

A Survey of Philosophical Thought in Children

In a number of recent discussions of non-standard, Philosophy programs various ages have been identified as the focus for spontaneous or exceptional interest in philosophising. Such claims, supporting a particular population as naturally suited to philosophical inquiry, are based, as often as not, on anecdotes that exhibit telling instances of philosophical activity. Needless to say, such evidence is suggestive at best. Philosophy as a deeply motivated activity occurring spontaneously and outside of a formal classroom may occur in many contexts and at various ages. If professional educators eager to support philosophical programs on the basis of the naturalness of the philosophical enterprise are to warrant their interest on the basis of claims to age-appropriateness, some reasonable attempt at gathering empirical data is required. We offer the questionnaire on the following pages as a probe to be used by interested educators and others.

Using the questionnaire:

The questionnaire should be given to children that have not been exposed to philosophical programs such as Philosophy for Children. A perfect time to give the questionnaire would be at the beginning of a year prior to the implementation of such programs. We have especially couched the questions so that they resemble untutored, if not naive, statements of philosophical issues. Try to use the questions as stated. With very young children you may read the questions aloud and help them to fill in the responses. But do not try to explain the question to them or to lead them into a discussion until after the questionnaire has been completed. You may substitute simpler expressions for words that they do not understand, but try to stay within the boundaries of the question as stated.

The demographic information asked for is crucial. We do not require any personal identification beyond the demographics called for.

Feel free to make as many copies of the questionnaire as are called for.

Send responses to: Mark Weinstein
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WHAT DO YOU WONDER ABOUT?

First tell me something about yourself.

How old are you? _____?

Are you a girl _____? or a boy _____?

Is your favorite subject reading or language arts _____?
math _____? social studies _____? science _____? music
or art _____?

Do you live in the southwest _____? southeast _____?
midwest _____? northwest _____? elsewhere _____?

We want to find out what you wonder about. And we have made up some questions that we would like you to answer. There are no wrong answers, because you are just telling

us your feelings. We hope that by finding out the things you wonder about, we can make school more interesting for you and other children.

Do you wonder about:

1. What do you find when you get to the end of the universe?

Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____

Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____

If you do or did not wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?

If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with?
friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____?
other grownups _____?

2. If your guess is right, does that mean you know the answer?

Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____

Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____

If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?

If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with?
friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____?
other grownups _____?

3. Can you know something if you never saw it, or heard about it in any way?

Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____

Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____

If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?

If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with?
friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____?
other grownups _____?

4. Could something be wrong even if everyone did it?

Yes I wonder about it _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____

Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____

If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?

If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with?
friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____?
other grownups _____?

5. If you changed into your best friend, who would your best friend really be?

Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____

Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____

If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?

If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with?
friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____?
other grownups _____?

6. Can something happen for absolutely no reason?

Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____

Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____

- If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
- If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
7. Is a story good because you like it, or do you like it because it's good?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
8. Could the whole world be a dream you are now having?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
9. Would it be fair to hurt a good person really badly, if it would save one hundred other good people from something as bad or worse?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
10. Can something you say be true and false at the same time?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
11. Are pictures pretty in the same way that sunsets are?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
12. Would having fun all the time be the best way to live?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
- Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
13. If someone knows for sure what you are going to do, are you free not to do it anyway?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
14. If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?
15. Can you ever really know what someone else is feeling?
Yes I wonder about it. _____ No I don't wonder about it. _____
Yes I did but only when I was younger. _____
If you do or did wonder about it, did you talk about it? Yes _____? No _____?
If you talked about it, who did you talk about it with? friends _____? parents _____? teachers _____? other grownups _____?

Thank you.

Mark Weinstein and Dale Cannon