



Children As Philosophers

Training Package

www.childrenasphilosophers.com



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 this package

This training package offers educators a set of activities to train staff on how to deliver each of the key thematic areas from within the CAPs project.

Each section represents an adapted version of the original staff training event content, specifically designed for ease of delivery and replication.

The training contents can be accessed either in the order presented within this edition, the same order as the original staff training events, or as a reference guide to be accessed and utilised at any point.

www.childrenasphilosophers.com



Philosophy workshop

The first part of the first joint staff training event focused on developing a common understanding of key principles of philosophy.

This training will focus on key theories and on the application of these through practical activities and exercises.

This module will set the ground for developing new thinking and pedagogical methods.

The training is envisaged over a period of 5 days and aims to develop skills and knowledge in the specified area 1 of the project Principles of Philosophy and Creative thinking.

As with all joint staff training, activities are intended to be delivered within a collaborative, supportive and shared approach.

Within the project delivery, specific activities took place to develop staff specific knowledge and skills.

These included exploring the following:

- key principles of philosophy
- key principles of creative thinking

Topic 1

Engaging in a thought experiment

A mental simulation that can lead to unknown places of discovery.

When exercising a mental simulation, adults and children are indeed philosophising: they imagine things differently, discover unexpected relations, make an hypothesis and look at themselves from the outside.

Activity 1

Read the participants a quote from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On certainty* (Oxford, 1969):

'The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief'.

Ask the participants to think about the quote and introduce to them this question:

- What kind of adult is the one who philosophises with children?

Divide the participants into small groups and ask them to discuss the possible answers to this question.

Activity 2

Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

- What is a philosophical question?
- Is there a typical form for philosophical problems?
- What kind of input and questions can help engaging a philosophical discussion with children?

Give two sticky-notes of different colours to each group and ask them to write down:

Examples of philosophical questions

Input they would use to stimulate a philosophical discussion with children.

Materials

- Sticky notes (at least 2 different colours)
- Pens

Activity 3

Ask participants to sit in circle and show them a drawing of a small island in the middle of the sea.

Invite participants to imagine that an unknown and uninhabited island has just been discovered in the ocean and to suppose they have the chance to move there and make it a good place to live in, to the very best of the human powers.

Ask the group to express opinions and thoughts openly, starting from the following set of questions:

- Which might be the primary needs on the island?
- Which things we are used to would be unnecessary?
- How should we settle in – close or far from one another?
- Which laws should we set (and do we need them)?
- What happens to those who break the laws?
- What should be the form of government?
- Should we have money?
- Will adults be admitted on the island?
- What should we do when someone we don't know arrive on the island?

Materials

- A map/illustration of a small island in the middle of the sea
- Optional: tools/objects to build a customised model of the island

Key elements of the “Utopia Island” thought experiment

Imagining a Utopia means addressing one of the most complicated thought experiments in the history of Philosophy, from Plato's «Republic», to Thomas More's «Utopia», and beyond.

It doesn't mean collecting many different answers to questions and putting them in a line, but creating a scenario of simulation, in which everyone can express his opinion and eventually change it underway.

Notes for trainers

The Utopia experiment is, indeed, also a good starting point for addressing crucial questions:

- what makes a human society go well?
- what makes people happy?
- which are the key factors that help people to have a good life?
- what are friends for?

The Utopia thought experiment might then be linked to subjects like:

- Maths and Geometry
- History
- Literature
- Geography
- Science and Technology
- Civic education

Creative thinking workshop

As part of the first Staff Training event and to develop a common understanding of creative thinking principles and methodologies, a readily applicable set of techniques and exercises have been selected and presented for use.

While some of the latter activities can be applied irrespective of presentation order, it is important that the early activities around the generation of alternatives and quotas are understood from the outset. This is because the principles of both of these topics are fundamental to most of the later activities.

The training can be used as part of a self-learning method, though it is recommended that a facilitator (most likely a teacher) presents the activities in a group participation scenario. It is recommended that each facilitator familiarise themselves with all of the activities before delivering them to the group.

