

Invitation to philosophy

Provide and organise material that is philosophically inviting. In other words, it is likely to arouse children's curiosity, create puzzlement and arouse a sense of mystery. Many picture books do all these things.

Key concepts

Explore key concepts through small-group talk. You could combine this with your hidden-questions activities. For example, in relation to *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, you might talk about questions like:

- What makes people angry?
- Was Max being naughty?
- Did his mum send him to his room to punish him? Was that fair?
- Was Max dreaming? When do you dream?

Imaginative and creative play

Use recommended picture books as starting points for developing group/class themes. Devise imaginative and creative play activities drawing on the pictures, characters and dialogue in a book. For example, and again using *Where the Wild Things Are*:

- A role play area becomes Max's bedroom or his boat or the island Max visited.
- Figures of the characters (which can be purchased) are offered for table top play.
- Leave multiple copies of books around the classroom for children to look at and talk about.
- Create monster masks (with some discussion about the criteria for judging something or someone to be 'a monster').
- Create monster portraits. Then compare them, identifying common characteristics such as sharp teeth, horns and scaly skin.
- Experiment with applying monster criteria. 'Do all monsters have sharp teeth?' 'If I see someone with sharp teeth, must they be a monster?'
- Play 'spot the monster'. Present collections of toys and other figures. Use hoops to create a Venn diagram or use a rope to make a concept line on the floor with each end representing the limits of a continuum of 'monster' – 'not monster'. Children in small groups take turns to decide where any toy/figure should be placed by discussing their opinions before making a choice.
- Explore other picture books that depict monsters such as *Not Now Bernard*, *Last Noo Noo*, *One for All*, *Two Monsters*. Talk about similarities and differences. Using pictures of monsters from the picture books as well as other pictures brought in by children, create a wall chart and make picture cards of monster characteristics such as claws, horns and so on. Ask children to decide which monsters have which characteristics.

Making use of opposites

The concepts of monster, hero and villain make exceptionally good starting points for exploratory talk and play.

When talking about characters or actions in stories, introduce 'opposites talk'. Collect opposites from stories or children's favourite TV programmes. Opposite could include: big/small; tall/short; happy/sad; good/bad; brave/cowardly; love/hate; scary/safe; possible/impossible; real/pretend; ugly/beautiful; clever/stupid; nice/horrible; special/ordinary; wild/tame.

Concept lines

Explore any of the opposites listed previously through 'concept lines'. Children hold a picture of a character from a story and position themselves on the rope (the 'line') representing a continuum linking the opposites at either end. It's good to mix up characters from different stories to add to the challenge of this activity. In this way children have to think about, and compare, what has taken place in the stories. You could take groups of stories together, for example, Max Velthuijs's books with *Frog*, *Rat* and *Duck*.

Opposites sorting activity

'Opposites' also makes a good sorting activity. For example, take a group of animals and ask children to sort them into wild/tame or pet/not pet. Use animals such as crocodile, rat, cat, dog, snake, lion, elephant and ant. Devise other sorting activities with any of the opposites listed above.

Ask children what they think are the most common opposites occurring in everyday life – in school and at home. Ask them which opposites appear most in stories and TV programmes they are familiar with.

Quick-thinking activities

Always, sometimes, never

There are lots of variations of this quick-thinking activity to develop the use of these essential logical concepts. In this version, ask children to perform an action according to what they think about statements such as those below.

(Always = stand up; sometimes = sit on the chair; never = sit on the floor)

- Tomatoes are red
- Carrots are vegetables
- Sweets are good for you
- Teachers are clever
- The sky is blue
- If someone's eyes are closed they are asleep
- Dogs have tails
- Animals are dangerous
- Heroes are brave

You should (always, sometimes, never)

- Brush your teeth in the morning
- Eat your lunch
- Play outside
- Be quiet
- Be noisy

When children have indicated their opinions, you can suggest they 'do an example test' (see above). So if the majority of children think that animals are always dangerous, you can challenge them to think about examples of animals that are not dangerous. Always explore the connections between all, some and none and always, sometimes and never. So, if carrots are always vegetables, does that mean that all carrots are vegetables?

Make Connections

This is a small-group activity. Bring in various collections of objects, pictures or books. The idea is to make connections between items in any one of the collections. You model the making of connections first and then invite children to join in. Use phrases like: 'Who can make a connection between ...?' and 'How many connections can we make between ...?' Introduce the idea of different kinds of connections such as connections you can see and connections you can't see.

Recognising differences

Use the same procedure as you did in making connections but this time focus on what is different between items in any of the collections.

