



---

**Children As Philosophers**

---

# Training Guidelines

[www.childrenasphilosophers.com](http://www.childrenasphilosophers.com)



## Contents

About the project	4
About the guidelines	5
Principles of philosophy	6
Principles of creative thinking	10
Metacognition	14
Social philosophy	16



## About the project

***“Enable learners to engage in a creative process of enquiry within a collaborative and supportive community”***

Children as Philosophers is a KA2 Strategic Partnership Project between eight partners from six countries who have worked together to develop and share their knowledge and skills.

### **The project aims to:**

- increase key competences for children in order for them to fully participate in and contribute to a multicultural society
- develop a robust and tangible methodology that employs strategies that support the development of basic skills through the use of enquiry-based philosophy skills and creating thinking techniques
- equip teaching and non-teaching staff with a range of skills, key principles and relevant methodologies.

The project focuses around 3 key thematic areas:

### **1. Principles of philosophy and principles of creative thinking**

### **2. Metacognition**

### **3. Social Philosophy**

The project aims to promote and offer an innovative methodology within the practice of philosophy with children that addresses specifically social inclusion.

The interest towards this theme arose from the consideration that the practice of philosophy is a useful tool that supports the development of critical and social skills in children and teenagers, favouring the implementation of a new form of collective action, inspired by the values of peaceful living, respect, dialogue and debate.

## About the guidelines

This booklet offers an overview of the basic principles across the three key thematic areas of the project and offers an insight into how certain skills can be learnt and improved.

This booklet has been developed in conjunction with the training package which offers educators a set of activities to train staff on how to deliver each of the three key thematic areas.

The training package can be accessed at:

[www.childrenasphilosophers.com](http://www.childrenasphilosophers.com)



## Principles of philosophy

Moving from Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations" we can state that: a philosophical problem has the form: "I don't know my way about".

When facing enigmas or confusion, humans tend to seek connections and similarities that help to make sense; they try to make hypothesis.

Philosophy is then a way in which we try to make sense of what we wonder about. Similarly to what happens in science, we refer to experience and we reflect about it, moving from the particular to the general.

From Plato and Aristotle on, it became clear that at the basis of philosophising there's a perception of wonder and surprise, that can't be imposed nor prescribed.

Nonetheless, methods and techniques can help, creating a slight perception of "suspension" due to a situation we don't know our way about. In this respect, philosophy is also a way of exercising to move from intuitions to hypothesis to their linguistic expression.

The philosophical conversation therefore needs a reason for wonder, even though wonder cannot be prescribed.

This is particularly important when doing philosophy with children and teenagers.

In this respect, a deep change in the teaching/learning approach is needed. Contrary to the teacher-centred learning model, in which knowledge is transmitted through dyadic student-teacher relation, in the learner-centred model learning happens through group investigation. Reversing the traditional approach, then, allows to share with pupils doubts and puzzles that even philosophers still consider a source of wonder.

Together with wonder, teachers and pupils also need to share a common desire of discovery and an attitude to exchange different points of view.

But how can a philosophical discussion be started? How should it be conducted and stimulated? What is a philosophical question?

Many different answers were given to this kind of questions and they generated a varied archipelago of philosophical practices, that differ in various aspects:

- theoretical and methodological assumptions
- explicit aims / objectives
- pedagogical references
- starting points for conversations
- methods and techniques for involving children
- the role of "philosophers" / facilitators
- the "uses" of philosophy (classics of philosophy).



## Philosophy for children by Matthew Lipman

The P4C approach is one of the most known and visited island in the archipelago. It's been inhabited since the early 70s.

This approach is based on novels specifically written to stimulate a philosophical discussion with children and youngsters.

'Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery' was the first didactic philosophical novel to be written by Lipman.

The novel features Harry and his 5th grade classmates. Adults occasionally enter in, but the primary philosophical work is the children's one. Harry and his friends discover several basic concepts and rules of Aristotelean logic; they puzzle over questions about the nature of thought, mind, causality, reality, knowledge and belief, right and wrong, and fairness and unfairness. The story does not introduce any of the special vocabulary of philosophy (not even the word 'philosophy' itself makes an appearance). Philosophical inquiry is initiated by the children in the story rather than adults.

Since its publication, P4C entered many classrooms and by 1973 it was apparent that manuals would have to be constructed that would not only contain a myriad of exercises and discussion plans but would also provide the teachers with an introduction to the content of the philosophical novel and a way of proceeding.