The key topics covered in this module are:

- The generation of alternatives
- Quotas
- Challenging assumptions
- What if?
- Brainstorming
- Random input

While the activities set out a route to explore the various principles and methods of creative thinking, facilitators are strongly encouraged to adapt activities to be relevant for their specific contexts.

Once all activities have been followed in a linear fashion, facilitators are also encouraged to combine various methods to create new creative thinking routines.

Topic 1

The generation of alternatives

Creative thinking relies on somehow arriving at solutions to problems (or developmental opportunities) that other people wouldn't or didn't think of.

While this may seem somewhat of an oversimplification, we should also note that having 'creative ideas' is one part of the process but having creating ideas that effectively resolve or satisfy a stated problem or development opportunity, is our ultimate goal. Therefore, our first step must be establishing a mechanism or method for generating creative ideas.

While many people claim to be creative ('creative' as an adjective, rather than 'create' as a verb) in their work or hobbies, when pressed on a specific method it is surprising how many people cannot provide an adequate response to this question.

The most basic step to achieving truly creative ideas and outcomes is to go beyond the typical human response to a problem, which is to arrive at a 'workable' solution and then implement it. In many cases this is indeed the 'right' thing to do, but it is likely to result in ideas that are predictable, known or offered by many others in the same situation ... not particularly creative.

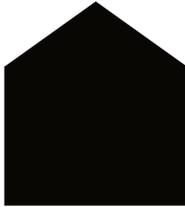
To immediately move beyond this approach of the first workable solution, we can simply commit to generating a range of alternative responses instead. From this range of ideas, we are far more likely to arrive at something that is actually creative.

Activity 1

Ask the participants to work individually for this exercise.

Present a simple shape picture in silhouette form. It is important that the shape is not so specific that only one interpretation can be arrived at.

The following shape can be used as a starting point, though once you are familiar with the activity you are advised to gather a small selection of shapes to use.



Ask the participants to each write down an interpretation of the image, then elicit answers from the group, exploring both different and repeated answers.

The most common interpretation of this image is that of a house, and it is likely that more than one person will offer this suggestion. At this point it is useful to point out that when one response is required or provided, it will often be predictable and/or the same as other contributors.

Repeat the same exercise but this time ask each participant to offer a further five interpretations of the same image. Encourage them to be as creative as possible in interpreting the image, using any method they can think of to describe the shape.

Insist that all participants achieve the target of five new responses.

Once this has been achieved repeat the feedback process, keeping notes of the different responses.

While it is still likely that there will be some repetition, the exercise should demonstrate that with the simple condition of generating multiple alternatives to a simple question, a far more interesting and potentially creative array of answers will emerge.

Typical responses to this activity are likely to be, in general order of predictability:

- A house
- An arrow / sign
- A pencil
- A rocket
- An open envelope
- A 5-sided shape
- The front of an ocean liner (from a low angle)
- A rectangle with a triangle on top
- A wedge of cheese (from a high angle)
- A mirror image of a 4-sided shape
- A tunnel*
- A gothic mouse hole*

The only criterion for accepting or rejecting a response is if others can appreciate the logic of the suggestion, 'could it be possible?'

*Please note that the last two responses imagine the black area as a negative space rather than a positive one. This shift in perspective is important in creative thinking and any participant making it should be specifically congratulated.

Repeat the exercise with at least one other silhouette shape.

Materials

- A small pre-prepared selection of deliberately ambiguous silhouette style imagery.

Activity 2

Introduce an acronym to the participants, preferably one that is known or easy to understand.

For example **POTUS**
(President of the United States)

First ask the participants to arrive at an alternative meaning to the original. It doesn't have to be related to the original meaning. If they can immediately think of more than one alternative, allow them to do so.

- Putting On The Used Sweater

After this warm up acronym activity, ask the participants to generate a further five alternatives to the meaning of the acronym, only this time they should relate them to the original meaning. It's permissible for one or two words to be as the original, though the overall meaning should be different.

- Patriot Occupying This Unique Station
- Position Of Treating Us Sympathetically
- Person Offending The United States

The resulting interpretations can usually be judged on their humour and/or profoundness.

