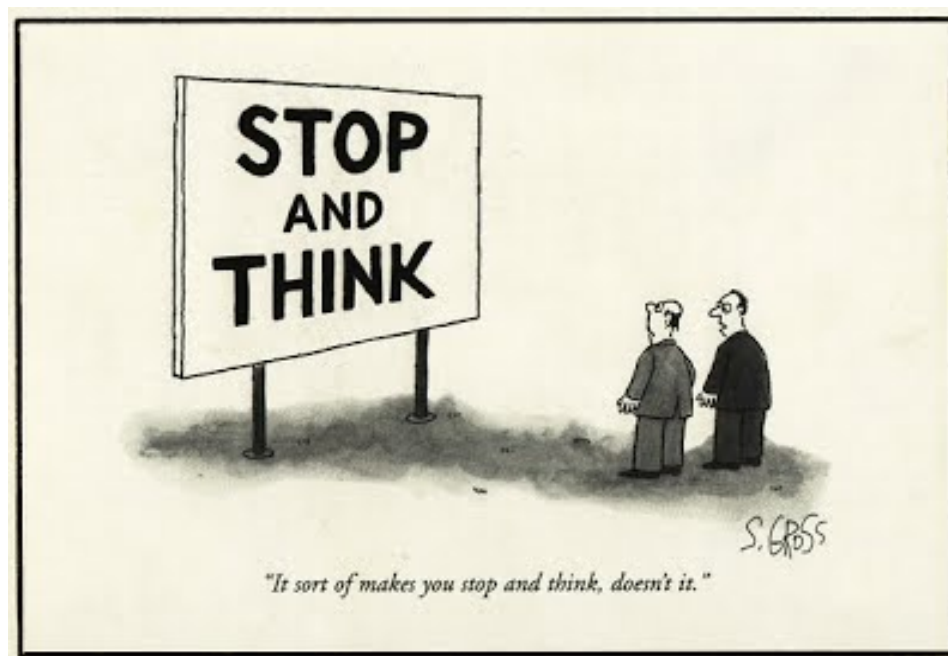


Should Philosophy be a Mandatory Part of the Education System?

http://www.davidbain.org/_/rsrc/1354377702075/whats-philosophy/STOPANDTHINK.jpg?height=278&width=400



Supporting Questions

1. What is the purpose of philosophy?
2. How is philosophy relevant to education?
3. What are the risks of teaching philosophy in schools?

Should Philosophy be a Mandatory Part of the Education System?

Inquiry Standard	12. C.1.1 Compare the various ways in which pragmatic and idealistic philosophies have addressed humanity's desire to understand life and the process of living. Teacher Professional Development
Staging the Question	Have participants construct a list of the knowledge they have regarding the study of philosophy and then allow them to present their ideas with the rest of the class. After this is completed, have them watch a short video explaining what philosophy is in the sense of an academic discipline.

Supporting Question 1
What is the purpose of philosophy?
Formative Performance Task
Have participants create a cartoon or picture depicting the purpose of philosophy.
Featured Sources
Source A: Role of a Philosopher Source B: What's the Point of Philosophy? Source C: What is Philosophy for?

Supporting Question 2
How is philosophy relevant to education?
Formative Performance Task
Have participants write one to two paragraphs on the ways in which philosophy is relevant to education.
Featured Sources
Source A: Why PLATO? Source B: Philosophy for Kids TED Talk Source C: BBC News Video

Supporting Question 3
What are the risks of teaching philosophy in schools?
Formative Performance Task
Have participants make their own advertisement explaining the risks of teaching philosophy in schools.
Featured Sources
Source A: Let's Stop Trying to Teach Students Critical Thinking Source B: Philosophy and Depression Source C: Can Critical Thinking be Too Critical? Source D: The Philosopher's Problem

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Should philosophy be a mandatory part of the education system? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical and contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.
	EXTENSION Have a class debate on whether or not philosophy should be a mandatory part of the education system.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Have participants who feel philosophy should be a mandatory part of the education system create a lesson plan based on philosophy while those who do not believe in the teaching of philosophy do research on their own to find reasons other than the ones provided in the sources. ASSESS Have those who created a lesson plan teach a class of students using philosophy based learning while those who did their own research compose a slideshow and present it to the class. ACT Have all participants write an email to their school board association addressing their point of view on philosophy being a mandatory part of the education system. Those who support philosophy would use the classes they taught to answer the compelling question in the affirmative while those who were against philosophy being implemented would use the slideshow they created to compose their email.

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry focuses on the correlation between philosophy and education. Participants will examine various perspectives regarding philosophy and its relevancy to the education system along with the risks associated with teaching it in the classroom.

This inquiry is designed solely for teacher professional development programs but is also suitable for high school students. Originally, this inquiry was formatted for twelfth graders, however, it was thought to be better fitting for teachers themselves due to its content regarding the education system and philosophy. For better clarification, teachers completing this inquiry will be considered *participants* rather than *students*. Normally, the person leading the inquiry is obviously known as the teacher, but this title will be replaced with *instructor* for clarification.

The purpose of this inquiry is to open the minds of teachers through the idea of philosophy being incorporated into schools and how it would affect the curriculum. They will examine various sources in order to formulate their stance regarding the compelling question and take note of both the positives and negatives resulting in the teaching of philosophy in schools. The answers each participant has to the supporting questions will help them determine which side they will represent along with the sources accompanying them.

It is important to note that although philosophy encompasses critical thinking, these two terms will be used interchangeably. Their definitions do differ from one another. Philosophy can be viewed as a discipline of ideas whereas critical thinking has to do with how you process these ideas. Philosophy plays perhaps the greatest role in helping people develop into critical thinkers.

Structure

This inquiry contains an exercise that tests participants on their prior knowledge of the study of philosophy. Once this activity is completed, a video will be shown in order to provide participants with a basic understanding of philosophy before continuing onto the supporting questions.

Following this portion of the inquiry are the three supporting questions. Each question includes three sources that vary from videos to articles which aid participants in answering the correlating supporting question. Accompanying each supporting question is a formative performance task which gives participants a chance to show their understanding of the material.

The next part of the inquiry is the summative performance task composed of two sections. The first being the argument in which participants use a form of media to convey their answer to the compelling question. They are expected to use to evidence from the sources provided to support their answer. The extension which is the second portion of the summative performance task is where participants will have a debate regarding the compelling question. The instructor

has the option of splitting the participants into two groups regardless of which side they truly believe in or the instructor can allow them to pick the side they would prefer.

