class. Having teenagers understand that they can publically share what could be considered nascent or difficult

thoughts without fear of embarrassment or peer ridicule is a challenge, and one which requires time to establish. One thing that does bear consideration from Birch's model is the concept that when teaching philosophy, the teacher must learn to be flexible, and respond to the contributions and thoughts of the class rather than sticking rigidly to a lesson plan.

The role of the teacher is of paramount importance to a number of thinkers. Feurerstein *et al* (2006) Mentis (2009) and Howie (2011) do not describe teachers within the learning environment as teachers, but as *mediators* – Feurerstein highlights the three roles that the learning experience should include: mediation of intentionality (sharing the learning goal) mediation of meaning (giving a sense of value for the learning goal) and mediation of transcendence (going beyond the learning goal). (p.16). This links closely to Freire's view of 'Problem-posing' education, discussed in the introduction. In deciding what to teach students when teaching philosophy, there is a clear need for the teacher to be the central figure in the room, but crucially, they are figures who enable or empower students to decide what is learned. In this intervention, my colleagues and I must acknowledge this when planning and delivering lessons. Lone and Burroughs (2016) have recently created a programme that rivals the Philosophy for Children programme, and also embraces the role of teacher as facilitator or mediator. They highlight individual lessons which could be expanded to cover a series of lessons. The topics include: beauty (aesthetics), the social contract, genetic engineering (applied ethics) and justice. What is remarkable about Lone and Burroughs' scheme is that it culminates in a definite assessment point; 'The Ethics Bowl' (p. 191). A class is presented with an ethical dilemma – for example, plagiarism – and then asked to argue the different ethical positions that they had been taught, and evaluate themselves.

They go on to suggest that a successful scheme of work for philosophy will incorporate the following elements: "1. Critical and flexible thinking; 2. Imaginative problem-solving, including a willingness to explore new ideas; 3. An ability to listen carefully; 4. A propensity to ask questions; 5. A commitment

to seek and evaluate reasons; 6. Intellectual humility and honesty; and 7. A comfort with uncertainty.” (p.221)

Finally, I considered the current thinking on designing tasks in the general secondary classroom. Thompson (2015) suggests teachers have to consider four separate factors when considering task design: “What matters in my subject? How does task design relate to subject knowledge? What is meant by task demand? How do tasks/activities help students conceptualise?” (p 5-6) At key stage three, I am looking to introduce a mixture of subject knowledge, whilst also encouraging discussion and questioning skills.

There are certainly areas of overlap when an overview of teaching philosophy and secondary school is taken in totality. The teacher as facilitator, the importance of discussion, and the place of the student as an active learner than a passive receptor. In terms of topics to study, there is also a focus on ethics, morality and elements of epistemology – asking ‘What can we know?’ These are all elements which I will attempt to incorporate into the key stage three schemes of work, and this will form the core content of the study.

The Study

My school, Coastal Grammar, is a selective boys’ grammar school, situated in an affluent part of Great Britain. The school regularly posts strong GCSE results, and was rated as ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted in its last scheduled inspection cycle (June 2014). However, following the 2014-15 academic year, Ofsted returned to the school following a dip in examination results for both English and Science. Following that inspection in December 2015, the school was given ‘Requires improvement.’ One of the findings of the report stated: “The proportion of pupils who attain the higher grades of A*/A at GCSE is too low across many subjects.” Even though this did not apply to religious studies GCSE, one of the school’s post-Ofsted action plan targets was focusing on how to push students at

the 'Top end.' It was clear that the school wanted to improve student performance in all areas, and given the new specification and assessment criteria for GCSE religious studies, it became clear that teaching more philosophy to students at key stage three was desirable.

Coastal Grammar places a great deal of value on Religious Studies. This can be seen in the school's aims which include:

- To prepare students for a fulfilling adult life in a changing society where dreams and ideals are highly valued.
- To promote and pursue excellence in a stimulating intellectual environment, helping all students to realise their full potential in academic, cultural, sporting, artistic and social development.
- To develop in students; tolerance, self-discipline, and respect, whilst at the same time nurturing increasing independence, intellectual curiosity and creativity.

The idea of creating well-rounded students with intellectual curiosity is one which religious studies supports. Lessons traditionally introduce challenging subjects, and students are encouraged to discuss and consider differing viewpoints as well as developing their own independent views.

The subject is taught once per week in years 7 & 8, three times per fortnight in years 9 and 10, and then four times per fortnight in year 11. The subject is compulsory, and grades at GCSE are good (98% A*-C in 2014-15). I took over the department in 2012, and following some very successful trial lessons, looked to give the study of philosophy and ethics equal weighting alongside the study of religion at key stage 3. In my experience, the boys responded extremely positively to this, and were keen to do more philosophy. (Lessons based on thought experiments and moral dilemmas were notably popular.) As a consequence, I looked to introduce dedicated philosophy units into the key stage three syllabus to run alongside the established religious studies content.

On observing my colleagues as part of the performance management cycle of 2013-14, I became aware that their philosophy lessons were good, but my colleagues were missing opportunities to

either 'dig deeper' into a subject, or set challenging written work that would formalise what had been covered in the lesson.

My part two study for the MLT qualification investigated this idea further. I asked if there was a more productive way to teach philosophy at key stage three, and I interviewed my colleagues within the department as to their thoughts and feelings about teaching philosophy and ethics lessons.

Following this process, I drew the following conclusions from our interviews:

1. My colleagues enjoyed the dynamism of the lessons, and felt that they gave a more rounded curriculum when taught alongside religious studies.
2. Both colleagues – neither of whom came from academic philosophy backgrounds – expressed concern in being able to appropriately marshal philosophical arguments, or have the capacity to introduce and recognise classic philosophical positions in the course of a lesson.

I was given free reign by the head teacher of the school to redevelop the key stage three schemes of work as I saw fit – his one recommendation was that we teach the skills that the new religious studies specifications required.

What follows is my attempt to conduct a pedagogical intervention within my subject at key stage three to establish best practice for the subject, and create new schemes of work as a consequence.

METHODOLOGY

Research question: What does an effective scheme of work for teaching philosophy at key stage three consist of?

Research Objectives

1. To develop new innovative schemes of work for key stage three religious studies that are focused on philosophy and ethics
2. To establish best practice in teaching the subject within the school

Research Design and Action Research Cycles

In this intervention process, my role is one that mixes practitioner research and action research. As Punch & Oancea (2014) state:

When the teacher steps back, reflects, collects information, observes classroom interaction and so on, this is practitioner research. When the teacher engages others in the process of inquiry, with the intent of solving an educational work problem together, this is action research. Collaborative participation becomes central. (2014 p174)

In this project, I am engaging in both these activities. On one hand I am reflecting on my practice, and will be gathering qualitative data from my colleagues and quantitative data from the students in the form of their assessment scores, whilst on the other I am actively engaged with the educational work problem too – I am collaborating with my colleagues in the creation of new lessons, and will modify them based on their feedback, establishing best practice for teaching philosophy in the school. Following the literature review, there are a number of elements which are seen to constitute successful philosophy teaching (for example, discursive skills) and in experimenting with them, I can establish what is effective for the students in my school.

As Robson (2002) states, Action research is often conducted as part of a spiral or cyclical process, in which a change is planned, acted out, and then observing what happens as a result of that change, before reflecting on the process and consequences. The model of action research proposed by Tripp (2003) displays a version of this pattern:

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Cohen, L., Manion, L, and Morrison, K. (2011) **Research Methods in Education (7th edition)**, London: Routledge

Figure 1: Action research cycle (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011)

The cycle consists of four phases: Plan action, act thoughtfully, research action, and evaluate action.

For the purposes of this investigation I will undertake an intervention that follows the action research cycle, incorporating the four moments above. I have chosen to use Tripp's model as this cycle allows the combination of two actions simultaneously. Given the time constraint on this investigation, being able to implement and monitor actions together as well as reflecting and researching together enables me to complete a whole cycle. They are as follows:

Action Research Cycle: devising new schemes of work to teach philosophy and ethics at key stage three

- 1) **Plan action:** currently, students at Coastal Grammar undertake three lessons of RP (Religion and Philosophy) per cycle at year seven, and then three per cycle in years eight and nine.
Given that there are 36 teaching weeks in the academic year (or 18 cycles). Within this

timeframe, students also need to learn about religion, so in order to complete a research cycle, I plan on implementing three schemes of work that last between six and eight weeks.