Take responses from the participants and share them with the wider group. Repeat the exercise once or twice more with a new acronym.

At the end of the exercise discuss the benefits of generating alternatives with the group. Ask them if they think that any ideas (in either exercise) were better after their first solution.

The typical response to this question is that the more challenging arriving at a solution became, the more chance that the result was either original and/or creative.

Materials

A small pre-prepared selection of known and/or relatable acronyms.

Examples:

- POS – Point of Sale
- WOMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction
- BOGOF – Buy One Get One Free
- DIY – Do It Yourself
- KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid
- MBA – Masters of Business Administration

Notes for trainers

In both activities it should be relatively clear that pursuing multiple options from the outset leads to a) a wider selection of possibilities and b) more interesting (potentially creative) solutions.

Encourage those that propose very different and/or unexpected ideas, being careful to resist judging and rejecting suggestions at this very early stage. The key to the activities is to generate alternatives, while quality and suitability can be addressed at later stages.



Topic 2

Quotas

Although this is a separate topic to the generation of alternatives, it should be delivered to participants at the same time, as ultimately the two principles are inextricably linked.

While the generations of alternatives method is a fundamental model of creative thinking, determining an appropriate number of responses to maximise the creative potential within a given time resource is essential.

This is achieved by implementing quotas.

Activity 1

Present the participants with an unusual photograph, one that perhaps has some humorous qualities. It is not important to know the context of the original image, though it may contain figures (real or fictional) known to the participants.

The challenge to the participants is to generate a funny caption to accompany the image.

In normal circumstances this activity would conclude after one caption has been generated, however in this version it is crucial that alternatives are generated.

The question though is 'how many alternatives should be generated?'

Ask the participants to set a number as a target for generated captions; this will serve as the quota for the exercise.

With the quota set, it is important that each participant manages to generate at least this specified number of captions. It is likely that the quality of the captions is variable, though this is not an issue.

When the participants have generated the full quota of captions, take feedback in a group setting.

Explore with the participants whether or not they generated 'better' ideas as they generated more ideas, and whether the introduction of the quota forced them to really stretch their minds to find solutions.

Ask the participants if they have any suggestions for approaching the setting quotas, something akin to a method.

As a general and workable rule, though one that is initially easier said than done, you can follow this guidance:

Think about ideas within a quota (set number) existing in within three types.

The first type could be described as 'predictable'. These are the ideas that many other people would have in the same situation. While these ideas may suffice, you may conclude that they are not necessarily original and/or creative.

The second type could be described as 'original' and/or 'interesting'. These type of ideas are ones that are unexpected but readily accepted as a new or original starting point; or at least a new path to a solution.

The third type could be described as 'crazy'. In this instance it may not be as clear to see how a solution may be developed from this type of path and the initial idea is definitely an unexpected and original one.

It can be surprising how often a crazy idea leads to a truly innovative solution, but unless we consider the crazy ideas we will never know.

In terms of a quota, a number that offers (approximately) a third of responses quickly and predictably, a third that requires more intense thinking, and a third that in order to hit the quota may force a little bit of desperation and 'craziness', will serve as a good guide.

Provide the participants with a second caption image and ask them to devise a quota based on the guidance stated above.

Materials

- A selection of humorous and/or ambiguous images

Notes for trainers

Setting an appropriate quota is notoriously difficult, as it will necessarily change depending on the stated problem and the type of thinking process being used.

However, it is so fundamental to developing creative ideas that it is worth persevering with.

If in doubt it is advisable to aim higher than what you think you require, as this will stretch the thinking and very unexpected responses will emerge.

Topic 3

Challenging assumptions

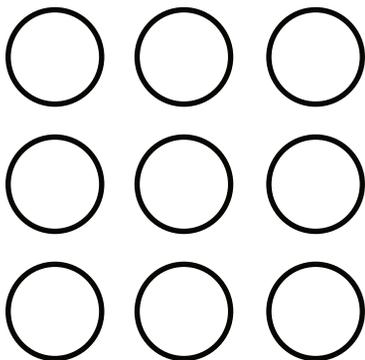
As humans living in ordered rules-based societies, it is very easy to not only be compliant with rules and expectations, but in some cases, to self-impose rules which have not been explicitly stated.