Lastly, participants will take informed action by completing three steps. They will do one of two things depending on their stance regarding the compelling question. If they are for philosophy be implemented in the education system then they will make a philosophy based lesson plan. If they are against philosophy being incorporated into schools then they will do their own research to find reasons to support their argument besides the ones provided by the sources. The second step is for those who support philosophy in schools to use the lesson plan they created to teach a class of students while those who are against it will compose a slideshow containing the information they found from research. The last step is to have all participants write an email to their school boards association using the evidence some collected from their philosophy based class while others will use the slideshow they presented to convey their arguments.

Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling Question	Should philosophy be a mandatory part of the education system?
Featured Sources	Source A An Introduction to the Discipline of Philosophy

Staging the Question

For this inquiry, participants will use their prior knowledge to brainstorm and make a list of everything they know or think they know about philosophy. It is acceptable for them to write nothing down if they have no knowledge on the subject. The instructor will set a timer for five minutes and allow participants to record their ideas. Lastly, a video will be shown explaining the definition of philosophy in the sense of an academic discipline. The instructor will give participants time to discuss the video by having them explain what they learned along with whether or not they were familiar with most or some of the information they were presented with. This warm up activity uses solitary thought through the process of recording prior knowledge of philosophy onto paper and then utilizes verbalization between peers allowing ideas and questions to be exchanged before examining the supporting questions.

It should be noted that this video contains information that is not pertinent to this inquiry but it does provide helpful insight into the study of philosophy. The last three minutes or so go into a good amount of detail regarding various philosophers and the books they have written along with ideas accompanying them. It is up to the instructor whether he or she would like to include these extra pieces of information or if they would prefer to focus solely on the definition and meaning of philosophy. If the latter is preferred then simply pause the video at the time mark of 1:46. Doing this would most likely be suggested when there is a limited amount of time for the class and the instructor would like to only include the vital portion of the video allowing the class to move at a quicker pace. However, the rest of video is not trivial for it provides its audience with a deeper understanding of this discipline through the use of differing philosophical ideas.

Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling Question	Should philosophy be a mandatory part of the education system?
Featured Sources	Source A "An Introduction to the Discipline of Philosophy." <i>YouTube</i> , YouTube, 14 Apr. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhnglxhzh7Y

Supporting Question 1

Supporting Question	What is the purpose of philosophy?
Formative Performance Task	Have participants create a cartoon or picture depicting the purpose of philosophy.
Featured Sources	Source A Role of a Philosopher Source B What's the Point of Philosophy Source C What is Philosophy for?

Supporting Question

For the first supporting question, participants will examine three sources in order to determine the purpose of philosophy, if there is one. By doing this, they will gain a better understanding of philosophy without relation to the education system. Participants will see why philosophy is studied and what benefits come from practicing this discipline. Two of the three articles explain the purpose of philosophy in today's time while the other provides evidence for why philosophy no longer has a purpose. Participants can work in pairs or by themselves depending on their preference. It is also acceptable to read the article as a class and then have a small discussion afterwards.

Formative Performance Task

Once participants have completed the reading and viewing of the three sources, they will complete a task to show their understanding of the material along with the intention of displaying their answer to the supporting question within this activity. They will create a cartoon or picture depicting the purpose of philosophy. They are allowed to create a comic strip or a drawing using examples and evidence from the sources provided. It is entirely acceptable for participants to believe that philosophy has no purpose as long as they use evidence. They may also create their art online as long as the

instructor permits them to do so. Completing this formative performance task will allow participants to show their answer to the supporting question without hindering their creativity.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source

Source A: Sugunan, Sreejith. "In Today's Times, What Is the Role of a Philosopher?" *The Wire*, *The Wire*, 11 July 2018, thewire.in/books/in-todays-times-what-is-the-role-of-a-philosopher.

It is interesting to note that some fishes find it easier to swim against the current. A trout, for example, is known to use the turbulence in the water and bounce off the eddies to propel itself forward. Salmon and tuna, on the other hand, prefer to go with the flow. There are others like pufferfish, which avoid the rough waters altogether and limit themselves to serene and sheltered lagoons. The present condition of most professional philosophers resembles those of the pufferfish, at least in the Indian subcontinent. Their activities and interventions take place in their "sheltered lagoons", mostly limited to the university departments where they teach courses with cryptic jargon like "epistemology" and "metaphysics" in their titles, which continue to remain incomprehensible to those outside the university walls. Yet, there has been no dearth of scorn for their vocation today.

There are two reasons for this. The first is that philosophy, as an academic discipline, suffers from carrying an identity that is perceived to have negligible utility for today's world. The second concerns a specific contemporary sentiment that believes we are all "thinking" beings, and hence philosophers. Any deep conversation has become "philosophical". The world doesn't need more philosophers, but scientists, CEOs and development professionals. After all, what pressing problem is the philosopher solving?

Consider the philosopher

In his celebrated essay titled 'This is Water', American writer David Foster Wallace relied on a parable of fishes to make a point about education. The essay begins with two young fishes swimming along and their chance encounter with an older fish, who greets them with "Morning boys, how's the water?" Swimming a bit further and confused, the younger fish finally looks at his partner and goes "What the hell is water?" The point of this parable, as Wallace noted, was that "the most obvious, important realities are often the ones hardest to see and talk about".

Wallace was in some senses a philosopher himself. He majored in philosophy and English during his graduation and began his PhD in philosophy at Harvard, which he later dropped out of. As a young philosopher, Wallace believed that the true purpose of education had less to do with gaining knowledge or explaining the world around us. Rather, for him, education is about developing an "awareness", of "what is so real and essential", yet "so hidden in plain sight all around us...that we have to keep reminding ourselves over and over: this is water, this is water."

Wallace's perception of education evolved from his own understanding of how we experience the world. According to Wallace, all human experience is processed from the point of view of the self, which he termed "our default setting". Wallace identified two "default settings" that we are prone to – the "self-centered" and the "socially conscious". The best representation of the former is the daily frustrations we face in our lives when everybody seems to be "just in the way", delaying us from getting to where we should be. Though the "socially conscious" default setting is less about "me" and more about the preserving nature and the world, it is still antagonistic to most of humanity, who are "selfish", "inconsiderate" and set to ruin our planet.