- 2) **Act thoughtfully:** this is the key action in the cycle as it allows me to implement and monitor the action simultaneously. Here I will introduce the new schemes of work to colleagues, and teach them myself.
- 3) **Research action:** At the end of the teaching phase, I will interview my colleagues, and ask them for their feedback and opinions as to what lessons worked, and which could be improved. I will also observe my colleagues lessons in order to gather a secondary source of data.
- 4) **Evaluate action:** Finally, I will reflect on and review the process simultaneously. This will leave me with refined schemes of work that I am then able to share with colleagues within the school, and the affiliated academic trust.

Sample Groups and Research Participants

The sample group for this study will be the current year 7, 8 and 9 cohorts. Each year group consists of 180 students, and a total of 540 active pupils. In analysing the data from the students' assessments, I will focus on the 160 members of year 8. This is because Coastal Grammar have only admitted year 7 students in the last two years, and as such I have no data to compare their performance against. Some of the year 9 students were taught by non-specialists in their first year, and I feel this could impact on their current assessment grades. The year 8 students however, were taught by the three members of the religion and philosophy department, and the data of year 8 academic performance over the last decade is available as part of the schools monitoring and assessment programme.

The main focus will be on their teachers, who consist of myself and two full-time Religious Studies specialists.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring that ethical standards are met is a key and vital feature of this investigation. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) note that following the guidelines of ethics research is a way of coping with a complex and demanding socio-political environment that influences research decisions. In order to ensure that this research is ethically robust, I completed the CUREC 1A application process. The 1A was chosen as the project focused on teaching practice, and as such focused on individuals who were able to give free and informed consent, participants were in no danger of criminal prosecution, and there was no deception of any participant. The university's safeguarding code of practice was considered, but given the small scale of the project, and that the participants were fully informed, given the opportunity to opt out and that the school's headteacher had given full consent to the project following a formal written request, I concluded that the process would not breach the university's code.

The 1A was completed and was successfully validated by the board meeting of the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) on the 16th February 2016. The CUREC 1A form fully complies with the University of Oxford's educational department's *modus operandi*. This is consistent with current British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines.

The BERA guidelines (2011) state that persons involved in action research "Must consider the extent to which their own reflective research impinges on others, for example in the dual role of teacher and researcher and the impact on students and colleagues." (2011 p 5) In this investigation, the main participants were my colleagues, and as such, the biggest impact that the process carried was the potential to diminish self-esteem or cause embarrassment. Thomas (2013) highlights this as an issue in educational research. In asking teachers to experiment with lessons, or place themselves outside of their usual teaching comfort zone, there could be a risk of their self-worth as teachers being damaged. Every effort was made in the early stages of the process to keep colleagues informed, and

all professional participants were given the continual right to opt-out of the process should they wish.

In undertaking this study, I was forced to consider from a philosophical perspective if I had the *prima facie* case for 'The Right to know', as outlined by Pring (2001, 2015). Educational research aims to establish the truth of a situation, or in this case, the best practice. By sharing my findings both with the SWAT group, and with the MLT course, I was assuming a right to share my findings and conclusions. It can be argued that in sharing these findings I could uncover uncomfortable truths or biases about my own teaching. However, I agreed with the position taken by Karl Popper (1972) who argued that knowledge grows through a process of being criticised and reviewed by one's peers.

Informed Consent

Once the title and focus of the project had been agreed, a letter to the headteacher was composed, outlining the research objectives and proposed goals, along with the methods of the investigation, and the strict ethical procedures that would be followed (See appendix). This letter highlighted that the potential for harm to both the participants and students was minimal, and involved the participants' usual professional practice as classroom teachers. The current teacher's standards state that teachers must 'Fulfil wider professional responsibilities' and as such must: "Take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development."

The letter also gave assurance that the project would fulfil the following ethical considerations:

1. Permission to research
2. Anonymity of participants
3. Confidentiality and security of data
4. Destruction of data upon completion of project
5. Participant's right to refuse

The letter was read by the headteacher, and full permission for the investigation was immediately granted.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

All participants in the investigation were told that the data collected would remain anonymous. This was important for the investigation, as having chosen to collect the main data through unstructured interviews, I wanted to ensure that the participants could speak candidly when interviewed. In keeping with BERA guidelines, (2011, p8) my colleagues were given a debrief of my findings in a department meeting held on May 2015, and given the opportunity to read the completed study in September 2016.

Limitations and Constraints

From the outset, the investigation faced a number of challenges. The most obvious one was time – Following the granting of ethical approval, I was left with two school terms in order to conduct the investigation. In order to get a more detailed overview of teaching philosophy, the study should realistically go on for a number of years to elicit the type of change that action research aims for.

A second challenge was bias – as an investigator, I will be bringing a very subjective set of beliefs and attitudes to the project. As someone with a background in philosophy, it is my assertion that that the subject can have a very positive effect on students, but I also feel that the subject needs to be taught by specialists. Ahead of the interviews, I need to be aware of my bias, and not ask leading questions of my participants.

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a problem regarding the lack of quantitative data in this investigation. My focus is more on qualitative outcomes, and in professional development, but by presenting the year 8 assessment data (from after the lessons have been taught) and previous years I will be able to point to a difference in student performance, and show what impact successful

teaching of philosophy can have at key stage three. Undoubtedly, this gives both a limited measurement and a narrow range of data, but will help corroborate my conclusions.

In observing my colleagues, I would also be faced with a challenge. Robson (2002, p.315-19) outlines that there are four types of possible observation for the social science researcher: complete participant, (in which the observer conceals their identity from the observed group) participant as observer (where the identity of the observer is made clear from the start) the marginal participant (where the observation is entirely passive) and observer-as-participant (where the observer takes no place in the activity.) All four of these roles do not quite represent the unique space a lesson observation takes place in. As part of the performance management cycle, all members of staff are required to be observed by their line manager or head of department. In undertaking this role, the observer must view a number of different factors, including; pupil progress during the lesson, teaching strategies employed, and use of assessment. In order to effectively measure the lesson, the observer has to strike a delicate balance between being a marginal participant and a participant as observer. However, because of this, it is difficult to say how reliable the information from the observation might be.

Students at Coastal do not usually react to a lesson being observed – it is part of the day-to-day practice of teaching, but in conducting a formal observation, there will be interaction between myself and the students (whose behaviour and responses could change accordingly) and if asked a question by either the students or my colleagues, I will have to respond, and thus become a participant in the lesson.

Finally, in conducting interviews, there are also limitations – I have to be aware that the collaborators within this study are both colleagues and friends. They will naturally want to help out in any way possible, and may give answers that they think I want to hear, rather than giving truthful reflections on what happens in their classes. There are also a number of challenges in employing interviews as a research tool, and these are highlighted during the 'Interviews' section below.

In this investigation, there are a number of alternative action research cycles that could have taken place. However, it is worth noting that Coastal Grammar are keen to have staff take place in ongoing professional development. These often take the form of 'Masterclasses' wherein members of staff give sessions on areas of expertise within their teaching. The school are very keen that this study enable me to give masterclasses based on my research, and provide the school with new schemes of work that can be used in the coming years.