We do that by making assumptions about what we think is the 'right' response or action in a situation.

By challenging assumptions, our own and those offered by others, we can unlock some powerful tools in developing creative thinking.

Activity 1

Start the activity by providing the participants with a sheet of paper containing 9 circle outlines equally spaced in a grid formation.



Ask them to 'make drawings from the starting point of the 9 circles'. Do not be tempted to offer any more information than this, even if participants ask for it.

Monitor the activity until you are satisfied that all participants have established a pattern to their approach, such as drawing within all of the 9 circles, or making drawings that connect circles together etc.

Once you have established the different approaches you can stop the drawing activity, as completing the exercise is not the objective.

Ask the participants to exchange papers with their neighbour.

Apply the following comparison descriptors to ascertain how different people have approached the activity, assuming continuation of approach:

- 9 different drawings within the circles
- 9 themed or similar drawings within the circles
- 9 different drawings based on the circles with some elements extending beyond the circle edges
- 9 themed or similar drawings based on the circles with some elements extending beyond the circle edges
- Drawings that link or join multiple circles together (maybe all of the circles)
- Drawings that exist and connect behind the circles, as if looking through holes
- Drawings that do not enter the circles at all
- Drawings that ignore the circles and treat the paper as a blank sheet
- Torn or cut out paper
- Something else deemed to be more 'creative'

While there is no formal mark scheme for the activity, responses that conform to the earlier descriptors are typically more predictable. The descriptors do attempt to ascend in order of non-conformity.

While participants may choose to self-assess on this basis, what is more important is to establish why people took the approach that they did.

In a situation like this it is easy for participants to assume that 'rules' exist, even when they don't. This is typical of living in a rules-based society, where we come to expect rules in most things.

Essentially people will 'assume' there is an expected way to do something and so they will comply with their own assumption.

Creative thinking can and should actively challenge assumptions in order to expose new perspectives or pathways for development.

Materials

- 9 circle diagram

Activity 2

Present the following statement to your participants:

- ‘An experienced teacher is the best person to design the lesson’

Ask them to use this format as a reference point, and to then construct a sentence that relates to something that they believe, perhaps in their own professional life.

We might describe such a statement as a general ‘truism’.

Ordinarily we do not concern ourselves with validating these types of truisms as they appear in our lives, however, if we actively interrogate such statements and attempt to challenge any inherent assumptions, we can usefully employ them within our creative thinking methodology.

Ask the participants to consider the original statement in order to identify any assumptions that are being made, ones that perhaps weren’t on first reading. Ask the participants to work in small groups for this activity.

It is likely that at least the following assumptions will be identified. If the participants struggle to get started, you may offer one example from this list.

Assumptions being made:

- Experience is an indicator of quality
- Somebody without teaching experience would not be good at designing the lesson
- Lesson design is not a democratic process
- A person (human) needs to design the lesson
- A lesson needs to be designed at all
- A teacher should design the lesson

You may identify other assumptions within this sentence, however, this short exercise does demonstrate how common assumptions can be.

In order to utilise this process within a creative thinking context, we now need to process the information identified. This is done in two stages.

The first is to invert each statement. In the example of lesson design not being a democratic process, we can start by saying ‘what if lesson design was a democratic process?’.

The second stage is to explore, with the generation of alternatives and a quota, ideas for implementing a lesson design strategy that is democratic.

Ask each small group of participants to choose one of the identified assumptions and to process it following the two stages above. The result should be a series of ideas with the potential for further development.

As an additional activity, ask each group to choose one of the truisms that they wrote themselves and to process it in the same way.

Notes for trainers

This is another powerful tool for unlocking thinking, though it may not be grasped by all participants in the first instance. Problems can occur when inverting statements. Be prepared to assist groups in posing the most productive ‘What if?’ style question.

Topic 4

What if?