Education, then, is about "de-centring" us from our own experience, thus helping us perceive alternative realities. This may be considering the possibility that others may be in a "more legitimate hurry" than we are, or it may be accepting that "it is actually I who am in his way", or it may be appreciating that everyone is probably going through a hard and

tiring day, just like me. And developing such a worldview has nothing to do with morality or compassion for Wallace. Instead, it is a matter of proactively “choosing” to alter our default settings, a prerequisite to becoming truly “free”.

Wallace believed that this adjustment, to go against the current, requires no knowledge or intellect. In fact, he candidly remarks that the troubling aspect of his education, and something that is specifically attributable to those trained in a discipline like philosophy, is that it leads them to “over-intellectualise” stuff, thus losing themselves in abstract arguments.

Despite this, Wallace felt that his liberal arts education helped him to exercise “some control over how and what you think”. This meant “being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience.” And this awareness is needed not because such careful construction of meaning helps one produce great works of art from the mundane, but because, this is the only way to go through an adult life without being “dead” (literally), “unconscious” and a slave to one’s “default setting”.

But there is nothing wrong in going along with our natural default settings, and Wallace is conscious of avoiding any moralising sermons that claim this is how you are “supposed” to think or act. He acknowledged that we may not be able to do it some days. Yet, he is hopeful that, with education, we may be able to see possibilities that are not “pointless and annoying”. Education, then, helps us “consciously” decide how we experience things, and determine “what has meaning and what doesn’t”.

Letters to the philosopher

The idea of education, and what it entails, is also central to the India-based Iranian academic Ramin Jahanbegloo’s book, *Letters to a Young Philosopher (LYP)*. At the heart of this book is the claim that “thinking” is indispensable to an existence without mediocrity. LYP comprises 16 letters from a master to his apprentice. For Jahanbegloo, or “R” as the master is referred to in his letters, philosophy is an “inquiry into the art of living”, a call to “think” as well as maintain a disposition to hear.

In his book, Jahanbegloo adopts a thoughtful and relatable vocabulary to delineate some of the aspects we have already discussed. For R, the “default modes” of thought and action are best represented by the phrase “techno-bureaucratic society”, which incentivises a particular kind of attitude over others, an attitude of conformism and mediocrity. Reading this book, one wonders how come we have replaced mediocrity’s original antonym, “excellence”, with an idea of “success”, despite both the words meaning very different things. R identifies this substitution as a byproduct of our current education system, which he feels has become a means to an end. Education is perceived today as a body of knowledge and skillset that helps us reach a goal, commonly termed success, key ingredients of which are high purchasing power and a penchant for sophisticated consumption.

R stresses on the importance of going back to the idea of education as a training for nurturing the human soul. Such an education should focus on the art of “thinking”, which is not about “knowing” or “possessing” an idea by being hard-headed about it, but to be thoughtful while encountering and responding to the other. Humility in holding opinions forms the core of this education. And it is this decay of education as an ethical enterprise that R laments. R links the current pervasive lack of “thinking” in the modern world to the rise of evil (read violence, hatred and indifference to others’ suffering) in society. Throughout the book, R continues this call for humility and responsibility, but at the same time highlights the necessity of being “conscious” as well as “critical”. This is because meaning or awareness from our life experiences is not found in what we see, read or do, but in the process of thinking and reflection we can bring to these images, words or actions.

LYP is undoubtedly a deep and meaningful book, conveyed through sharp yet compassionate writing. The book aims to be the gadfly, stinging the reader and keeping them in a state of alertness and resistance to mediocrity. It conceives of philosophy as an inherently ethical enterprise and reiterates that the philosopher's role is to draw attention to the shortcomings of our present human conditions, thus generating moments of critique. And this needs to be done with an attitude of excellence – so with humility, responsibility and meditative awareness.

Death of a philosopher

Unlike R, Wallace was adamant that education and philosophy need not be an ethical enterprise. Wallace was deeply sceptical of inherited “pre-formed positions” of “moral clarity”. His main problem with embracing positions of virtue and compassion as part of our education was that it provided packaged answers to the “young fishes” and painted certain perspectives as “more right” than others. He was very particular about the fishes exercising their own freedom, “the really important kind of freedom” which involves “attention, awareness, discipline, effort” to care about other people, and sacrifice for them in our “myriad petty little unsexy ways, everyday”. Wallace concluded, “none of this is about morality, religion or dogma, or big fancy questions about life after death. The capital T-Truth is about life before death. It is about making it to 30, or may be 50 without wanting to shoot yourself in the head.”

Wallace did not make it to 50. He hung himself at the age of 46, troubled by chronic depression. Five years before his death, in an interview, Wallace pointed out a paradox produced by our liberal arts education, especially those focused on philosophy and literature. While the whole liberal arts enterprise is premised on the “nobility of the human spirit”, most of these educated graduates end up being unhappy once they finish their education. In a country like India, a significant portion of the liberal arts graduates majoring in a discipline like philosophy may not find financially rewarding jobs. And not all who find financially rewarding jobs will end up using what they have learnt as part of their education.

Wallace's philosophical brilliance lies in identifying the connection between the everyday mundane in our life and how it impacts the world. His writings focus on highlighting this often overlooked reality of how we, in our little unconscious ways, contribute to the ongoing crises or acts of violence and rage around us. He wants us to think whether our default settings cause pain and suffering to people we don't know. And it doesn't require us at all to take up arms or burn down buildings to bring a positive change in the world. Maybe all we need to do is to relax in our sheltered lagoons like a pufferfish and think about what all this means. It may lead us to realise why our indifference to the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq, or the rapes in Unnao and Kathua, might have something to do with how people from other communities feel about us. And that would be a good starting point, for doing philosophy.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source

Source B: schooloflifechannel. "What Is Philosophy for?" YouTube, YouTube, 9 Oct. 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIYdx6IDDhg.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source

Source C: Goldhill, Olivia. "What's the Point of Philosophy? A New Philosophy Paper Says There Isn't One." *Quartz*, Quartz, 27 June 2018, qz.com/1313616/whats-the-point-of-philosophy-a-new-philosophy-paper-says-there-isnt-one/.

There comes a moment in every philosophy student's life, perhaps when struggling through a logic set or trying to parse some impenetrable Derrida essay, that the inevitable question comes up: What's the point? A new philosophy paper, published in the June 2018 edition of the *Journal of Practical Ethics*, argues that there isn't one.