## Dialogues with children by Gareth Matthews

In Matthews' approach, "philosophy may indeed be motivated by puzzlement."

His "Philosophy and the Young Child" starts with a question from Tim (about six years) who, while busily engaged in licking a pot, asked, 'Papa, how can we be sure that everything is not a dream?'

In Matthews' words, Tim's puzzle is quintessentially philosophical. Tim has framed a question that calls into doubt a very ordinary notion (being awake) in such a way as to make us wonder whether we really know something that most of us unquestioningly assume we know.

Puzzlement and wonder are closely related. Aristotle says that philosophy begins in wonder (Metaphysics, 982b12). Bertrand Russell tells us that philosophy, "if it cannot answer so many questions as we could wish, has at least the power of asking questions which increase the interest of the world, and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life"».



## Five finger by model by Ekkerhard Martens

Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Analysis, Dialectics and Speculation are the five methods upon which this model is built.

In order to stimulate broader and distinct questions by children, Martens suggests to use them as step-by-step reflective operations:

- (phenomenological) to be able to describe something exactly
- (hermeneutical) to understand oneself and others
- (analytical) to clarify in a conceptual and argumentative way how something is understood
- (dialectical) to ask and to disagree
- (speculative) to fantasize how something could be understood.



## The exercise of mental simulation

Sailing from one island to another, we can get some practical advice on how to engage in a philosophical discussion considering the experience of Luca Mori with Comune di Modena and Fondazione Collegio San Carlo.

The key element is the idea that philosophy with children can start with a sort of enigma and lead to the construction of a thought experiment.

Asking children to imagine together a place where to live better (the thought experiment named “Utopia”) is quite different from asking them to listen to a ready-made history, or to invite them to reconstruct a puzzle we already know how to solve.

The trainer just introduces a “rebus element”. He does not judge nor gives advice: his role is to help children move from their own point of view, using their own language, to get the best from the discussion.

In this respect, the thought experiment has something in common with the jigsaw puzzle game. While assembling the jigsaw puzzle, children refer to the complete picture that’s usually displayed on the package. While philosophizing, that complete picture (the answer to their questions) doesn’t exist yet!

That’s exactly what needs to be searched and outlined together (being aware that the outcome could be an incomplete, provisional and revisable picture).

To make sure that children are able to develop their own logic constructions throughout a gameplay, a sort of playroom is needed.

Bruno Bettelheim named it Spielraum using a German word that refers to a free environment where to play with ideas, similarly to the room where the child plays with toys.

What is important when conducting a thought experiment with children is exercising thoughts and language in a special environment, created by questions and doubts.

In this process, discussion within a group is of fundamental importance.

To tell is like Terrence Deacon would, if a child gets lost in the forest, a single adult has very few chances to find him because the tracks to follow are too many. If a group of people start searching the child, the chances of finding him grow because many more tracks can be crossed.

Similarly, when addressing philosophy with children, the more different views are shared, the more their possibilities to make new discoveries grow, as long as they learn how to cooperate.

When exercising a mental simulation, then, children and adults don't talk about an imaginary world, but are indeed stimulated to talk about two worlds: the one they imagine and the one they live in. This lets them imagine things differently, discover unexpected relations, make hypothesis and look at themselves from the outside.

## The history of philosophy as a stimulus

To enrich the method based on the thought experiment, myths and allegories from the ancient classical philosophers might be a valuable input.

Fragments dating back to the pre-Socratics and pieces from the Antigone by Sophocles can be proposed to engage children in a philosophical discussion. Using the fragments as traces of the ancient thoughts on nature and human beings, the trainer introduces himself to pupils like an adult who needs help to understand the meaning of mysterious clues dating back to people of a distant past.

While talking about these mysterious messages, children often understand that they don't really know what they thought they knew. This applies to both cosmological hypothesis and hypothesis about the human world (knowledge, friendship, language, biological phenomena...).

Addressing paradoxes and logic problems means indeed engaging in a hand-to-hand fight with language and reflecting on how we reflect, how we deceive ourselves and how we can improve our way of thinking.



## Principles of creative thinking

Creative thinking encompasses a set of tangible and repeatable methodologies, that when applied with conviction and a basic working knowledge, will significantly increase the number and quality of ideas in the pursuit of any creative solution.

