

19. Thinking skills B

Philosophy for Children (P4C)

Use *Introducing the activity* and then follow through with the different steps, finishing with *Drawing things together*.

Teacher's notes

- Thinking skills activities can be used on a range of stories, biblical texts, practices and beliefs.
- Thinking skills activities encourage the pupils to ask their own questions. See *REthinking 1 Encouraging thinking in RE* and *REthinking 3 Using stories and poetry to stimulate thinking in RE*. Available from www.stapleford-centre.org.

Introducing the activity

Explain that pupils are going to do some philosophy. Start by playing a warm-up game, for example, 'Stand Up'. In a one minute period, everyone has to stand up, but no two people can stand up at the same time or the game is over and has to start again.

Activity 1: Setting ground rules

Ask the pupils what they need to have a good discussion. Record and display the rules agreed by the class. They might include: Don't talk when someone else is talking, look at the person talking and listen until they finish, don't laugh at other people's ideas . . .

Activity 2: Introducing the stimulus

Schools are full of books, objects, images and music that will stimulate rich enquiries. Anything that raises questions with you, is bound to raise questions for your pupils. You might want to use a story – a parable from the Bible, or a picture book such as *The Whisperer* by Nick Butterworth (theme prejudice and discrimination). Read the story to the class, once seated in a circle or give them time to concentrate on the object in the middle of the circle.

Activity 3: Thinking time

Encourage the pupils to take a minute of silent thinking time before volunteering questions in response to the stimulus. The pupils can put their hands up to volunteer questions which the teacher writes on the whiteboard. Another way to generate questions is to ask pairs to share their ideas, and agree on a question they feel will lead to an

interesting enquiry. The next step is to ask whether any questions link together. This encourages pupils to practise the conceptual skills of connecting ideas. Finally, the teacher asks the pupils to choose a question, usually by majority vote. Generally the teacher should resist steering the group towards a particular question, trusting that, over time, the pupils will learn to pick out the less literal, more open questions that make for stimulating enquiries. Occasionally, however, the facilitator may influence the choice.

Activity 4: Facilitating the enquiry

A good way to begin is to invite the pupil who asked the question to say a little bit more on what they were thinking about. As others begin to contribute, the teacher keeps track of the developing strands of enquiry, asking speakers to clarify points that seem unclear and encouraging them to link their contributions with what others have said. Asking if they agree or disagree with previous speakers, and probing for examples or reasons, are good ways of helping pupils sharpen their capacity to think critically and build on each other's thoughts.

Deciding when and how much to intervene is the real skill of the teacher. Groups just starting P4C may need more intervention to sustain an enquiry, or to encourage contributions from less confident pupils. If an enquiry seems to be going round in circles, it is perfectly valid to bring the pupils back to their original question, or to point out a deeper issue arising from the discussion.

Some useful things to say to facilitate the enquiry:

How do you respond to that?

Do you agree or disagree with what you have just heard?

Can I ask you to clarify what you mean?

What I think you are saying is . . . Is that right?

Can you give an example to support your argument?

Can you justify what you have just said with a reason or an example?

Drawing things together

Finishing with a final round allows everybody in the circle a chance for a last word, either adding to what has been said about the question or commenting on how the session went. You may decide to pass an object round the circle. Often pupils who have made little or no contribution to the session, take this opportunity to contribute.