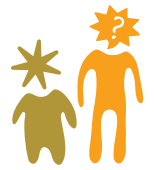


Playful and puzzling

General strategies for early years

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Nursery &
Reception



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Strategies

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Stimulus for enquiry

Found or made by teachers to suit the activities described below

Thinking emphasis

General critical and creative thinking

Skill focus

Developing children's language;
enhancing conceptual capacities

Conceptual terms

In the early years, children's conceptual capacities can be extended and developed when you model conceptual language by re-phrasing and repeating what children say using the conceptual terms you wish them to use. Give them positive feedback when they use the terms in an appropriate way.

Vocabulary in response to a stimulus

- Thinking, think, thought
- Wondering, wondered, wonder why
- Puzzling, puzzled
- Surprising, surprised
- Interesting, interested

Vocabulary for dialogue

- I agree/disagree
- I believe/don't believe
- I know/don't know
- Same/different/similar
- Idea
- True/not true
- Right/wrong
- Reason
- Example
- Question words such as what, why, how, does, who, if and when
- Connection
- Meaning, means
- Understand/don't understand
- Imagine

Playful and puzzling

Here are some ideas for setting up situations in a nursery classroom. Introduce the vocabulary listed previously and so develop 'pre-philosophical' skills.

Set up, in the classroom or outdoors, stimuli that are 'playful and puzzling'. They could be placed in a specially-identified thinking space, in the home corner, sand area, water area, construction area, around a table, in a box on the carpet or in a tent. The key is that children are able to 'play' with each stimulus as they talk.

Playful and puzzling stimuli

Here are some examples of the sorts of things or collections of things you could put together for your 'playful and puzzling' sessions.

- A set of objects: for example an actual apple, a plastic or wooden apple, a photo or drawing of an apple.
- A set of animals with one 'red-herring' animal: for example farm animals with a penguin. Animals can be arranged in puzzling ways. For example, put the animals in a circle with the penguin in the middle.
- Puzzling drawings and paintings: for example one or a set of drawings by M.C. Escher. The drawings could be in a special box or wallet or on a wall of the home corner so the experience of exploring them seems more exciting.
- Puzzling photographs: there are many possibilities to choose from.
- Different-sized mirrors in a box.
- A puppet with a bandage on its arm.

Types of enquiry

There are two complementary approaches to 'playful and puzzling': child-initiated enquiry and teacher-initiated enquiry.

Child-initiated enquiry

Children access a 'playful and puzzling' stimulus during independent learning. Hold back at first and observe a pair of children or a small group and listen to any dialogue. Then join in. Listen for cues in the children's dialogue where you can intervene and sustain it using open-ended questions and by modelling the sort of vocabulary listed previously. You could ask, for example, what interests them, what reasons they have for their interest, whether they find any similarities and differences about any aspects of the stimulus and so on.

Teacher-initiated enquiry

Form a small group of 4–6 children and present the stimulus, allowing the children to talk freely as they handle it. Then follow the same procedures as in child-initiated inquiry.

If significant dialogue emerges from either of these approaches, provide an opportunity to review the stimulus later in a circle with a small group or the whole class. Ask children who explored the stimulus to recount what they found puzzling, surprising and interesting and what they talked about. Again, you should model and highlight any vocabulary that you want to promote. Begin to highlight and record philosophical questions the children ask.

Philosophy for reception children

For younger reception children who have done no philosophy before, the above approach is still very relevant. Older reception children, or those who have pre-philosophy skills, can be moved on to a more structured philosophy session with focus on developing specific skills.

Skill-focussed activities

Speaking in front of others

Pass around a puppet/object/picture. Ask for 'one word' from each child in response to the stimulus: for example to welcome the puppet, to describe the object, to say what they like about the photo and so on.

Sentence starter: Ask children to respond to the stimulus with the sentence starters such as those listed below. Later encourage children to add 'because' to each and give a reason.

- I was puzzled by (or about) ...
- I was interested in ...
- I was surprised by (or at) ...

Be content to think differently to others

Language emphasis: 'like', 'dislike', 'reason'. Have two objects/photos in the middle of the circle. Ask children which one they like and why? Ask them if they can think of any other reasons why other children might prefer a different one.

Making connections

Language emphasis: 'connection', 'same', 'different', 'similar'. Have a set of objects or photos. Ask children to put any of them together and say what the connection is.

Give opinions and reasons

Language emphasis: 'agree', 'disagree'. Tell children a short story that presents a dilemma with two possible answers. Ask them which of the answers they prefer and why. Alternatively, bring out two puppets you say have different views about something. Get children to decide which one they agree or disagree with.

Ask questions in response to a stimulus

Language emphasis: question starters such as 'when', 'what', 'why', 'how', 'what if'.

Question starter cards. Have a set of cards with symbols and question-starter words. In response to a stimulus, ask children to generate questions using a question starter. Introduce question starters one at a time.

Be aware that children think differently

Language emphasis: 'I think', 'thoughts', 'similar', 'same', 'different'. Bring out a puppet or 'persona doll'. Ask the children to imagine what the puppet is thinking about? Share ideas and look for similarities and differences. Invite children to ask the puppet questions.