At least, there's not a singular coherent point that the field is working towards. Whereas history is clearly focused on understanding our past and biology is devoted to explaining living organisms, there's some confusion as to philosophy's purpose. There are clear themes of course, such as the meaning of life, and what constitutes reality. But the subject is huge and sprawling, encompassing questions about metaphysics, epistemology, language, and ethics, among others. Is the point of philosophy to unravel the nature of the universe, or how we know what we know, or the role of language, or answer some other great question?

Ingmar Persson, professor of practical philosophy at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and Oxford University's Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, argues that philosophy will never figure out a coherent purpose. "It is suggested that the intrinsic point of doing philosophy is to establish a rational consensus about what the answers to its main questions are. But it seems that this cannot be accomplished because philosophical arguments are bound to be inconclusive," he writes in the *Journal of Practical Ethics*.

That's because philosophy refuses to take anything for granted: "Even if philosophical arguments are logically valid—and, thus, guarantee true conclusions if their premises are true—they will inescapably have some premises whose truth can be denied or doubted because in the end they run out of support," Persson writes. Though there are plenty of philosophers who believe they've uncovered the truth, there are no objectively correct answers in philosophy. Someone who ascribes to Kant's ethical theory (here are key principles that can never be broken) will always disagree with those who accept Bentham's utilitarian arguments (any act can be ethical as long as it maximizes happiness). And there's no way to truly prove one is right and the other is wrong. "Eventually arguments will peter out, and it will have to be extraneous factors such as our personalities and how social circumstances impinge on them that determine whether we come down on one side or the other," writes Persson.

However, that interaction between philosophy and personality can in fact be philosophy's point. Persson quotes Friedrich Nietzsche, who in *Beyond Good and Evil* wrote, "Every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author." Thus philosophy may have the same point as art and literature, in that it communicates its creators' personalities. And on the flip side, readers of philosophy can find something of themselves in the work. Those who are drawn to existentialist theories might recognize themselves as particularly angst-y individuals, while Stoic aficionados can see themselves as unswayed by emotions. There's also a possible practical benefit to philosophy: The subject can help reveal how to behave more morally or provide guidelines for pursuing a good life.

But both of these are points external to the subject, rather than contained within it—just as treatment of diseases is a beneficial application of biology, but not the core internal goal.

In other words, we still haven't found an *intrinsic* point to the subject. "Doing philosophy in order to 'know thyself' is a time-honoured task which is sufficient for philosophy to have a point *for you*, given your interest in gaining self-knowledge, though you will not be pursuing philosophy strictly for its own sake," writes Persson.

According to Persson, philosophy does not have "the primary, intrinsic point of establishing a rational consensus about the solutions of its leading problems," or even agreement about what constitutes its leading questions. Nevertheless, Persson's paper shows the subject is far from useless.

Supporting Question 2

Supporting Question	How is philosophy relevant to education?
Formative Performance Task	Have participants write one to two paragraphs on the ways in which philosophy is relevant to education.
Featured Sources	Source A: Why PLATO? Source B: Philosophy for Kids TED Talk Source C: BBC News Video

Supporting Question

Supporting question two addresses the relevancy of philosophy and education. The purpose of this question is to have participants think about how these two terms connect with one another. They will examine, once again, three sources that explain in what ways education and philosophy intertwine. The two videos and article discuss the positives of philosophy being implemented in schools and how the students have responded to it. It should be noted that in source C the word *metacognition* is used interchangeably with *philosophy*. Metacognition is simply being aware on one's own thoughts and thought processes which is always in use when practicing philosophy. It can be thought of as metacognition being a part of philosophy, much like critical thinking.

Formative Performance Task

For the formative performance task, participants will construct one to two paragraphs explaining the relevancy of philosophy to education. They will need to organize their thoughts after reading the article and watching both videos. It is highly suggested that participants take notes while going through the sources that way they have an easier time constricting their paragraphs afterwards. Each paragraph needs to be at least five sentences and convey coherent pieces of information. In total, they should have, at the minimum, four pieces of evidence from the sources provided. Completing this activity will help participants convey the ideas and knowledge they learned through writing.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Sources

Source A: “Why PLATO | PLATO - Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization.” PLATO, www.plato-philosophy.org/why-plato/.

WHY PLATO?

At one time or another, we all ask ourselves philosophical questions: open-ended questions that explore fundamental concepts and values in human life, questions that are not easily answered but lend themselves to rich reflection. We wonder, discuss, and critically explore the nature of reality and our values, as we try to understand and find meaning in our lives.

Children, too, engage in philosophical inquiry. From a very young age, children give voice to their curiosity by questioning everything around them.

PLATO is devoted to enriching young people’s educational experiences by introducing them to the benefits and rigors of philosophy before they graduate from high school. Our members include professional philosophers and other educators, K-12 teachers, graduate and undergraduate students, and school administrators.

We contend that philosophy is a key, yet overlooked, resource for preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century.

THE BENEFITS OF PHILOSOPHY IN SCHOOLS

Although it is sometimes misrepresented as an abstract practice removed from the concerns of everyday people, philosophy is eminently practical. Engaging in philosophical inquiry can bolster our ability to think deeply about our beliefs, commitments, and values; critically evaluate our own assumptions; construct sound and valid arguments; and evaluate the arguments of others.

Philosophy helps make us better listeners, and more reflective, respectful contributors to discussions.

Philosophical inquiry doesn’t treat knowledge as a commodity or a set of facts to be passed on to young people, but rather as something that is created collaboratively and emerges in classrooms in which questioning, discussion, and the search for unexamined assumptions are encouraged.

Instrumental Benefits



Studying philosophy hones analytical reasoning, reading comprehension, logical argumentation, and independent thinking – all important elements of a 21st century education. Several studies demonstrate the benefits of philosophy for children in these and related areas. Trickey and Topping (2004) show that philosophy programs help young students to improve their reasoning, discussion, and logical argumentation skills. Those who study philosophy also tend to perform higher on the Cognitive Reflection Test (Frederick, 2005), which measures problem-solving skills. Philosophy in K-12 classrooms has also been shown to promote socio-emotional growth, independent thinking, and positive self-esteem in children and adolescents (Millett and Tapper, 2012; Mohr Lone and Burroughs, 2015; Trickey and Topping, 2005).

Intrinsic Benefits

Philosophical inquiry allows students to experience the pleasure of growing intellectually. In his pioneering work on education, John Dewey maintained that children enter school curious and motivated to learn (Dewey 1916; 1938). Educational research shows that students perform better academically when they are engaged in their own learning and believe it is of personal value (as opposed to a purely instrumental task) (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Martin, 2001).