### Creative V Creating

It is important to differentiate between the terms 'creative' and 'creating', as these two terms are often wrongly interchanged, leading to a 'sense' of creativity which in many cases is an act of creating (something or other). To illustrate this point, we can think of the process of following a paint-by-numbers to produce a credible looking painting. If we interrogate this process, we will soon ascertain that following a step-by-step guide to creating our painting has very little to do with creativity, despite the fact that we have 'created' something.

The British educational Sir Ken Robinson offers a useful working definition of 'creativity', that being 'original thinking...with purpose'. To refer back to the painting-by-numbers analogy, it is fairly clear that this process has very little to do with 'original thinking', though we could argue that the process does have a purpose.

We can perhaps consider this definition from the opposite perspective, original thinking without a purpose. In this type of scenario, we may imagine a very experimental work or design, perhaps unlike anything ever seen before, but under interrogation we conclude that it serves no intended purpose.

If we can use the word 'creative' as an adjective; 'that is a creative solution to the problem' for example, and we can clearly identify originality AND purpose, we are most probably dealing with 'creativity' as a result of creative thinking.

Despite some opinions to the contrary, creative thinking is not the gift of few, but something that can be learnt by many. In a fast-changing world in which people are increasingly challenged to demonstrate

mental agility, it would be remiss of educators not to teach creative thinking methods throughout a child's education, and beyond.

### Creative thinking cycle

The fundamental building blocks of creativity are ideas, and to this end creative thinking prioritises the generation of multiple ideas and/or ways of engaging with situations (these can be ideas in themselves). Therefore, the starting point and essential principle of creative thinking is to establish one or more methods that will achieve this objective.

The 'generation of alternatives', both as a discrete and wider-reaching method, demands that participants always seek to go beyond their first workable solution in terms of ideas. This ensures that more than the most-predictable (and often known) suggestion is considered as a possible outcome. In most creative thinking activities, a quota is introduced to ensure that participants really test their mental capacity. Quotas, sometimes referred to as targets, can range from a few (three to five) or extend to much larger quantities. Quotas of thirty plus are not uncommon in creative design professions.

As rule of thumb for setting an appropriate quota, we could say that around a third of the ideas should be fairly predictable and would be 'thought of' by many people. A third of ideas should demonstrate very individual thinking and perhaps a degree of surprise to others, with a final third fitting into a category that might at the outset, be considered a little silly. Many times, an idea from the final category has been refined to be the most creative final solution.



It should be noted that creative thinking methods do not guarantee creative outcomes. However, they vastly increase the probability of arriving at a truly creative solution, compared to conventional and less-structured thinking processes. Exponents of creative thinking learn this fact very early on, knowing that with every unusable idea generated, they are one step closer to a truly creative outcome.

In terms of thinking types, we can usefully refer to terms offered by the eminent theorist in the subject, Edward De Bono. In his seminal work, 'Lateral Thinking', De Bono offers us the terms 'Lateral Thinking' and 'Vertical Thinking'. While these two terms are not necessarily oppositional, they each relate to significantly different modes of thinking and their respective objectives.

Vertical Thinking is the type of thinking that most people do most of the time. It is about quickly establishing a right or workable solution in most situations. This process (and its outcomes) is most often based on experience, habit or some other familiar cognitive process. In Vertical Thinking we look for single 'right' answers, and step-by-step we eliminate other possibilities.

In contrast, Lateral Thinking seeks to establish many possible 'right' answers or steps, before moving forward. In fact, the lateral (sideways) movement, as opposed to each step taking you forward, is designed to establish multiple possible paths at the outset.

Once a quota has been met, and multiple ideas are available, consideration of the potential application, the purpose of each idea, is normally considered following a more Vertical Thinking approach, one in which logic and rational judgement is applied.