Although we have already utilised this simple but effective method as part of the ‘challenging assumptions’ topic, it is valuable enough to merit its own inclusion.

While it is a very simple concept to understand and apply, it is often overlooked in creative situations.

The key to its use and benefits, is simply including it as a formal part of a creative thinking session or routine.

It can be used as a way of provoking deeper thinking and justification in response to a comment or a practice that has been preserved by habit or traditions.

For example, someone saying 'but we've always done it this way'.

We can respond by asking 'what if we think about doing it any other way but that one?', as a starting point for generating ideas.

Or 'What if we were devising our method (or whatever) today, rather than 20 years ago? How would it be different?'

We could simply use it as a starting point for what is often termed 'blue sky thinking', meaning unfettered free-flowing thinking that may or may not have a final purpose. It is amazing however, how blue sky thinking often results in identifying a final solution, or at least a starting point for one.

We could start by saying 'What if the government withdrew our funding, how could we survive?'. While such an idea may sound extreme and/or unlikely, this type of question could prompt ideas for generating additional income or resources.

As in the 'challenging assumption' activity, 'what-iffing' can be used to create a type of inversion.

Famously, Henry Ford, while considering how to improve his car production, identified the problem of getting the right skilled workers to each partly produced car at the right time. So he asked the question 'what if we get the cars to the workers rather than try and get the workers to the cars?'. Reputedly this 'what if' question led to the development of the modern production line.

Activity 1

Ask the participants to conceive a 'what if' question relating to their own professional situation. This could be based on the question above, in which something adverse were to happen that would impact negatively on the organisation.

From this starting point of 'what if....?', work with the generation of alternatives and a quota to generate a series of possible solutions. Keep in mind that creative solutions are being sought so the quota should really stretch the thinking.

Below are some examples of questions relating to schools that could be used to inform planning in different areas.

What if we were to lose our sports coordinators, how could we ensure pupils get regular exercise?

What if we were creating a new administration system today, what might it look like?

What if we wanted to identify as a centre of excellence for technology, how would we start this process of change and what might our curriculum look like?

What if we got the pupils to design the lessons, how could this work and what benefits might we see?

Materials

- Pre-written 'What if?' questions that your participants can relate to

Notes for trainers

This is one of the more flexible creative thinking methods, as it can be used to consider broad and even abstracted problems, as well as those with a specific focus.

Sometimes, if a group is particularly wed to a specific idea or practice in their environment, a 'What if?' question can be used in a directly relatable, but different scenario. In this way ideas can be sought without suggesting a direct challenge to what the participants already do.

Topic 5

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a term that is often used by people engaged in creative thinking. However, it is often practised without a great deal of consideration of how the brainstorming activity is different from more conventional thinking.

Brainstorming is a method of generating ideas that benefits greatly from applying some basic rules.

This section and its activities are designed to present and demonstrate the various rules in order that brainstorming becomes more than someone or a small group sitting and thinking, in a conventional sense, imagining that this will be more productive simply by terming it 'brainstorming'.

The brainstorming process can be broken down into four of five steps, as follows:

1. Define the problem

While this may sound obvious, it is something that is not always carried out effectively. A problem can be set too large and/or vague, such as 'how do we solve the problem of climate change?'. This would generate many responses, perhaps some new and innovative ideas, but the ideas are likely to be disparate and beyond the influence of individuals in the group. This is another type of 'blue sky' thinking, which of course has its place in certain situations.

A problem such as 'how do we make our school lunch times more environmentally friendly?', is far more likely to offer achievable solutions that are closely related within the context of the group.

Generally speaking, the more specific you can make the problem (or opportunity) the more rewarding the brainstorming will be.

2. Set a quota

The amount of time spent on brainstorming is typically based on one of two factors. The first being how much time you have for this part of the meeting or session, or to keep going until the first useable idea emerges, and then stop.

We have already discussed how dangerous this second method can be, as it reduces the potential for truly creative ideas, while the first is a very artificial measure.

Therefore, we should return to our idea of a quota, applying the same guidance as before; predictable, interesting and a little crazy.