PHILOSOPHY IS UNIQUE AMONG THE DISCIPLINES

Philosophy is uniquely positioned to provide meaningful educational experiences to students. Other subjects may introduce elements of critical analysis and logical thinking, but only in philosophy are these skills deployed in the service of questioning, examining and discussing central questions pertaining to human life.

Through personal and group reflection, students have an opportunity to consider their assumptions and implicit biases, their own views and those of others students, and explore multiple, diverse perspectives on the issue under discussion. Students engaged in philosophical inquiry come to see how an academic pursuit can inform their personal experiences and development.

Philosophy doesn't teach students just to answer questions, but also to "question answers." Students are often asked to respond to teacher-supplied questions that have clear-cut answers. In contrast, in philosophical inquiry, students learn to pose questions and challenge their own assumptions.

THE CASE FOR PHILOSOPHY

As we debate the benefits of high-stakes testing and the Common Core and the value of public education, including philosophy in the curriculum is increasingly relevant. Today's students are called upon to be critical readers, engage in close textual analysis, improve their reasoning skills, become more discerning consumers of information, and develop more creative and divergent thinking. However, for many reasons (including competing priorities and resources), we are not providing them with the skills they need to master these tasks.

Philosophy addresses both the timely and timeless goals of education: it improves students' test-taking abilities and sharpens their intellectual skills. It also provides opportunities for authentic, student-centered learning, which are often limited because of the crowded curriculum and pressures associated with standardized testing that inhibit the possibilities for collaborative education.

Philosophy is important both for its instrumental value – as a discipline that will help students perform better in school and in higher education – as well as for the intrinsic rewards it promises. Now, more than ever, students need to become engaged in the world as skilled thinkers, as citizens in a democracy, and as global citizens. The stakes couldn't be higher, or the need for responsible, reflective, systematic thinkers greater; these are precisely the habits of mind that philosophy cultivates.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Sources

Source B: TEDxTalks. "TEDxOverlake - Dr. Sara Goering - Philosophy for Kids: Sparking a Love of Learning." *YouTube*, YouTube, 30 June 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DLzXAjScXk.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Sources

Source C: bbcnews. "Meet the Kids Who Think for Themselves - BBC News." *YouTube*, YouTube, 28 Dec. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMVvWik0jyk.

Supporting Question 3

Supporting Question	What are the risks of teaching philosophy in schools?
Formative Performance Task	Have participants make there own advertisement explaining the risks of teaching philosophy in schools.
Featured Sources	Source A: Let’s Stop Trying to Teach Students Critical Thinking Source B: Philosophy and Depression Source C: Can Critical Thinking be Too Critical? Source D: The Philosopher’s Problem

Supporting Question

The last supporting question addresses the risks of teaching philosophy in schools. These four articles discuss the issues associated with philosophy and critical thinking. Two of the sources talk about philosophy and critical thinking without relation to education while the other two do. Regardless, all four sources can be applied to the concept of philosophy being implemented in the curriculum. Once again, it should be noted that philosophy encompasses critical thinking. In order to truly practice philosophy one must use critical thinking.

Formative Performance Task

After all the sources are examined, participants will have the opportunity to create an advertisement protesting the incorporation of philosophy into the education system. They will need to include at least four pieces of evidence and proof from the sources provided. Their advertisement can be hand drawn or created online depending on which they prefer. The purpose of this activity is to put participants into the mindset that philosophy should not be a mandatory part of the education system, much like the last formative performance task did the opposite. The advertisements can be communicated through words, pictures, or both.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Sources

Source A: Hayes, Dennis. "Let's Stop Trying to Teach Students Critical Thinking." The Conversation, The Conversation, 17 Aug. 2018, theconversation.com/lets-stop-trying-to-teach-students-critical-thinking-30321.

Many teachers say they strive to teach their students to be critical thinkers. They even pride themselves on it; after all, who wants children to just take in knowledge passively?

But there is a problem with this widespread belief. The truth is that you can't teach people to be critical unless you are critical yourself. This involves more than asking young people to "look critically" at something, as if criticism was a mechanical task.

As a teacher, you have to have a critical spirit. This does not mean moaning endlessly about education policies you dislike or telling students what they should think. It means first and foremost that you are capable of engaging in deep conversation. This means debate and discussion based on considerable knowledge – something that is almost entirely absent in the educational world. It also has to take place in public, with parents and others who are not teachers, not just in the classroom or staffroom.

The need for teachers to engage in this kind of deep conversation has been forgotten, because they think that being critical is a skill. But the Australian philosopher John Passmore criticised this idea nearly half a century ago:

If being critical consisted simply in the application of a skill then it could in principle be taught by teachers who never engaged in it except as a game or defensive device, somewhat as a crack rifle shot who happened to be a pacifist might nevertheless be able to teach rifle-shooting to soldiers. But in fact being critical can be taught only by men who can themselves freely partake in critical discussion.

The misuses of 'criticism'

The misuse of the idea of "criticism" first became clear to me when I gave a talk about critical thinking to a large group of first-year students. One student said that the lecturers she most disliked were the ones who banged on about the importance of being critical. She longed for one of them to assert or say something, so she could learn from them and perhaps challenge what they say.

The idea that critical thinking is a skill is the first of three popular, but false views that all do disservice to the idea of being critical. They also allow many teachers to believe they are critical thinkers when they are the opposite:

1. “Critical thinking” is a skill. No it is not. At best this view reduces criticism to second-rate or elementary instruction in informal and some formal logic. It is usually second-rate logic and poor philosophy offered in bite-sized nuggets. Seen as a skill, critical thinking can also mean subjection to the conformism of an ideological yoke. If a feminist or Marxist teacher demands a certain perspective be adopted this may seem like it is “criticism” or acquiring a “critical perspective”, but it is actually a training in feminism or Marxism which could be done through tick box techniques. It almost acquires the character of a mental drill.
2. “Critical thinking” means indoctrination. When teachers talk about the need to be “critical” they often mean instead that students must “conform”. It is often actually teaching students to be “critical” of their unacceptable ideas and adopt the right ones. Having to support multiculturalism and diversity are the most common of the “correct ideas” that everyone has to adopt. Professional programmes in education, nursing, social work and others often promote this sort of “criticism”. It used to be called “indoctrination”.
3. “Critical theories” are “uncritical theories”. When some theory has the prefix “critical” it requires the uncritical acceptance of a certain political perspective. Critical theory, critical race theory, critical race philosophy, critical realism, critical reflective practice all explicitly have political aims.