There are also philosophical issues to consider before I began my investigation. Pring (2000, 2015) highlights a number of issues in conduction educational research. Action research often gathers data by means of observation and interview. These would be the two main methods that I hoped to undertake, but Pring raises issues with both. Firstly, observation:

Observations do not come independent of concepts and theories, apart from the prejudices and preferences we bring to the observing...Second...it is not clear that it is the *behaviour* I am observing. For example, two teachers who appear to be doing the same thing may in fact be doing two very different things. (2015 p 46)

Pring's assertion is that observation is subjective – gaining an objective view free from expectations and prejudice on my part will be problematic. Secondly, in regards to interviews:

Given the claimed uniqueness of each individual's understanding of an event or activity, it would seem impossible for the interviewer to grasp the significance of what is said. The interviewer inhabits his or her own unique world of beliefs and understandings of the person interviewed. (2015 p 54)

The divisions that Pring notes are indicative of a classic philosophical schism – that of subjectivity versus objectivity. Before I begin the study, it is vital to note that any conclusions could be described as subjective, or biased on my part. However, Pring does suggest a solution to the subjective-objective divide, and it is rooted in the later philosophy of Wittgenstein (1958). In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein states that any given language has 'Family resemblances' – a series of shared connotations and inferences that are context-dependent, and acquired through a speaker

being a participant within that language. Shared meanings are therefore possible if both participants are playing the same 'Language game.' In this investigation, my participants will be professional teachers who therefore partake in the educational language game – all will have been versed in the language of pedagogy, and thus meaningful dialogue is possible. Building on the idea of shared, common features within the language of education and educational research, Pring states:

There are stable and enduring features of reality independent of us, which makes such distinctions possible. And this applies not simply to the physical but also to the social and personal. There are features of what it is to be a person which enable generalizations to be made or quantities to be added or subtracted. Most persons have predictable emotions and capacities which makes it possible for certain purposes to consider them the same from person to person – and thus open to quantification. The qualitative investigation can clear the ground for the quantitative. (2015 p78-9)

Consequently, this is my hope for the investigation – that it can act as a both a survey of what constitutes effective teaching of philosophy at key stage three, but also acts as a signpost for future quantitative research. I wanted to take some initial findings however, and chose to examine the assessment performance of year 7 and 8 classes and compare their grades with their projected grades from SISRA to see if the lessons have had any positive statistical impact. In doing this, the intervention becomes replicable – one of the key features the study requires.

One of the pressing questions for the investigation was establishing what constituted 'effective' teaching of philosophy and ethics at key stage three. Within the sphere of social sciences the focus is on human behaviour and interaction. This can be a subjective field of investigation, and making any strong claims about what constitutes effective or successful teaching is incredibly challenging. There have been a number of articles published by the Journal of Philosophy in Education that seek to define this question, and beyond an advocacy for teaching the subject, there was no consensus. (Biesta 2011, Hand and Winstanley 2011, Haynes and Murriss 2011, Gregory 2011)

There was also the question of how I would measure effectiveness. Philosophy and ethics sits within the educational framework of religious studies, and both subjects share the same problem. The

subjects ask students to reflect and to consider different opinions and beliefs (traditionally characterised as 'Learning from' religion.) As a result, it is often difficult to gauge progress in these subjects, and it is also difficult to say what 'Progress' would look like. Because this study is one without quantitative data, it will therefore be one which can be defined as a qualitative investigation. My research question is fundamentally looking at how best to teach a subject, and as such, an action research model best suits my needs. Punch and Oancea (2014) note that the tradition action research can be traced back to Marxism and its maxim 'The important thing is not to understand the world but to change it.' Action research involves practitioners embarking both on an investigation, but also an attempt to illicit change:

The central idea is conveyed by the term 'action research' itself. Action and research are brought together: action researchers 'engage in careful, diligent inquiry, not for purposes of discovering new facts or revising accepted laws or theories, but to acquire information having practical application to the solution of specific problems related to their work.' (Stringer, 2004). Action research brings together the acting (or the doing) and the researching (or the inquiring). (2014, p.172)

The next question I had to consider was what form my action research would take – I was hoping to bring about change in both my own teaching and that of the department. One major issue that I faced was that of time. The nature of the research project meant that I would not be able to chart the impact of teaching philosophy as the key stage three students moved through the school, but through staging an intervention in the subject, I could establish improved teacher practice and encourage higher-order thinking skills, or metacognition.

This investigation is intended to be an intervention. Fullan (1982, 2007) highlights a number of assumptions for educators wishing to illicit change within their practice, and stresses that change is a process, rather than an event. (p 91) The investigation may be limited due to time constraints, but the process of changing how philosophy is taught within the school can certainly begin here, and this intervention should signpost future research as a consequence.

Following the definition by Robson (2002) the investigation is designed to follow a relativistic approach. In such an approach, "Reality is represented through the eyes of participants...The research process is viewed as generating working hypothesis rather than immutable empirical facts" and "Qualitative methods are used." (P.25). The ongoing argument against such a position is that a relativistic approach denies an underlying reality to the project, and as such has less value than a positivist investigation but the process here involves something which will add to the methodology of educational research, and be of value both to my institution, and to others.

This investigation is also relevant to my interests as an academic philosopher. As Cahn (2009, ix) noted, there is a clear historical relationship between philosophy and education, with many leading figures in the history of philosophy contributing to the philosophy of education. Starting from Athenian culture and the work of Plato and Aristotle, through the medieval work of Augustine and the enlightenment ideals of Rousseau, Locke, Kant and Mill, there has been a distinct interest in enquiring just what it means to teach, and how best to teach. Simpson and Jackson (1984) in *The Teacher as Philosopher* stress that successful teachers are involved in an ongoing process of reflection on the pedagogy whilst simultaneously empowering pupils to think for themselves: "The teacher must examine the pedagogical and ethical aspects of methodological approaches of teaching models. The teacher, as philosopher, studies the implications of conditioning pupils as well as allowing them to do their own things." (p.15) This dual function is what I aim to achieve as a philosopher and as researcher in this investigation.

Hammersley (2006) points out that philosophy has a vital role to play in educational research: "It is necessarily a meta-discipline, concerned with clarifying the concepts that we use to think about what is good, what is right, what ought to be done, and so on. Such clarification is extremely important, not just in relation to research but also for our practical judgments in the world, including policy decisions about education." (p.286) In conducting this intervention, I aim to achieve a degree of clarification concerning what should be taught at key stage three.

My choice of this investigation is also due to my belief that teaching philosophy at key stage three plays a key role in enabling students to think more creatively, and outside the framework of more didactic teaching methods. This is known as 'Problem-posing education' as characterised by Paulo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire posits two contrasting forms of education. Firstly that of 'Banking education' – a process which emphasises the transmission of facts from the teacher to the pupils. Freire identifies this form of education as 'Oppressive' which produces passive thinkers. The second form of education is 'Problem-posing education.' This model is one which echoes both the goals of philosophy, and those skills which GCSE religious studies students are now expected to display ('Engage with questions of belief, value, meaning, purpose, truth.') Freire states:

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they see come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p.64)

It is my view that introducing philosophy successfully at key stage three is something that not only prepares students for work at GCSE, but equips them with the means to think independently. In asking my colleagues to be involved with this investigation – and asking them to teach more philosophy as part of their allocated hours, I hope that this enables them to develop as practitioners within the problem-posting framework:

Problem-posting education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming* – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness. In this incompleteness and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity. (p.65)

Freire's assertion that education is unfinished and ongoing is an ethos is one that my students and my colleagues can fully support and engage with during the investigation.

Finally, in this study, I will collaborate in the first instance with teachers within my own school, but I will also share my findings with teachers from within the South West Academic Trust (SWAT) of which my institution is a part. By incorporating them into my study, and sharing schemes of work, I can disseminate my ideas, and add to the literature on the subject.

Collaboration

A key factor in this investigation is the potential for collaboration. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) highlight that one of the goals of action research is to empower participants, and focus on everyday practices. In this investigation, the collaboration of the other teachers in my department is vital – through testing out different methodologies and pedagogies for teaching philosophy, I aim to improve their practice, and make them equal stakeholders in the subsequent schemes of work that are created. In working with my colleagues in this way, I aim to bring about pedagogical innovation for teaching philosophy for KS3. There is much empirical evidence that suggests that a collaborative process has a positive impact on both pupil learning, and teacher performance (Jackson and Breugman 2009; Pil and Leana 2009; Kraft and Papay 2014) and this action research process should provide further evidence for this claim.

Beyond the school, the academic trust (of which Coastal Grammar is a part) expressed an interest in the outcomes of the investigation, and my findings were shared with the group in the annual meeting of department heads on the 27th June 2016.

With collaboration being a key part of this investigation, it became clear that interviews and formal lesson observations would be the most useful means of gathering data, and conducting the intervention. The goal of this investigation is to find out what the most effective methodology is for teaching philosophy at key stage three. As mentioned in the introduction, this will be difficult to

answer through quantitative data, and thus qualitative data must play a central role. The opinions and feedback from my colleagues would therefore be the most important factor in the investigation.