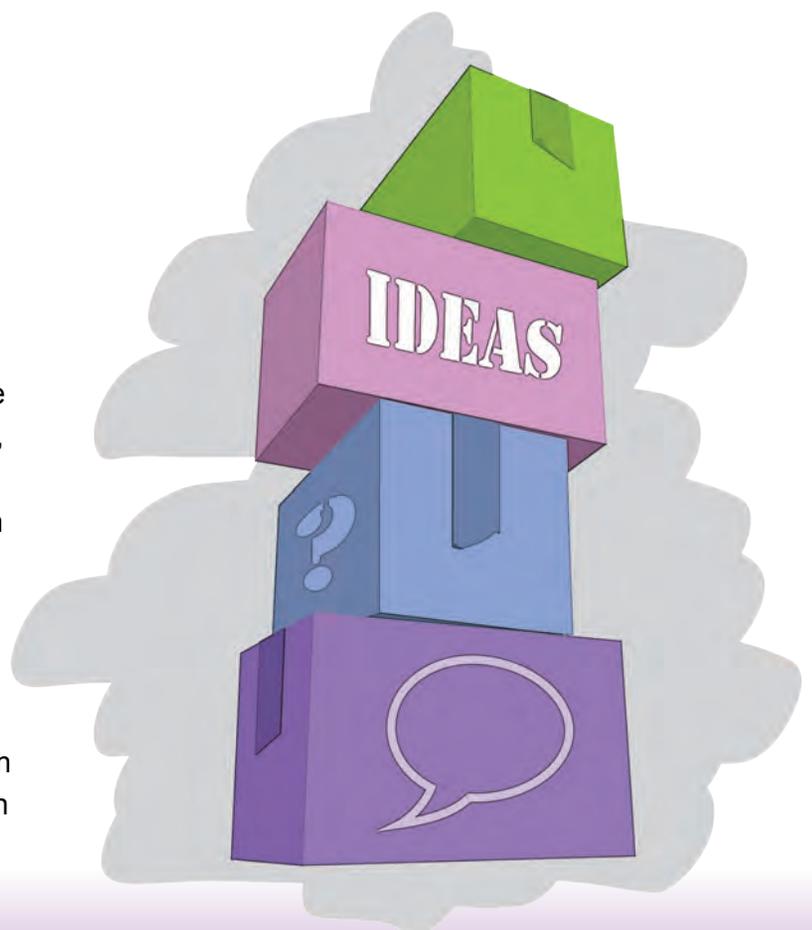
The initial set of multiple ideas should be regarded as 'bridging' ideas, and most certainly not considered at such an early stage as a 'finished item'. To overlook initial ideas as bridging ideas with potential for refinement, is one of the most common mistakes in creative thinking.

Various stimuli and structured activities are routinely used in creative thinking, with group activities generally producing ideas of a higher quality, though not necessarily more ideas per capita; group working is advisable whenever possible.

As a type of disruption to our 'normal' thinking-processes is required, activities and strategies are specifically designed to achieve this objective.

The various activities can be usefully sub-divided into those that rely on us processing ideas based on internal and/or obviously relatable references - or; we might refer to this as internal stimulation. While responding to artificially introduced stimuli, such as random words, objects and colours etc., can be referred to as external stimulation.

The inherent function of a healthy and active brain is to make connections between stimuli, whether these previously did or didn't exist. De Bono refers to the brain as a 'self-maximising system', and this innate ability of humans to quickly establish connections, is actively exploited within creative thinking processes.



## Benefits of creative thinking

While creative thinking is often undertaken to solve real-world problems, commonly in fields such as design, industry, management, politics etc. it can also be utilised to deliberately exercise the mind, stimulating new connections for young and old alike.

As stated previously, creative thinking skills are essential to educating children to actively problem-solve beyond conventional methods, demanding a greater degree of cognitive processing and most importantly, the synthesising of ideas and concepts.

As creative thinking also demands the application of vertical thinking, which we might refer to as 'conventional' thinking, continued practise will enable learners to seamlessly shift between the two modes in response not only to particular problems / situations, but also to the various and often cyclical stages of each challenge.

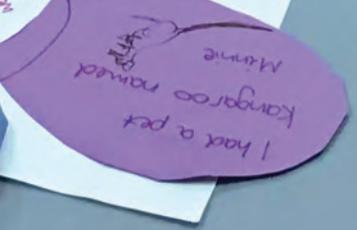
As learners become familiar with the basic principles and methods offered within most workshops and/or books on the subject, the ultimate goal is to equip learners with the competencies and confidence to construct their own methods / activities in response to particular types of problems.

Facilitating activities, which is encouraged for all learners to engage in, can enhance confidence and leadership capabilities.





Daily plan	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	



Daily plan	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	



# Metacognition

Although, there are many definitions of metacognition, the one that underpins this project describes metacognition as the overall process of the planning, monitoring, reflective evaluation and changing of learning behaviours.

Metacognition and self-regulation approaches aim to help learners think about their own learning more explicitly, often by teaching them specific strategies for planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning. Interventions are usually designed to give learners a repertoire of strategies to choose from and the skills to select the most suitable strategy for a given learning task.

There is evidence showing that metacognition has a great impact on self-regulated approaches to learning which will be explored further within this section.