Ideas should come very quickly during brainstorming so a higher quota is normally required. Note that if this is the first time the group have brainstormed in this way, give it a few rounds before you insist on speed. However, be sure that as a facilitator you do insist on speed before too long.

3. Time limit

Although already stated a time limit is often an artificial limit for idea generation through brainstorming, preferring the setting of a quota, a time limit can be used to manage the process of multiple rounds of brainstorming.

To do this the same problem may be re-phrased three or four different ways, perhaps suggesting different priorities to elicit different ideas.

If you have five phrases dealing with the same problem you may set a time limit of 30 minutes for brainstorming. Each phrase is introduced, a quota is set and the brainstorming happens until the quota is met and subsequent evaluation takes place, then the next phrase is introduced.

If you have set 30 minutes for brainstorming you conclude at this time, whether or not all phrases have been processed. The pressure of time will add something to the process.

4. Generate and record ideas without judgment

This is a really important rule to follow. During the active idea generation stage someone should be nominated as a record keeper, noting down every idea that is proposed.

It is important that members of the group do not try to justify or edit answers as they emerge, just write them down and move on to the next idea...quickly.

What of course is permissible, and indeed highly likely, is that from one idea another person may respond with something similar or an extended concept, based on the 'trigger' response. The 'trigger' response is where one person's thinking is triggered into action based on an idea put forward by someone else. This is a very common yet highly valuable part of the process.

5. Evaluate 'bridging' ideas

Almost all creative thinking methods are designed to generate 'bridging' ideas in the first instance.

A bridging idea is an idea that points the way to a new pathway for development, rather than being a final solution in itself. Bridging ideas require nurturing through discussion and additional ideas for development, which should be a collective goal. Ask participants to only offer positive and constructive comments for each idea, even if they are ultimately dismissed. This additional thinking process will sharpen focus and may offer suggestions to support other ideas at any stage.

This is a really important concept for your participants to understand.

Once a quota has been met each group should evaluate their initial ideas on potential for development, being very careful not to exclude ideas that are not already known or tested, as this would completely undermine the goal of achieving creative solutions.

Activity 1

With the rules for brainstorming clearly understood by all participants, you can set the first activity.

Choose something that you believe your participants can relate to.

As an example and a useful starting point, you could start with ideas to resolve the problem of 'children getting separated from their parents / guardians in large crowds'.

Follow the formal steps set out above.

For this initial activity you should listen to groups in discussion and offer verbal guidance when necessary. Encourage participants to follow the rules, particularly regarding speed and moving on quickly to the next idea without discussion.

Once each group has met their quota, it is a good idea to take feedback just to see if there is similarity (predictability) across the groups, and also how different and original some ideas are.

Ask the groups to continue with the evaluation stage, with a view to identifying and expanding on their best idea, the one with the most potential as a solution. Encourage the group to justify this as a workable and a creative solution.

Continue the activity with another one or two rounds if this is simply a training exercise, or until you have met your goals within a developmental session with a real purpose.

Within the latter context the next few rounds will be determined by your actual problems or needs, while in a training scenario you will need to either provide problems to work on or ask the groups to nominate problems.

This can be a good opportunity within a 'training' mode, to get participants to begin to address genuine problems that they can identify within their professional lives.

Some suggested problems to use for training:

- Reduce the instance of pupils being driven to school
- Ensure the school maximises its recycling potential
- Address the lack of trained or skilled teachers to deliver philosophy for children
- Embed creative thinking within a school curriculum

Materials

- Pre-written problem examples that each participant group can relate to.

Notes for trainers

For brainstorming you will find that for the first few rounds you will need to be an active facilitator, ushering people along and enforcing the rules. Try to avoid becoming a contributor to ideas.

After a few rounds, groups should be able to self-manage the process and from this point your input should only be by request.

Topic 6

Random Input

Random input, as a method, actually supports various forms of creative thinking activities, and it represents a paradigm shift from other forms of creative thinking.

The methods considered above rely on information that the participants already possess. In this, they encounter a problem and attempt to generate ideas by constructing internal connections between the problem and what the person/people already knows.