FINDINGS

At the start of the calendar year, my intention was to teach the following classes: The year 7 students were due to be taught an introduction to ethics. Based on classes that I had taught over the past two years, and the findings from the literature review, this scheme of work had the following goals:

1. Encourage philosophical and ethical discussion amongst the students
2. Introduce the general ethical teachings of Aristotle, Kant and the Utilitarians; Bentham and Mill.

Seeing that my department constituted three religious studies specialists, I decided that I would give them the freedom to teach these topics as best as they saw fit. As a Religious Studies head of department, I am aware that in broad terms, the subject is one which is open to a number of teaching strategies. Blaylock (2004) highlighted six separate 'Schools of thought' in teaching the subject, stressing that this was part of its strength: "It pleases me very much that the small discipline of religious education has so many schools of thought, which all contribute to the subject's vibrancy." (p.15) Blaylock argues that there isn't a 'Correct' way to teach the subject, and that teachers should aim to 'Mix' the different pedagogies.

Viewing philosophy and ethics as a distinct topic, but yet under the aegis of religious studies, the intervention here will allow my colleagues to experiment in the way recommended by Blaylock, and try out for themselves different methodologies in order to give an outline of what constitutes the effective teaching of philosophy at key stage three. Therefore, it seems logical to allow my colleagues to experiment and apply their professional judgement to the lessons.

In discussing task design in religious studies, Fancourt (2014) recommends a Vygotskian (after the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky) approach to lesson design, stressing that: “Pupils had to construct their own knowledge by engaging with the generic concepts through activities, especially through classroom talk, and that the teacher’s role was to mediate this learning.” (p182) The philosophy lessons are taught as part of the religious studies syllabus, and following this suggestion, I decided that the core of the lessons for all years would constitute a strong element of discursive skills.

Each lesson had a learning objective, and suggested content supplied by me, but the teachers were told that how they went about it – for example, how much time would be given over to thought experiments, or written responses would be up to them. I asked that they take personal notes on the lessons, so that they would be reminded of strengths, weaknesses and points for refinement that could be shared during the interview process. In allowing this degree of freedom, I actively encouraged my colleagues to innovate, and then to share best practice. At a time agreed by myself and my colleagues (as is standard practice at Coastal Grammar) I would also conduct a formal lesson observation on one of the key stage three classes. Following the observations and interviews, the schemes of work could be modified as suggested in Tripp’s action research cycle, and immediately taught in the next academic year.

In year 8, the students studied ‘The School of Athens.’ Using Raphael’s painting within the Vatican as a starting point, the scheme of work saw individual lessons on the world of the pre-Socratics, then Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras. Students were then asked to work collaboratively in groups of six and asked to decide what thinkers from the last two centuries would be worthy of a place on a modern-day school of Athens.

Finally, year 9 students would be given an introduction to the history of philosophy, using copies of Brian Magee’s *Story of Philosophy* before choosing a philosopher to research further, and create a short presentation on that thinker to show to their classmates. The unit would then conclude with a

formal written assessment, in which students were asked open-ended questions that required them to show their subject knowledge but also to display meta-cognition. For example: 'Who do you think the most influential philosopher is, and why?' and 'Do you think philosophy is still an important subject today? Give reasons for your answer.'

Coastal Grammar's policy is that departments have a scheduled meeting once a month, and it was agreed with my department in December 2015 that feedback and interviews would take place during departmental meetings in January, February, March and April. It was also agreed that the members of the department would decide on a lesson to be observed on as part of their performance management cycle during the Hilary academic term.

Early Issues and adjustments to intervention

The investigation immediately ran into problems. Following the OFSTED inspection that the school received in December 2015, the senior leadership team placed immediate emphasis on observing teaching and learning, and asking each member of staff to review their personal targets for the year. Within quick succession, both of my colleagues involved in the investigation were signed off from their teaching timetable with work-related stress. One colleague subsequently left their post within the school, and the second retired after a phased return in the summer term.

As head of department, it became my responsibility to supply work for their classes, and supervise members of staff assigned to cover their classes. My immediate concern was that this investigation would have to be terminated, as without contributions from specialists, I feared that I would not be able to gather the opinions or perspectives needed to give me the required data to reach conclusions and make a contribution to the literature.

Even though there were no religious studies specialists to cover the classes, I was aided by two humanities teachers. One is a History specialist, the other a Geography specialist. Given the neither

of them had taught any philosophy (or had any real knowledge of the subject) I was sceptical that the lessons would go ahead, and considered supplying the members of staff with more straightforward tasks while my department members were absent. Following conversations with both of them, they both expressed a preference to try and teach the philosophy units, and were keen to contribute to the research project. Both teachers were then given the opportunity to opt out of the study at any time, and both signed the ethics form, in accordance with the BERA guidelines.

Rather than allowing the teachers to experiment freely with the subject content, and then feed back to me, it became necessary to provide my colleagues with a more prescriptive scheme of work. As a result, the rationale for the investigation shifted from developing a new scheme of work to enabling non-specialists to deliver philosophy lessons effectively.

The largest problem for the investigation was that my methodology for producing qualitative data looked doubtful. With experienced specialists, it would be straightforward to ask them to experiment with both lesson plans and with pedagogical style. Asking two non-specialists to do the same was asking them to go beyond their standard teaching responsibilities, and in a very short period of time. Given their enthusiasm for the project, it became clear that there could be interesting perspectives gained from their experiences teaching the subject, and that this presented an opportunity to empower them as part of the investigation. Both teachers were asked to teach the year 7 and 8 philosophy and ethics topics detailed above. It was also agreed that I could still conduct a lesson observation of the two teachers as part of Coastal's performance management cycle, and that both gave permission for the observational data to be included in the investigation. Finally, the same structure for departmental interviews was agreed on, but due to demands from their relevant departments, our interviews would have to take place at lunchtimes.

The Interviews

Rationale: Given the nature of the investigation, and my status as an inexperienced researcher, I opted for a semi-structured interview. This allowed the freedom to discuss any particular areas in detail as they came up, and allowed the members of staff to freely bring up any issues that had happened during their teaching time. The original decision was to ask more specialist questions about the student's responses; what format did they respond to – the philosophy for children model, or the idea of teaching the subject grounded in text? Given the subject knowledge of my new members of the department, I opted instead for more general questions and allowed them to take the discussion where they wished. In gaining the insights of my colleagues, I would be able to see how effective the intervention had been, and begin to see what some of the benefits and drawbacks of teaching the subject at key stage three were.

There were obvious limitations to adopting this research method. Punch and Oancea (2014) highlight that there will be a question over the validity of any data gained through the interview process, noting: the possibility of interviewer bias and effects, the accuracy of respondents' memories, people's response tendencies, dishonesty and social desirability. (p.192) Furthermore, Wittgenstein (1968) stresses that conversation takes place within a language game – one where the participants agree on rules and context for meaning. In this interview process, there is a danger that my meanings and use of terms will be different to those employed by my colleagues from different specialist backgrounds. This idea is developed further by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) who state "The interview is...not a neutral tool, the interviewer creates the reality of the interview situation." (p.353). The interview process is thus one which is capable of divulging a rich seam of data, but also one which will require constant evaluation and reflection.

The interviews were all recorded on a digital recording device in accordance with BERA guidelines, and took place over three lunchtime sessions in February, March and April 2016.

Findings: During all three interviews, I asked the same four questions; 1. How are you finding teaching philosophy as a non-specialist? 2. What lessons have the boys responded to positively? 3. What has not worked so well? 4. Are there any observations you wish to share? The question of 'responding positively' is one which is difficult to convey via a series of pre-determined criteria. Experienced teachers will be able to identify when a lesson 'Works' and when students have fully engaged with a lesson or topic, but may not always be able to quantify this. As a result, it was agreed that we would use the school's criteria for an outstanding lesson during internal lesson observations: "The teacher generates high levels of enthusiasm, motivation, and the participation of all students in the lesson." And "All students make rapid and sustained progress within the lesson."