What is criticism?

Criticism, according to Victorian cultural critic Matthew Arnold, is a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. We should all be as “bound” by that definition as he was. We need only to teach the best that is known and thought and “criticism” will take care of itself. That is a lesson from 150 years ago that every teacher should learn.

Critical thinking seen as Arnold defined it is more like a character trait – like having “a critical spirit”, or a willingness to engage in the “give and take of critical discussion”. Criticism is always about the world and not about you.

The philosopher most associated with the critical spirit is Socrates. In the 1930s, another Australian philosopher John Anderson put the Socratic view of education most clearly when he wrote: “The Socratic education begins ... with the awakening of the mind to the need for criticism, to the uncertainty of the principles by which it supposed itself to be guided.”

But when I discuss Socratic criticism with teachers and teacher trainers I miss out Anderson’s mention of the word “uncertainty”. This is because many teachers will assume that this “uncertainty” means questioning those bad ideas you have and conforming to an agreed version of events, or an agreed theory.

Becoming a truly critical thinker is more difficult today because so many people want to be a Socrates. But Socrates only sought knowledge and to be a Socrates today means putting knowledge first.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Sources

Source B: "Philosophy and Depression: Don't Think So Much." *Project Conquest*, 10 Oct. 2017, projectconquest.org/philosophy-and-depression.

When it comes to philosophy and depression, the linking is rather odd.

I am not talking about philosophy as a form of focusing your general thoughts on, arguably, meaningless things.

Like, say, why do they call him "Spongebob Squarepants" if he is a rectangle.

No, I am actually talking about letting your thoughts drift towards the meaning of life, morality, and self.

All of these useless or even harmful things (I'll tell you why in a few minutes)

You see, when you are looking for a meaning you may end up depressed due to the end result of your thoughts, but when you are already depressed you can't help but look for a meaning, for something to strive for in your dull life.

Rumination is a killer

"The sharpest minds often ruin their lives by overthinking the next step, while the dull win the race with eyes closed."
-Bethany Brookbank

When you really break it down, a philosophical approach to life is nothing more than overthinking meaningless issues (I'll explain why a few paragraphs below).

The sad truth is that overthinking takes you from your present, from the current events that you experience, and traps you inside your own head.

Asking why all the time is one such symptom of depression-based thinking.

"Why me", "Why this", "Why that". Why Why Why.

This is what we call rumination, the concept of going over a pattern of thoughts or problems without reaching any results.

When people are depressed they search for a meaning, for a reason for their suffering, but their search for answers remains inconclusive.

Instead, they review their shortcomings, failures, and mistakes, only to reach no actual results and deduce that everything "just sucks" instead.

You get stuck in a long chain of negative thoughts, pulling your sense of worth way, way down (and this is coming from me) as a result.

Data shows that this type of thinking is both a cause and a symptom of depressive disorders.

In additional data, people who were encouraged to focus on their shortcomings did so and lowered their current mood as a result.

Not only that, but focusing on depression itself, the default choice of such thoughts, with it being a major problem, can actually make your depression even worse.

Think about it for a moment – trying to find a solution for your depression can make your depression worse.

Philosophical thinking is a form of rumination

When it really comes down to it, most philosophical issues are problems that you are trying to solve.

Not only that, but said problems are very difficult to solve.

Sure, you may say that the sky is blue, but that raises a whole new set of problems.

“How do you know that the sky is blue” “what is the basis of the color blue” “is it blue to you, or blue to me?” and the list goes on and on.

Strictly speaking, these thoughts have no practical purpose yet you are determined to sort through them.

So you think, and think, and only rarely come up with a conclusion that you can’t debunk yourself.

And even if you can’t, someone else can and will do that for you.

The most dangerous thing about philosophy is how subjective it is.

When you are thinking about meaning, you are thinking about your meaning, when you think about right and wrong, you base it on yourself and your actions and feelings.

So when you think about the meaning of your life, and can’t come up with a conclusion, you end up believing that your life has no meaning and get depressed as a result.

After all, if you can’t define it, then what good is it?

There is an inherent flaw with this type of thinking, however – it’s purely in your head.

It’s about our ability to define our meaning in life

Now you must be thinking that I am an idiot.

Already saying things like “Well Vlad, of course my thoughts are inside my head!”

...And you would be right too, but believing that you can come up with a meaning to your life purely by trying to think about it is wrong.

But why do we even search for meaning in the first place?

People will probably give you answers like “without it, life is meaningless” or “How else would I know if I am doing right or wrong?”

But all of those statements miss the mark completely.

Without it life is meaningless? So basically life is meaningless without a meaning.

Oh, how very thought-provoking! #Deep.

The whole truth is a lot uglier – people are scared of the unknown.

We want to understand all factors of our lives, that’s why growing up scares so many people.

We want straight answers, we want a sense of self, of defining who we are.

What we don’t understand is that we are already striving towards that goal.

In 1946 neurologist and psychiatrist Dr. Victor Frankl published his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* (it’s a great read on the subject, by the way)

In it, he described his own experiences in the concentration camps, and how he came to his own conclusion regarding happiness.

For you see, it is not through lust for power or a need for glory that Frankl survived the harsh conditions at the camps, it was through his own drive to live.

Why did he want to live so badly? he wanted his life to have a meaning.

Ultimately, we all spend our entire lives looking for meaning, through happy experiences, sad experiences and everything in between.

When you find something that makes you happy, that makes you feel good, that pushes you forward, you have found your meaning.

After all, if the meaning of your life can’t make you happy, then what good is your attempt to find it?

According to Frankl, every moment of our free time is dedicated to that goal, to lead to that end.

This philosophy is called logotherapy, and it’s the downfall of all overthinkers and most people who apply such philosophies to their daily lives.

Thinking about these things serves no purpose

Frankl’s philosophy is ultimately flawed when looked upon in terms of specifics.

After all, if our freedom is meant to be a tool for finding meaning, why do so many people waste their time doing so little to accomplish it?

The truth is that there is no perfect philosophy, a state of mind or an idea.

Logotherapy is generally correct – your search for meaning, happiness, and fulfillment is the driving force in your life.

Those, however, all build up as a sum of experiences rather than thoughts.

In theory, if you avoid bad experiences, and strive for good ones, the state in which only good experiences remain is the ideal that you strive for.