While this can be effective, the fact that it relies on existing knowledge can possibly impair original thinking.

In contrast, random input method introduces new information that the participant needs to factor into their thinking process.

The human brain is adept at making connections between disparate concepts, and it is this innate human ability that the random inept method relies on.

Similar to brainstorming, there are certain steps that should be taken to ensure that the full potential of the method is realised.

The first stage is to introduce some form of random stimulation. This can be a word/concept (most common), a picture, a sound, a colour, an object, in fact, anything that you can attribute characteristics too.

The second stage is to explore your random stimulation element in terms of the characteristics, associations that it evokes in the participants. These associations can be very personal and distinct from others experiencing the same stimulation.

This is similar to a word association game and is illustrated in activity 1 below.

The third stage is to consider your problem specifically in relation to your random input element and its associations.

The same rules that apply in brainstorming regarding the note taking of ALL ideas put forward also apply here, as do the rules relating to the final evaluation of bridging ideas.

Of course, a quota should be introduced, though this activity can generate many ideas quite quickly.

Activity 1 (warm up)

The game of 'word association' is played in a group, taking turns to provide responses. With the group sitting in a circle one person follows their neighbour in responding.

A word is introduced, then the first respondent says something that relates to the initial word. For example, the word 'sun', may result in a response of 'hot'. The rule for acceptance is that most people can appreciate the association between, in this case, 'sun' and 'hot'. The respondent must also respond to the word said immediately before, not the original word or other subsequent response.

You may introduce a time limit for each person to respond and repeat answers are not permitted. If someone doesn't respond (in time), repeats an answer or has their response contested (it does not relate to the response made immediately before) then that person is out. The game can continue until one person is left.

Explain these rules to your participants and start a round with the word 'politician'.

Even if you only play one round with your participants, you will see that the topic very quickly moves away from the concept of a 'politician' and this is expected.

However, for our purpose it is important that we collect as many associations as possible with the word 'politician' or other starting point.

Explain that the rules are changing and that now each participant has to respond with a word that they associate with the word 'politician'.

Just play for one round and ask someone to note down all of the things associated with the word 'politician'.

Review the list and point out that this is the second stage of the random input method, to quickly list associations evoked by the random stimulation element.

Activity 2

In this case we will work with a specific problem, to improve the spelling of children in school (assuming ages 5-8 years).

The random input word is 'Bank'.

In small groups the participants should make associations with the word 'bank', as they did with the word 'politician' in the warm up exercise. This is likely to include terms such as:

'Money, safe, service, online, saving, borrowing, lending, interest, closed, manager, teller, cash machine, bank card, savings book, bank robber, security, cameras etc'.

Once a list has been compiled, between 10 and 15 words as a suggestion, each small group should consider the problem of improving spelling in the context of each of the words on this newly generated list.

For example, a 'savings book' may be used as a personal method of recording and retaining information of words that have been learnt, with some kind of 'spend' reward when enough 'word savings' have been accrued. A 'cash machine' dispenser may relate to how words to be learnt are assigned to learners, maybe with a PIN code. New words will only be dispensed when the older ones have been learnt.

At this stage the technical and/or resource requirements to facilitate any ideas are not important, this is just about generating bridging ideas.

History has proven that if an idea is good enough, initial obstacles of facilitation can generally be overcome later.

Once the quota has been met, ask each group to evaluate their collection of ideas by applying logic and rational processing.

At the end of the session ask each group to describe a small number of their 'better' ideas to the wider group.

Repeat the session, only this time introduce a new random input. You could use another word, as there are plenty of random word generators available online. Watchout4snakes.com is very useful and free online utility for this purpose.

Alternatively, you could repeat the session with the random input of a sound, a colour, an object etc.

What is important at this stage is that the same problem is processed from a different perspective, providing a wide range of 'different' ideas to the first session.

As a suggestion for extending the activity, ask the participants to provide a problem, or opportunity for development, that exists within their own professional context.

Materials

- List of random words (on cards perhaps) or access to a random word generator, collection of random objects, colour cards, random sound or music player, as per your approach to the activities.