1. **Teaching philosophy as a non-specialist.** In the first interview, both the Geography specialist (GS) and the History specialist (HS) were clearly keen to display both their enthusiasm for the task at hand, and wanted to re-assure me as head of department that they were fully in control of their classes:

GS: "I thought this would be a challenge – I obviously wanted to help you out, but I didn't know what to expect. But the boys have been good. I said at the start that I would be learning with them as they went, and they've really responded to that. There have been a couple of things they've asked me where I've got no idea, but we've agreed to list things that we can't answer, and then ask you as the specialist."

HS: "I taught some key stage three Buddhism when I was doing my training, so I felt that I would be OK – and it's fine so far. I spent the first lesson asking the boys what they knew about philosophy and ethics – not much as it turns out. That's a good thing though, I feel like I can fudge any difficult questions."

In the second interview, the two members of staff were noticeably more relaxed, having had almost daily interactions with me as head of department – both teachers were told that they could drop in to my office at any time and talk through the lessons, or ask for resources where necessary. Following these meetings, a natural acquaintances began to grow, and this could be detected during the interviews. The response to the first question included:

HS: “There have been a couple of times when I have totally misjudged the lesson – not in terms of the content, they’re all clearly learning, but in terms of what we’ve discussed prior to the lesson, when you’ve said ‘They are usually really keen to discuss this.’ And then – it’s not worked at all, they’ve discussed and finished in five minutes instead of twenty, and then I’ve felt like I’m desperately trying to think of something else to do to fill the time.”

GS: “My class are really, really chatty – I’m not having any problems with that, but my only worry is I don’t know if what they’re writing, when they do the written stuff is good enough. It’s more straightforward in Geography to say ‘That’s a sufficient answer’ – otherwise it’s all fine.”

In the final interview, the positivity from my colleagues was still evident, and there was an astonishing claim from GS:

GS: “Whenever I’ve done group stuff in the past, it’s usually in twos, or groups of three maximum. So getting them to work in groups of six has been way outside my comfort zone. But I have absolutely loved it, and I think I’d like to teach this again next year if the timetable will allow it.”

HS: “I have really enjoyed it – especially the year 8 stuff, as when we were doing Aristotle, Plato and Athens I put a more historical spin on that, and took the lead in the lessons more,

but that was fun. Like GS, I haven't had much experience of group work bigger than pairs, and all the History rooms, tables are set out in lines or in a big round. I was really impressed with how it worked though, and I want to take that method and use it in History."

It was extremely pleasing to see that both teachers had A) had a positive experience teaching the subject as non-specialists, and B) taken something of value that could be applied to their own practice. Before the end of the academic year, I observed HS as part of a joint observation with the head of History (This was also a function of the post-OFSTED action plan implemented by the school.) HS used the group discussion most associated with philosophy for children to great effect, asking them to discuss "Which of these 5 battles was the most important in History?" and then asking the groups to debate and elect a spokesperson to forward the democratically agreed result for further discussion. This appears to give some validity to Peter Worley's (2015) conception of philosophy as means for discussion rather than a subject in and of itself in school.

- 2. What lessons did the boys respond to positively?** The responses to this question confirmed some of my initial bias. The year 7 students loved the thought experiments, but became more reticent when asked to write up their conclusions or thoughts:

GS: "With the year 7 lads, sometimes it's really hard to 'put the lid back on' – they get so engaged, or they've got so many questions, it's difficult to get them to stop, and write down everything that they've been talking about in the lesson."

HS: "I think that's year 7 a bit too – in History, its tough getting some of them to write. There's always those really good kids who just produce pages and pages when you ask them to, but I think a lot of them come to us from primary and middle school having not done

tonnes of extended writing...asking them to do extended writing on their ethical thoughts is a bit much.”

My colleague from History makes an interesting point – seeing that the school has only recently started admitting year 7 students, there is still a period of adjustment going on across the curriculum. Some students are capable of writing almost a side of A5 paper when asked to justify or explain an opinion, whilst many see two sentences as sufficient. This is certainly a point to reflect on and a possible area for further study, discussed in ‘Implications for future research.’

The interviews also highlighted that the ‘School of Athens’ unit with the year 8 was the better of the two, in terms of teaching, and the students’ engagement:

GS: “I think that the School of Athens unit is the unit that works the best. It has got that nice mix of stuff, where it’s a bit of ‘Proper’ philosophy – learning about Plato, but then getting them to decide who is a great modern thinker is fantastic. I learned so much doing that.”

HS: “It’s that thing where you give them some control over the content...but it’s very limited control. I was pleased you said that there was a ‘No’ list as to who they could include. I think it’s good to give students some say in what goes, but be able to channel their ideas properly.”

GS: “I think that the boys do respond to rules – I think it keeps them focused, and I think it stops the stronger ones dominating the discussion and talking rubbish. In saying something like ‘No sportsmen’ you eliminate them putting forward their football team – I think it shows them that there’s boundaries to a discussion.”

The idea that the teacher should act as gatekeeper or a facilitator is in keeping with what Fisher (1998) highlights as a key role in the process of teaching philosophy: “Childrens contributions can be repetitive, irrelevant, endlessly anecdotal...It is essential for the facilitator to keep the focus on thinking.” (p.178-9)

3. **What did not work so well?** It was clear in the interviews that the year 7 lessons were patchy in comparison to the uniformly successful year 8s. Incorporating my own experience teaching the year group, I found a similar pattern. The year 7 students needed to be taught how to discuss properly with each other before they could engage in a discussion and investigation of ethics. I sensed this in September with my classes, and had the opportunity to get them in to good habits whilst studying their first unit in school – world religions. Robert Fisher (1990) acknowledges this in stating: “Developing discussion skills in children is a slow and gradual process. Identifying the skills needed is an important first step for both teacher and child.” (p.169) My two colleagues had not had that luxury of identifying and developing the skills required, and their lessons with year 7 suffered occasionally as a result:

HS: “There have been times where we’ve gone ‘Off the map’ – we were supposed to be talking about the hotel fire thought experiment, and they ended up talking about if there could be a pill that could help erase negative memories. I thought ‘This has gone badly wrong!’”

I replied to my colleague that this was not necessarily a bad thing – if it happened time after time, then there would be a clear issue about completing the scheme of work, and it would be extremely difficult to be able to demonstrate that learning had taken place. But in terms of a thinking exercise, if the boys became engaged by it, and that it provoked students who

had been previously reticent to contribute to speak up, then I would view that as a valuable learning opportunity rather than a failure.

4. **Shared observations:** When given the opportunity to share any extra thoughts on their experiences teaching the subject, in the first interview, both declined to add anything, with GS stating “I think we’ve talked it through really.” Once again, the second and third meetings saw both colleagues clearly more at ease in sharing their thoughts:

GS: “I was thinking about what we do as a school here, and I think that it is really important that we do philosophy with them. One of the year 8s said to me in class that his parents couldn’t believe that he was talking about Aristotle to them at dinner – and I think there’s a self-esteem thing there, that they think they’re doing something advanced, and then that their opinions are worthwhile.”

HS: “It has really added to my teaching practice over the last couple of months. I have always hated doing starter activities, trying to tie a 10 minute activity to a History lesson feels awkward sometimes. But doing a discussion at the start of the lesson has made my planning much easier, and I’ve got some great lessons out of it.”

Following the interview process, it became clear to me that both of my colleagues had benefited almost as much as the students had from teaching philosophy.

The circumstances of the year meant that my initial goal for the investigation – to develop new schemes of work for key stage three – might not be realised as I had hoped, but there were clear conclusions beginning to take shape, both as to the function of philosophy in school, and how it should be taught. These will be discussed further in the findings section below.

Observations

Rationale: In looking to gain as much data as possible within the timeframe, I looked to employ what Denzin (1978) referred to as methodological triangulation. This idea states that in a social science research project, it is more useful to gather as many different sources of data as possible. As Thomas (2013) points out: “You will never in social research get conclusive evidence of something being the case. However, the more evidence there is...The surer you will be.” (p.22-23) Robson (1993, 2002) highlights that “Observation can also be used as supportive or supplementary method to collect data that may complement or set in perspective data obtained by other means.” (p.312) Observing my colleagues lessons provided a natural fit as a secondary source as firstly, in my role as head of department I am required to conduct formal lesson observations on all teachers within my department once a year. Secondly, the process of observation would allow me to compare and contrast the data from the interviews, and give me another perspective on how effective the intervention had been.