In other words, by eliminating all negative factors in your life you will end up with the optimal version of it.

Just try and be happy, and you will literally do as well as you ever could.

Sure, this philosophy is full of holes, but given the fact that your thoughts are just the sum of your experiences (alongside some genetic biases), thinking about things will get you nowhere due to how your thoughts are a reflection of your mental state.

Depressed people are natural-born overthinkers, and that’s the whole problem.

Rather than doing, they much rather wonder about why everything sucks and what they should do next.

They focus on what to do next rather than actually getting up and doing it.

No wonder intelligent people are more likely to be mentally ill – they live inside their own heads the entire time!

Just go

The truth is that you will never be able to come up with a goal and attach any potential course of action to it by yourself.

And even if you do, said goal will lose its meaning very quickly.

Humans are the sum of their experiences, both good and bad, so the only way to find your “calling” would be to take one action after the other.

Eventually, you will end up staying away from certain things and strive to get more from others.

This world view might mix and change over the years, but life is a flexible thing, and you will be changing just as much.

The point is this – You won’t find any meaning to your life simply by thinking about it, you should take action and go searching for it instead.

This way you will figure out everything unfavorable and end up living in the best possible scenario.

Unless, you know, something really bad happens during that time.

Like I said before, no philosophy in the world is perfect.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Sources

Source C: Wexler, Ellen. "Can Critical Thinking Be Too Critical?" *Education Week - Teacher Beat*, 3 June 2014, blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2014/05/can_critical_thinking_be_too_critical.html.

According to Wesleyan University President Michael Roth, the first thing inquisitive students do when they read a new text is point out exactly what's wrong with it.

The reason for this, Roth argues in a *New York Times* commentary, is that in a classroom setting, intelligence is becoming equated with debunking, unmasking, and exposing. If you're a good student, you can argue why the authors you read are wrong—but that isn't necessarily the best way to learn.

Roth says that when students feel the need to find flaws in every text they study, they lose the ability to *use* those texts to create meaning and find inspiration. Students are rewarded for their cynicism in classrooms, but that cynicism will harm their ability to engage with compelling ideas throughout their lives.

"As debunkers," Roth writes, "they contribute to a cultural climate that has little tolerance for finding or making meaning—a culture whose intellectuals and cultural commentators get 'liked' by showing that somebody else just can't be believed."

Throughout the piece, Roth labels this focus on poking holes in arguments as "critical thinking"—a term that is being increasingly emphasized in K-12 education. If teachers place too much emphasis on critical thinking, Roth argues, students will become immune to texts that might otherwise challenge their beliefs about the world:

Hard-nosed critical thinking is a useful tool, but it also may become a defense against the risky insight that absorption can offer. As students and as teachers we sometimes crave that protection; without it we risk changing who we are. We risk seeing a different way of living not as something alien, but as a possibility we might be able to explore, and even embrace.

About a week after Roth's piece ran in *The New York Times*, Noah Berlatsky, a correspondent for *The Atlantic*, [published a response](#) critiquing Roth's position on criticism.

"So here I am doing that thing that Roth doesn't want me to do," Berlatsky writes. "I am not taking his writing as an opportunity for inspiration. Instead I am finding in it material to object to. Mea culpa."

According to Berlatsky, it's impossible to decide which texts are beyond critique. For instance, it makes little sense to examine political writings without examining their flaws, too: "Should we open ourselves and be absorbed and inspired by *Birth of a Nation*? By *Mein Kampf*?" he asks. What about the speeches of George W. Bush or Bill Clinton?

Berlatsky argues that there is no difference between ordinary thinking and what Roth defines as critical thinking. When you form an opinion about a piece of art, how can that opinion be unrelated to your critical evaluation of that art?

"If I love Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*," Berlatsky writes, "how is that love separable from my evaluation of his use of language, his subtlety of characterization, or his criticism of the protagonists' families?"

According to Roth, overly-critical students will devalue the arguments of the authors that they study. Berlatsky counters students study those authors for a reason—their arguments are the best of the best. They can withstand student criticism.

"The truth is, Emerson doesn't need help," Berlatsky writes. "James Baldwin doesn't need protection from students. Away with this trembling art. Give me art that gets stronger when you fight it, not weaker. Give me the art that's left after the hammer comes down."

Supporting Question 3

Featured Sources

Source D: Rana, Zat. "The Philosopher's Problem: When and Why Thinking Can Be Harmful." *Medium*, Augmenting Humanity, 15 Feb. 2018, medium.com/personal-growth/the-philosophers-problem-when-and-why-thinking-can-be-harmful-6ce260c51e78.

Cogito ergo sum. It's arguably the most famous phrase in Western philosophy.

It can be traced back to the French philosopher Rene Descartes, considered by many to be one of the most influential modern thinkers in Western history.

The phrase roughly translates to "*I think, therefore I am*," and the story behind it begins with a simple question that Descartes asked himself — is there anything in the world that I can be completely certain of?

How do we reconcile the doubt we feel about our understanding of reality with the fact that there must be something, anything, that is foundational?

He thought, and thought, and thought, and ultimately, he settled on his famous statement. To him, this fact had to contain some aspect of a truth.

He knew that he couldn't completely trust his own observations through his senses, and he was also aware of how easy it was for his mind to confuse him, but the fact that he was able to ask this question in the first place was proof that he, on some level, must exist as a thinking being.

Regardless of the fact that all of his thoughts may be wrong, doubtful, and uncertain, the mere ability to think proved something.

Well, it was definitely provocative. For the next three centuries many other philosophers came and went with their own opinion on the matter. Some building off of Descartes reasoning and others refuting it.

In the end, however, it offered nothing more than a semantic game.

The Problem with Thinking

As far as we know, humans are the only animal that can think about thinking. That can imagine what is and what is not and question it with awareness.

For philosophers, like Descartes, this poses an interesting challenge. It gives them something to work at. It creates branches of thought like metaphysics (the nature of reality) and epistemology (the nature of knowledge).

While the study of metaphysics and epistemology have indeed contributed something to our prosperity — in some small ways — their study is less about adding anything useful to our day to day lives and more about creating depth and dimension to our thinking about what is real and what isn't.

And given this fact, they can make the thinker of these subjects and thoughts run around in circles questioning and re-questioning themselves. Eventually, they start talking about things that most people can't even relate to.

While very few of us spend our time diving into questions about the nature of reality and knowledge, we also fall into these same loops of thought in our day to day life, and we do so without realizing and without control.