## Metacognition cycle

“Metacognition should involve the advance planning and organisation of an individual's own thought processes before a task is performed, the learning and controlling of the task during performance, and the reflective evaluation after completion” (Akturk and Sahin, 2011)

We should consider metacognition as the organisation of thought processes within a cycle. Following this cycle, and intentionally reviewing it, allows us to develop our understanding of our thinking.

The metacognition cycle involves some clear stages:

### 1. Assessment of the task

During the planning stage, learners need to consider which approach or strategies they will use to complete a task.

### 2. Evaluation of own strength and weaknesses

In this stage learners evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses in approaching the task.

### 3. Planning the approach

The evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses will help them decide which approach to follow that best fits with the tasks required to be completed. During this stage, learners draw on their previous experience and knowledge. A visual map of their plan can sometimes help learners with their approach.

### 4. Applying the strategies

Learners engage in the application of the strategies and continually monitor their progress.

### 5. Reflect

In the monitoring of their progress, learners may adjust their approach and apply new strategies to the task.

In doing so, the cycle is repeated.

## Benefits of a metacognitive approach to teaching and learning

Historically, metacognition originates from the realisation that learners are active rather than passive recipients in their learning.

In addition, Vygotsky (1978) discusses “The Zone of Proximal Development”, arguing that learning evolves from an internalisation of interaction with others, and furthermore that learning is a progressive process.

Moreover, in recent years, researchers claim that thinking skills improve learners’ performance on cognitive and curriculum tests, believing that they are more effective than other interventions and therefore should be encouraged.

However, before employing strategies that actively encourage the use of metacognition in any learning environments, educators should consider the following:

1. Are there any strategies that can be taught to help learners in the metacognition cycle?
2. Can we explicitly encourage specific metacognition skills and attitudes in teaching?
3. How can we encourage learners to self-regulate?

Higgins et al (2005) conducted a meta-analysis on the impact of thinking-skills. After the examination of 191 studies, they concluded that, at the time, thinking-skills played an important part in education, such as in effective questioning, contributing to pupils’ spoken replies and assessment for learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.11; Rose, 2009, p.76). However, Higgins et al (2005, paragraph 1), added that these skills were not taught explicitly in schools. Moreover, they concluded, the meta-analysis needed information which was more precise about “their effectiveness and efficiency” (Higgins et al, 2005, paragraph 6). The final outcome showed that thinking skills’ interventions were effective in schools for improving pupil performance, and the greater impact was found in schools using

metacognitive interventions. Higgins et al (2005, paragraph 16) claim that thinking-skills improve student performance “on cognitive and curriculum tests”, therefore, as they are more effective than the majority of other interventions, their use should therefore be encouraged. However, they do warn that the effectiveness and age appropriateness should be monitored, especially the impact on outcome.

## Metacognition skills and attitudes

The Bliss Charity School (UK) Metacognition Project identifies a set of 10 skills and 10 attitudes that are explicitly taught to their learners which help them to self-regulate their learning process.

### 10 Skills:

- Applying
- Aware of learning styles
- Collaborating
- Communicating
- Creating
- Making choices and decisions
- Questioning
- Reasoning
- Researching
- Self Managing

### 10 Attitudes:

- Curious
- Empathetic
- Enthusiastic
- Independent
- Open minded
- Pride in myself and others
- Reflective
- Resilient
- Responsible
- Risk Taker

All learners are encouraged to explicitly identify the skills and attitudes pertinent to their learning processes which supports them in their metacognition cycle.

## Social philosophy

It has been argued with good evidence that in the 'post-industrial West', the autonomy of the individual has assumed priority over the interests of the community. This is certainly not the case in many other parts of the world. Whether the causes that have led to this position can be blamed on the rise of capitalism during the same period, is also a point of discussion and contention. Though for many citizens of the West, the basic premise is one that is recognised.

Social philosophy, as a branch of philosophy, actively engages with aspects of social behaviour, interactions and institutions. At its core it is a branch of philosophy that is informed by social and/or ethical values.

It is a wide-ranging study that encompasses all aspects of social life, including though not limited to; familial relationships, friendships, institutions, trends, cultural values etc. With such a wide range of areas of potential study, most of which existing in fluid and changeable forms, a perfect definition can prove to be elusive.

Social philosophy has existed as long as philosophy has, with early Greek philosophers concerning themselves primarily with social philosophy within the domain of the 'polis', the typical structure of a community within the ancient Greek world. Of course, ethics, ontology and to some extent rhetoric, were intrinsically linked to issues of social philosophy.