This choice was not without difficulties, however. As mentioned in the methodology, when undertaking a formal lesson observation as a head of department, there is a difficulty in defining just what kind of observer I would be. It would be impossible to be a complete participant, but yet simultaneously, it would be difficult to be a marginal participant – part of the lesson observation process is to ask students their thoughts on the lesson, what they are learning, and what their targets were. Also, as a well-known figure within the school (and in the case of some of the year 8 students, their former RP teacher) it would be incredibly difficult to be a passive observer. Following a department meeting on the 2nd February 2016, both of my cover teachers agreed to be observed the week beginning 22/2/2016, and both expressed a preference to be observed with their respective year 8 groups. The year group and focus for the observation would traditionally be agreed as part of the performance management and target setting meetings at the start of the

academic year, but due to the department gaining two teachers in such an unorthodox manner, all three of us, and the head teacher agreed to the shorter preparation time.

Findings

Observation 1:

I undertook an observation of GS teaching his year 8 RP class on Tuesday 23rd February, 2016. The formal lesson observation sheet is available at the end of the thesis (see; Appendix 1). In observing the lesson, I was looking to focus on the 'Progress' section of the observation. GS is a highly experienced classroom teacher, who has an excellent rapport with his classes. At the outset of the lesson, I followed school protocol and informed the students that I was observing the lesson, and interested to see what they had been learning over the last few weeks. The lesson objective was for the groups of five students to finalise which thinkers would constitute their 'Modern school of Athens'. Each student had been asked to prepare three choices for homework, and then had to discuss with the four other members of their groups which ones would be included in their collective choice. Once they had agreed on their choices, they had to feed back to the class as a whole through a spokesperson, and then write up their choices in their books, including a rationale for each thinker.

What was immediately clear was that the students were all extremely capable of arguing well, and displaying the levels of meta-cognition that advocates of teaching philosophy to children claim happen as a natural consequence of teaching the subject (Lone & Burroughs 2016, Anderson 2016). During the discussion stage, I overheard comments from students that included:

"You can't have John Logie Baird as TV has been responsible for as many bad things in the world as good."

"I wanted to include Bill Gates but I suppose he wouldn't have made Microsoft without Jack Kilby inventing microchips."

“Martin Luther King did lots of good, but I don’t think he really changed the world. He changed America, but changing the world is different.”

This stage of the lesson worked extremely well with every member of the class actively engaged in discussion, and what was pleasing to see was that rather than an argument in which the students shout over each other, they were showing clear signs of listening to each other’s responses.

When the time came for the groups to share with the rest of the class, the lesson lost pace. This was largely due to GS not challenging the students on their picks. Rather than asking “So why did you pick thinker X rather than Y?” he simply allowed the students to list their choices. Fisher (1990, 1995) claims that “The thoughtful teacher (of philosophy) needs to pay close attention to what the children say. This means responding to what children are saying, rather than what you think they mean...You will be placed to in a better position to ask a follow-up question or to make a relevant response.” (p.169). GS is not an RS specialist, but observing the lesson, it was clear that his lack of questioning presented a wasted opportunity to make the students think and clarify their thoughts further.

Overall, the lesson was rated ‘Good’ – the students were obviously fully engaged with the material, and were showing outstanding discursive skills, but without the experience to ask follow-up questions, or challenging opinions, GS’ lesson failed to reach the school’s standard for ‘Outstanding’. This standard is described in the school’s Lesson Observation Guidance Sheet (see Appendix 3) as including “Open-ended and searching questions are used throughout, and illustrate the teacher’s excellent subject knowledge.’ I was pleased to see that the students were responding so well to the subject matter, and this suggested to me that if a lesson is well-designed (and the behaviour management is good) then philosophy need not be exclusively taught by an expert.

Observation 2:

I observed HS with his year 8 RP class on Wednesday 2nd March, 2016. The formal lesson observation sheet is available at the end of the thesis (see; Appendix 2). It was immediately obvious that HS approached the lesson differently to GS. Whereas GS had gone through what they needed to do at the start of the lesson HS had added a starter activity. He projected an image of Winston Churchill on the board, and asked if the class thought he should be considered a great thinker. He conducted the responses with great skill, and immediately displayed the follow-up questioning that had been absent in GS' observation. One student who had voted 'Yes' was asked why, to which they responded "Because of him, the world is a much better place than if the Nazis had won." HS responded by saying: "But was it all down to him? Have you heard of Alan Turing? Isn't he more important?" It was clear that HS was enjoying bringing his subject knowledge into the lesson, and the starter activity represented an excellent augmentation to the lesson plan I had provided him with.

HS then outlined how the boys should debate with each other, and used the Churchill example of how to challenge the decisions and figures that the other members of the group had chosen. Once again, I was very pleased to see how well the boys discussed with each other. In this lessons, comments overheard included:

"I think the inventor of the car is more important than the inventor of planes – cars have changed the world more than planes have." This comment was countered by "Planes have had a bigger effect on wars though, and they are the things that change history."

"I think Einstein is the most important choice – he has changed the way we understand the Universe, and that's what Aristotle and Anaximander wanted to do."

Following the discussions, HS asked the boys to present their choices. Crucially he asked the students “And tell us why you picked them.” He then highlighted that everyone would be writing their choices up next, so it would be useful to listen to people’s ideas.

HS didn’t challenge the choices in the same way as he had during the starter activity, but it was still pleasing to see the students having to justify the choices. At the end of the lesson, I felt it was worthy of an ‘Outstanding’ rating. Whereas GS had followed the lesson plan entirely, HS had incorporated his own subject knowledge, and then used philosophical questioning to really challenge the students. As with the GS observation, it appeared that philosophy lessons do not require an expert in order to be worthwhile or successful. However, the more a teacher can embody and encourage philosophical practice (for example, good questioning) then the more effective the lessons become.

Data analysis: Assessing year 8 data

Rationale: In examining the performance of students in year 8, I could draw some preliminary conclusions as to how effective the intervention had been. In being taught as a sustained series of lessons rather than occasional one-off experiences, there should be some impact on student performance, and I expected the year 8 data to give me a definite indication as to what extent.

Throughout the academic year, students at Coastal Grammar are given an assessment level for every subject studied. It is recommended that this level is produced via a piece of written assessment undertaken in controlled test conditions. At year 8, it is recommended that this assessment last for 30 minutes. In RP, assessment can be difficult. This is due to the fact that the National Curriculum level descriptions for subjects is not always explicit in its use of terms. For example, the National Curriculum Level Descriptions for Subjects (2010) states that level 7 students are able to: “Articulate personal and critical responses to questions of meaning, purpose and truth and ethical issues. They

evaluate the significance of religious and other views for understanding questions of human relationships, belonging, identity, society, values and commitments, using appropriate evidence and examples.” (p.46) Unlike Modern Foreign Languages in which there are certain skills that are achieved at certain levels – for example, being able to use tenses equals a level 7 – in Religious Studies, there is no further guidance on what successful articulation is, or what good evaluation consists of.

As a result, assessment in RS (and by extension, Philosophy) remains problematic. Fancourt (2005) highlights that if the scale used in RS is to be used, then it needs to be understood by both teachers and students (p.117) and that is not always the case.

With this in mind, any data from prior years (especially data that was generated by my predecessors) may not be consistent. The data will also be contrasting students’ responses to different topics studied – explicitly taught philosophy has only occurred in the last two years. However, given that the national curriculum levels look to assess certain skills which are comparable; good explanations, use of evidence, citing numerous perspectives – there is some commonality between the assessments of year 8 in 2016, and their 2012 counterparts.

Findings

Following the assessments, the average grade for the 2016 year 8 students was a 6A. This is a definite improvement on the assessments from 2012, which sees ‘5A’ as the average grade. What is remarkable though, is the results of those students making five or more ‘Sub-levels’ of progress. Sub levels are the ‘A, B, C’ distinctions within level 5, 6, 7 and 8. Students should progress from a 5A to a 6C, and then up to a 6A over the course of the year and so on. Making five sub-levels of progress constitutes excellent attainment within the subject. For 2016, four of the six year 8 classes had 20% (23.3 in one class) making five or more sub-levels of progress.