The fact that we can think deeply almost instinctively creates the conditions in our brains that encourages us to do so, regardless of whether it adds value.

We are programmed to think deeply even when there is no benefit to thinking deeply. In fact, quite often, rather than providing a clearer foundation for our thoughts, the added depth simply detaches us from reality.

We start thinking about things that have little relevance to what it is that we need to figure out and make sense of, but at the same time, we confuse this added depth for clarity and organization.

Oftentimes, thinking deeply is the antithesis of thinking clearly.

Separating Your Mental Worlds

I like to separate reality into two different worlds that interact with my mind at any given time. The real, tangible world and the invisible world.

These are very rough separations, and in many ways, they do overlap with each other, but this distinction helps me categorize them so that I can better make sense of my interactions with reality.

The real, tangible world is what I visibly see and what my senses interact with. The invisible world is what adds depth and context to my vision of the tangible world. The latter is where metaphysics and epistemology reside.

The purpose of interacting with the real, tangible world is to help us effectively navigate our surroundings so we can live sustainably. The purpose of the invisible world is to play a secondary role in supporting the former.

The trap that most of us fall into is one in which we impose too much of the invisible world onto the real, tangible world. The result of this is that we add needless context and depth that detracts from the clarity provided by the senses we use to paint the part of reality in which we commonly live.

To exist happily, effectively, and with minimal confusion, what we need is the ability to think clearly in the real, tangible world. And the invisible world is only as useful as its ability to use its depth to add to that clarity.

If all the invisible world does is make us more confused about how to live in the real, tangible world, then it's likely too involved.

At the end of the day, your overarching purpose is to make it through life in a way that has been meaningful, pleasant, and engaging. If you can't think clearly, then making the right decisions becomes that much harder.

The Takeaway

The power of depth has its time and place. And philosophers, like Descartes, who have engaged this depth have given us some striking insights.

That said, if this ability to think deeply isn't controlled and managed, it spills out beyond the domain in which it finds its strength. We have to be very careful about the degree to which we engage it.

The thing that actually makes the world work is clarity, and this clarity can only be found if we adequately train it to come through.

In the words of the legendary inventor Nikola Tesla,

"One must be sane to think clearly, but one can think deeply and be quite insane."

Not every tangent we think about is worth exploring. Not every idea that pops up is worth considering. Not every nuance needs to be given its time.

Sometimes, all life demands of us is the ability to see the parts of reality we need to engage with, clearly and simply. It means that rather than adding more to our vision and observation via thought, we have to be disciplined about removing what isn't useful and relevant.

This takes practice and intention. It requires you to think about thinking and slowly develop the awareness to watch your mental processing occur.

It's not easy, but if honed, this kind of clarity changes everything.

Summative Performance Task	
Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Should philosophy be a mandatory part of the education system? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical and contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.
	EXTENSION Have a class debate on whether or not philosophy should be a mandatory part of the education system.

Summative Performance Task

At the end of this inquiry, participants will be able to answer the question, "Should philosophy be a mandatory part of the education system?" They will use two to three pieces of evidence from the articles in order to support their argument along with finding information to formulate a counterargument. Once this part is completed, participants will use the evidence they collected and transfer it into some form of media. It can be a video, essay, drawing, and so forth as long as the proof is articulated clearly and appropriately.

For the extension of the summative performance task, participants will take part in a class discussion using evidence to back up their stance. The instructor has the option of choosing who will argue for which side or he or she may allow participants to pick the side they prefer. Participants are encouraged to use the argument they previously constructed to help them convey their thoughts during the discussion. The type of discussion implemented is decided by the instructor. He or she can find a list of class discussion strategies at this website: <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/speaking-listening-techniques/>

Taking Informed Action

Taking Informed Action

UNDERSTAND Have participants who feel philosophy should be a mandatory part of the education system create a lesson plan based on philosophy while those who do not believe in the teaching of philosophy do research on their own to find reasons other than the ones provided in the sources.

ASSESS Have those who created a lesson plan teach a class of students using philosophy based learning while those who did their own research compose a slideshow and present it to the class.

ACT Have all participants write an email to their school board association addressing their point of view on philosophy being a mandatory part of the education system. Those who support philosophy would use the classes they taught to answer the compelling question in the affirmative while those who were against philosophy being implemented would use the slideshow they created to compose their email.

Taking Informed Action

For this portion of the inquiry, participants will impact their community or even state in this scenario by taking informed action. This process contains three steps. They first need to show their understanding of the material through independent research and composition. Next, they need assess their work through either presentation or the teaching of a class. After this complete, participants are asked to act by writing an email to their school boards association conveying their stance on philosophy being a mandatory part of the education system.

To understand the situation, participants will do one of two things. If they are for philosophy being a mandatory part of the education system then they will create their own philosophy based lesson plan. They may have to do some independent research in order to gain inspiration from others. If the participants in this scenario are teachers then they will be responsible for teaching a specific subject to their class. For example, if the participant is a science teacher then he or she will have to find a philosophy based lesson that compliments what he or she teaches. If the participants are against philosophy being integrated into schools then they will do research on their own in order to find reasons to support their claim other than the ones provided in the sources. It is suggested that they find evidence specific to the

state and county they live in such as how finances would affect the implementation of philosophy into the education system.

Below are several resources which may be found useful for creating a lesson plan:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UBisctJtTpf4AJvTsXCZYg4L6w6Va3hj-4kSwInMJ0/edit?usp=sharing>

<https://www.plato-philosophy.org/teachertoolkit/>

To assess the situation, those who are for philosophy in the school system will teach a class of students using the lesson plan they created. The participants who are teachers will teach their lesson to their normal class of students. It is preferred that the material used for the lesson matches the subject the teacher instructs. If those completing this inquiry are high school students, then it is acceptable for them to perhaps teach their classmates or another class if allowed. They can choose the subject they would like the philosophy to revolve around or they can simply teach a class solely on philosophy. The participants who are against philosophy being taught in schools will use the research they collected to create a slideshow to present to the inquiry class.

Lastly, to act on the situation, each participant will write an email to their school boards administration regarding their stance on the compelling question. If they are for philosophy being a mandatory part of the education system then they will use the lesson plan they created to support their argument. They may explain how the students responded to the lesson whether that be in a positive or negative way. Participants should make a counterargument to better defend their claim. If they are against philosophy being a mandatory part of the education system then in their email they will include the research they used for their slideshow as evidence.