As we evolve further into a world mediated largely via screen interactions and social media platforms, seemingly fuelled by a rising toxicity of language, statement and intent, the need for an appreciation of social cohesion and understanding has perhaps never been greater.

It is important then that social philosophy places emphasis on social values that promote harmony and sharing, working towards the common good through positive actions and ideas, rather than the divisiveness that exists in a 'winner takes all culture'. Its fundamental roles originate from a perception of divergence between existing behaviours of a society or community, that have led to negative outcomes, to exploring how society can better function to achieve the ideals of a happy social community.

Social philosophy can be regarded as the nexus between sociology and philosophy, as clearly social philosophy shares similarities and mutual ideas with sociology. The emphasis however, within social philosophy, leans more towards interpreting social phenomena in terms of ethical principles, striving to attain social good itself.

Returning to the idea that social philosophy is based on values, which of course may differ from culture to culture, there is still a strong sense of determining and adhering to the prevailing moral values in pursuit of communal wellbeing. This brings into play ideas of the individual as an agent with the potential to affect change within whichever communities / societies he/she belongs. At this point moral codes may need to be demonstrated to be superior to potentially more negative impulses or learnt behaviours.

Such education may happen in the home or indeed within society at large, but as schools arguably afford children more sustained and consistent opportunities to impact their formation, it is here where social philosophy can achieve the greatest impact on both current and future generations.

We can usefully categorise areas for enquiry within schools, notwithstanding that each area should be

modified in terms of approach and content to be both accessible and relevant to particular learner age groups.

### **Social relations**

Recognising that all societies consist of groups, with each group being an aggregate of individuals. It is also important to note that the mere presence of individuals within a physical location, does not in itself constitute a social group. It is the contact and communication between two or more individuals that realises a social group, as societies are rooted in social interactions. Once individuals begin consciously interacting it is then possible to observe patterns of behaviour or social relations. The types of relations observed are many and they can include oppositional pairs such as; friendly or unfriendly, intimate or non-intimate, inclusive or non-inclusive etc.

### **Culture**

It would be particularly problematic to engage with social philosophy in a particular setting without a complete understanding of the prevailing culture, as this will inform and/or mitigate many of the values aspired to. An awareness of the evolution and transformation of culture is also important, as a generation can, at least in recent times, represent a significant period in the redefining of cultural norms and preferences. An appreciation of cultural preferences through critical questioning, can serve as a starting point for this area of study.

### **Economics**

While not perhaps an obvious starting point for children, the impact of economics within societies cannot be over stated. Returning to the idea of social philosophy being in pursuit of social cohesion and happiness, the distribution of wealth, equal or otherwise, can be a key determinant in achieving or falling short of this goal. Furthermore, as much as we are social contributors in the emotional and spiritual sense, we are (in the main) social contributors in an economic sense; based on the reality that money has become a universal

exchange currency for so many components that can be exchanged within a society. As stated earlier, capitalism has impacted on the formation and maintenance of social groups, whether for good or otherwise.

### **Politics**

As most societies throughout history have had some form of discernible governance, and continue to do so, an awareness of political structures and movements is advantageous to any scholar of social philosophy. In an ideal scenario the political leaders of any society (locally, nationally and internationally) would reflect and promote the values incumbent in that society. Motivations for doing otherwise may illuminate our perceptions of societies while aiding us in restructuring our societal philosophies to achieve societal wellbeing.

### **Education**

Education, both formal and informal, has been intrinsic to the evolution of humankind, making it one of the most basic activities and pursuits of any successful society. The continuation of societies relies on the transfer of knowledge from the elders to the young. In most modern societies, formal education, in its many forms, has become the dominant means by which this transfer of knowledge is executed.

Educational institutions have themselves become societies, with their own codes and value sets, along with expectations of learners, staff, and where applicable, the parents of learners. While the goal of achieving harmonious, fulfilled and happy societies is the same, educational institutions offer an immediate access to the study and promotion of social philosophy.

Within the Children as Philosophers project, and in particular the pupil exchange visits, social philosophy has been explored and tested. Cultural differences have been made apparent and strategies to overcome adverse consequences have been readily devised and enacted by pupils and staff; in most cases intuitively.



**MALIBU**  
CALIFORNIA

**JUNGLE FEVER**

CALVIN





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

Project Agreement Number: 2017-1-UK01-KA201-036622