In comparison, the 2012 cohort shows 3 classes where no student made five sub-levels of progress, and in the remaining three, the percentages were 4%, 10% and 8.3%.

There are, of course numerous possibilities as to why this may be the case – as highlighted above, there could be differences in marking and assessment between 2012 staff, and the current department, and the 2016 cohort could have benefitted from being in the secondary environment from year 7, unlike the 2012 students, who started in year 8.

However, it is still a remarkable improvement. The students clearly responded to both the subject and their teachers. My fear that the subject would not be taught as effectively by non-specialists was shown to be unfounded – given the right stimulus and an enthusiastic teacher, philosophy at key stage three can make a clear impact on student thinking – but From speaking to students as part of the school’s policy of ‘Student Voice’ – in which students are picked at random and asked to contribute their thoughts to staff on their lessons across the curriculum – it was clear that the year had responded extremely positively to the ‘School of Athens’ scheme of work. As my colleague noted in one of our interviews, “It has a nice mix of stuff.” The scheme was varied, and challenged the pupils to think about philosophy in a formal way, but then empowered them to think about what great thinking and accomplishments consisted in. When asked to express their own thoughts and opinions on what constituted an influential idea, or asked to make a value judgement, the students responded extremely well. Due to the nature of Religious Studies’ method of assessment, there are not the clear lines of progress or National Curriculum levels that can be found in other subjects (such as English and Maths.) However, many schools see ‘Evaluating responses to questions insightfully’ as a level 7 skill, and from the data, it is evident that as a result of the philosophy lessons, students responded positively when assessed.

As a result of the data and the student voice meetings, it was made clear that what is taking place is Friere’s (1970) conception of problem-posing education: “The students – no longer docile listeners – are no critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the

students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as students express their own.” (p.62) Because students feel that they’ve had a greater ownership over the work in the scheme of work (it was up to them to decide who to include in the modern School of Athens, but their choices needed to be justified, and survive the scrutiny of their peers) when it came to completing a written assessment on the project, they felt more engaged to write and repeat their experiences over the last term.

ANALYSIS

At the start of this process, my goal was to develop a new scheme of work for teaching philosophy at key stage three, and establish best practice for teaching the subject. I was able to develop lessons that included the features highlighted in the literature review: An ability to listen carefully; A propensity to ask questions; A commitment to seek and evaluate reasons, and a comfort with uncertainty. At the end of the process, I was unable to establish best practice due to factors beyond my control, but through the contributions of colleagues outside the department, I was able to conclude that teaching philosophy at key stage three is beneficial to students, and to staff.

Colleagues who taught the philosophy units were able to take elements of philosophical questioning and structured debate and apply it successfully to their own teaching practice. This provides support for the claim made by Pritchard (2014) that teaching philosophy to children should not be expected to provide answers to all questions. They can share puzzlement with their students, and be open to unexpected responses to the questions they and their students pose.

This thought is echoed by Mercer (2000) who states that good teachers use three methods when teaching well: “1.They use question-and-answer sequences not just to test knowledge, but also to guide the development of understanding. 2. They teach not just ‘Subject knowledge’, but also procedures for solving problems and making sense of experience. 3. They treat learning as a ‘social, communicative process.’” (p160) Introducing the innovation of a philosophical methodology to the

non-specialists' teaching suggests that the skills needed to teach philosophy are also those needed to be a successful secondary classroom teacher *per se*.

Implications for future research

Following this investigation, there are a number of implications for future research. The first point is one raised by Robson (2002) in writing on evaluating social science research he states "Effective change takes time. It is a developmental process that takes at least two years." (p.220) Robson arguably correct in his assertion. Overseeing this investigation, it is clear that developing philosophy at key stage three is not something that can happen quickly – and crucially, it is not a process that is finished. Freire (1970) and Popper (2000) both suggest that education is an incomplete exercise; it is part of an ongoing dialogue, and must always be open to revision and adaption.

One thing which has challenged my personal assumptions from the start of the investigation is that teaching philosophy needs to be carried out by trained specialists. This is the commonly held pedagogical view of a number of thinkers. Firstly, it is obvious that a degree of knowledge and training is required for philosophy to be taught successfully. As Gazzard (2010) states:

I also want to disabuse (students) of the belief that you "don't need to know any philosophy to do philosophy with children" and the belief that "there are no wrong answers." Some answers are simply and plainly wrong, some are better than others, and a background in philosophy is an enormous asset to know the difference and teach philosophical thinking to children. (2010 p.52)

Gazzard is right to stress that it is an enormous asset to have some knowledge of the subject, and it is crucial to be able to guide students – to both develop their critical skills, and also keep them focused on answers and concepts which are useful. My interviews and observations with my colleagues indicates that what is needed for successful teaching is two skills outlined by Turgeon

(2011): “1.The ability to recognize philosophical issues and problems. 2. The dispositions, skills and techniques needed to assist children in acquiring and developing their thinking skills.” (p.72). In researching how philosophy should be taught at key stage 3, there is a large number of texts that highlight the idea that philosophy should be a whole school activity – rather than being taught as a separate subject, teachers should be taught to think philosophically and incorporate philosophical aspects to their lessons. Howie, (2011) Simpson and Jackson (1984) and Fisher (1998) all claim that philosophical enquiry, rather than learning the subject itself is of primary value. Following my interviews with my colleagues, there is definitely a case to be made for this, and a study wherein teachers from across the curriculum are given CPD in philosophical teaching methods could provide interesting results.

At the end of the academic year, I shared my findings with my colleagues who comprise the South West Academic Trust. When outlining both schemes of work for year 7 and 8, three of the schools expressed a desire to take what I had developed, and teach it with their own year 7 and 8 classes. One immediate area for further research would be to monitor how these schools then teach the scheme of work – how they modify it (if at all) and how it effects their students’ assessment grades would be an obvious and fruitful area of further research.

In discussion with them, I asked them what their schemes of work consisted in at key stage 3. All the schools present at the meeting did teach philosophy as a separate subject as part of religious studies. One school had separate units consisting of: 1. Who am I? (questions of identity) 2. What is philosophy? 3. What is truth? 4. Contemporary moral issues. Two other schools included a unit which saw the lines between philosophy and theology merge, (‘What is God?’) but both felt that the skills the students had to learn – evaluation and justification of views – were philosophical in nature. All the participants involved stressed that discussion was vital, but that written work was of equal importance – one could not exist without the other. Finding a balance between these two key skills

would be interesting, and a trial in which students are assessed on both their speaking and written skills (As they are in English and MFL) could provide an interesting area for development.

One final point that emerged from collaborating with my SWAT colleagues was that there was a distinct difference in gender when it came to teaching philosophy. The colleagues who taught at all-girl schools stated that the girls were naturally better at taking part in a community of enquiry, and understood moral issues with a far greater deal of empathy than the boys. So far, there has not been any research conducted into the comparative performances of boys and girls in the subject, and this may be a fertile area of future research.

CONCLUSIONS

In this project, I originally sought to establish best practice for teaching philosophy at key stage three. At the end of the intervention, I was unable to do so due to exterior factors, however, there has been a definite shift in teaching philosophy Coastal Grammar. What has been produced is not what was originally intended, but from a highly challenging situation, a number of positives have emerged. Firstly, the empowerment and involvement of the non-specialist colleagues lead me to re-evaluate just who is qualified to teach philosophy. From looking at the student's work and assessment scores, it appears that at key stage 3, a philosophy 'Expert' is not required; enthusiastic teachers who are prepared to experiment are. Good schemes of work are needed too, to provide teachers with a solid framework that keeps learning focused, and builds towards a definite assessment.

Introducing and teaching philosophy can be a subject fraught with peril. Golding (2013) highlights issues that I also encountered in establishing philosophy as a subject: how to ascertain that effective progress is made, and how best to control a class philosophical discussion without dominating it. From my interviews with my colleagues, the key to solving these problems is both practice, and a

willingness to experiment within class. In terms of assessment, there may never be any consensus on what constitutes 'Good' philosophical thinking, but using elements from the National Curriculum levels for RS, a scheme of work that measures good explanations, use of evidence, and citing numerous perspectives is viable, and provides adequate preparation for skills now needed in GCSE RS.

There is undoubtedly an interest from students to learn more about the subject, and with the right stimulus and teacher, it can produce incredible moments and work from students. Before it can develop further, there needs to be more clarity in what a philosophy curriculum would be, and how it would be assessed.

Having conducted the intervention, it is clear that students at key stage three are far more competent than adults think. This intervention has demonstrated how empowering it can be, to both students and teachers and schools. Providing young people with a forum for examining their own questions and ideas, in a structured and rigorous framework, is empowering – for all involved with the teaching process.

Ultimately, the skills required to be a good teacher of philosophy are also those that are required to be a good teacher – the ability to think, question, listen and explore are all vital, along with the Socratic ethos that the journey of learning is never complete.

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Appendix A: GS Observation

Teacher: GS	Observer: HOD	Class: 8E
Date: 23/2/2016	Subject: RP	Topic: Philosophy
Context:.. Performance management observation Research project		Day: Tuesday Period: 3 Time: 11:15
		Room Number: GT1

Lesson Observation Sheet

	Standard	Key features	
1	Expectations of pupils	- Sets goals that challenge and inspire pupils of all abilities - Creates a safe environment in which pupils feel secure	Classroom atmosphere was open and friendly –highly conducive to group work and I/o
2	Pupil Progress	- Keeps a record of pupil progress and outcomes - Shows awareness of individual pupil needs - Knows how pupils learn and its impact on learning - Encourages independent study	Independent study encouraged through well structured group tasks Individual pupil needs served through highly differentiated seating plan and group task Students showed high level of discussion and reason in justifying choices
3	Subject knowledge	- Promotes the value of scholarship - Promotes literacy, articulacy and good use of English	Focus on literacy and verbal skills through written and group work Subject knowledge not outstanding, but not expected from a non-specialist
4	Planning	- Makes effective use of lesson time - Promotes intellectual curiosity by developing thinking skills - Sets homework effectively - Plans sequences of lessons that promote continuity of learning	Prior agreed lesson plan was followed Lesson lost pace during student feedback – secondary questions would have challenged choices and encouraged students to fully justify
5	Needs of all Pupils	Uses differentiation effectively for pupils of all abilities	Differentiation through highly specialised seating plan and ‘Team leader roles’
6	Assessment	- Uses statutory assessment effectively - Uses formative and summative assessment to inform pupil progress - Sets targets for pupils - Monitors pupil progress throughout the lesson	Assessment shown through group feedback, and formative feedback through written responses in exercise books (All marked up to date) Targets set in books Excellent monitoring throughout the hour, ‘Second order’/follow-up questions could have been used more effectively
7	Behaviour management	- Establishes clear rules for behaviour - Has high expectations of behaviour	Class extremely well behaved and fully engaged throughout No behaviour management issues in any way

		• Uses strategies that motivate and energise pupils • Communicates with parents to promote well being	
8 and part 2	Professional responsibility /Conduct	• Is a good role model • Punctual to lessons • Shows tolerance and respect for the rights and values of others • Works with professional regard of the ethos policies and practices of the school	Allowed students to take ownership of the lesson. Excellent rapport shown with class

Points for discussion and reflection with regard to: Areas of Strength & Areas for Development	
Expectations & Planning	Both the expectation and the planning for the lesson were good
Teaching	Within the lesson itself, the teaching was good – rapport and enthusiasm were obvious, and would be outstanding with better use of follow-up questions
Students' learning	In both summative and formative assessment, it was clear that student's learning was excellent
Judgement of quality of lesson: Good	

Signature of Teacher..... Signature of
Observer.....
(If you would like to make any additional comments please do so below)

Appendix B: HS Observation

Teacher: HS	Observer: HOD	Class: 8E
Date: 23/2/2016	Subject: RP	Topic: Philosophy
Context:.. Performance management observation Research project		Day: Wednesday Period: 1 Time: 08:55 Room Number: 9

Lesson Observation Sheet

	Standard	Key features	
1	Expectations of pupils	- Sets goals that challenge and inspire pupils of all abilities - Creates a safe environment in which pupils feel secure	Classroom atmosphere was excellent, with a sense of purpose and challenge
2	Pupil Progress	- Keeps a record of pupil progress and outcomes - Shows awareness of individual pupil needs - Knows how pupils learn and its impact on learning - Encourages independent study	Independent study encouraged through well structured group tasks Individual pupil needs served through group task and outstanding questioning Students showed high level of discussion and reason in justifying choices
3	Subject knowledge	- Promotes the value of scholarship - Promotes literacy, articulacy and good use of English	Focus on literacy and verbal skills through written and group work Subject knowledge was impressive given non-specialist subject
4	Planning	- Makes effective use of lesson time - Promotes intellectual curiosity by developing thinking skills - Sets homework effectively - Plans sequences of lessons that promote continuity of learning	Prior agreed lesson plan was followed Excellent starter activity used Good references made to earlier lessons in SOW
5	Needs of all Pupils	Uses differentiation effectively for pupils of all abilities	Differentiation through highly specialised seating plan and 'Team leader roles'
6	Assessment	- Uses statutory assessment effectively - Uses formative and summative assessment to inform pupil progress - Sets targets for pupils - Monitors pupil progress throughout the lesson	Assessment shown through group feedback, and formative feedback through written responses in exercise books (All marked up to date) Targets set in books Excellent monitoring during the lesson, with first-rate questioning
7	Behaviour management	- Establishes clear rules for behaviour - Has high expectations of behaviour	Class extremely well behaved and fully engaged throughout No behaviour management issues in any way

		• Uses strategies that motivate and energise pupils • Communicates with parents to promote well being	Students listened to group choices well, and remained focused while writing
8 and part 2	Professional responsibility /Conduct	• Is a good role model • Punctual to lessons • Shows tolerance and respect for the rights and values of others • Works with professional regard of the ethos policies and practices of the school	Allowed students to take ownership of the lesson. Acted as a conduit for the learning, and guided the class well throughout the hour.

Points for discussion and reflection with regard to: Areas of Strength & Areas for Development	
Expectations & Planning	Great expectations set from the start, and superb adaptation of prescribed lesson plan
Teaching	Excellent questioning that elevated the lesson, and constantly challenged students during the hour
Students' learning	In both summative and formative assessment, learning was outstanding
Judgement of quality of lesson: Outstanding	

Signature of Teacher..... Signature of

Observer.....

(If you would like to make any additional comments please do so below)

Appendix C: Year 8 assessment data 2012/2015 cohort comparison

2015/16 COHORT

Class Name	Level 4+ %	Level 3+ %	Level 2+ %	3+ Sub LOP %	4+ Sub LOP %	5+ Sub LOP %	Stu Count	Residual	Avg Pts	Avg Lvl
8C/Rp	100	100	100	83.3	36.7	0	31	3.9	41.84	6a
8E/Rp	100	100	100	83.3	46.7	20	30	3.5	41.53	6a
8N/Rp	100	100	100	80	53.3	20	30	4	41.07	6a
8P/Rp	100	100	100	83.3	43.3	10	30	2.9	41.07	6a
8S/Rp	100	100	100	90	56.7	23.3	30	3.2	42.47	7c
8W/Rp	100	100	100	80	36.7	13.3	30	3.5	41.87	6a
Summary for Rp	100	100	100	83.3	45.6	14.4	181	3.5	41.64	6a

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2012/13 COHORT

Class Name	Level 4+ %	Level 3+ %	Level 2+ %	3+ Sub LOP %	4+ Sub LOP %	5+ Sub LOP %	Stu Count	Residual	Avg Pts	Avg Lvl
8C/Rp	100	100	100	51	7.1	4	30	0.4	35.9	5a
8E/Rp	100	100	100	50	0	0	30	0.3	34.58	5a
8N/Rp	100	100	100	62.3	10.7	10	30	3.5	39.6	6b
8P/Rp	100	100	100	52	0	0	31	0.4	35.9	5a
8S/Rp	100	100	100	51	0	0	30	0.3	34.58	5a
8W/Rp	100	100	100	60	10	8.3	30	0.6	39.4	6b
Summary for Rp	100	100	100	54.83	4.6	3.71	181	0.9	36.66	5a