Notes for trainers

It should be noted by facilitators, that the shift from the previous activities to this type of mental processing, can be greeted with skepticism and/or doubt by participants.

A confident facilitator will demonstrate the method through exemplar activities and before too long a level of acceptance will emerge. The effort required to bring participants to this point is infinitely worthwhile.

Metacognition workshop

The second joint staff training focused on developing a common understanding of metacognition strategies to help learners understand the way they learn and to think about their thinking.

The joint staff training focused on key theories and on the application of these through practical activities and exercises.

The training set the ground for developing new thinking and pedagogical methods.

The activities suggested in this section support staff development of specific knowledge and skills.

The key topics covered in this module are:

- Defining metacognition and its cycle
- Metacognition skills and attitudes
- Metacognition in action

This module encourages understanding of specific metacognition strategies such as think aloud, comprehension connections and summaries, independent thinking, organising thinking, solving problems, question questions, process vs results, building resilience, generating creative outcomes, to name a few.

Topic 1

Defining metacognition and its cycle

“Metacognition is 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.

Activity 1

Divide the participants into groups.

The trainer selects a picture with text (this can be a page from a children’s book) and places them at the front of the room on a table away from the participants.

Each group then selects:

- 2 ‘secretaries’, 1 will be writing and 1 will be drawing.
- The rest of the group will be ‘runners’. Half of them will be memorising and reporting back on the text and the other half on the picture.

When ready, two runners from each group (one for text and one for the picture) will run to the front of the room and will look at the picture or text. They will then run back to their group and describe or dictate to the relevant secretary what they have seen or read.

When the first two runners have returned to their group, two more runners will go to the front and repeat the process.

Only the secretary is permitted to write or draw.

Participants should be encouraged to report quietly to the secretaries to avoid the group overhearing.

The first group to finish the task will go to the trainer to ring the bell which indicates the end of the activity.

After the bell has been rung, the trainer will distribute a copy of the image and text for each group to check the accuracy of their work.

Using the following questions as prompts to initiate a group discussion, the trainer asks the participants to evaluate and reflect on strategies used during the task:

- What strategies did you use to complete the task?
- Did you change the strategies as you progressed into the task?
- What difficulties did you have to overcome?
- What would you do differently next time?

This discussion will set the context to the question on ‘What is metacognition?’

Activity 2

The trainer distributes Post-it speech bubbles to each participant and asks them to give a key word to define what they think metacognition is.

Each participant in turn places their speech bubble on a flip chart to create a visual display, while explaining why they have selected that particular key word.

The trainer then shares with the participants the following definition of metacognition:

“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)

This leads to the introduction of the metacognition cycle which the trainer then presents as follows:

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.

Materials

- A picture book with text
- Post-it Notes
- Markers
- Pens and coloured pencils
- Flip Chart

Notes for trainers

The initial activities should encourage participants to reflect and build upon their own understanding of metacognition and its cycle.

Topic 2

Metacognition skills and attitudes

The online Cambridge dictionary defines 'skill' as the ability to do something well, especially because you have practiced it; an 'attitude' a feeling or opinion about something or someone, or a way of behaving that is caused by this.

Activity 1

To help participants appreciate some of the benefits of the metacognition process, the trainer asks the participants to complete a task individually and in silence.

The trainer displays on a flip chart a line showing two destinations, Manchester and Singapore. The trainer then asks the participants to solve the following problem in silence and individually:

Josh's flight leaves from Manchester at 8.30am to Singapore. The flight takes 7 hours and 30 minutes. Josh wishes to let his father know he has arrived in Singapore as soon as he has landed.

- What time is it in Manchester when he calls from Singapore?
- What time is it in Singapore when he lands?

Participants may find this task particularly challenging as the purpose of the task is to illustrate that tasks set are very difficult without using certain skills and knowledge.

The trainer initiates discussion around the following questions:

- What made the task challenging?
- What would they have needed to solve the problem?
- Could the task be solved if there was more information provided and if they were allowed to discuss the task with a partner or in teams?
- How did they feel about not being able to speak or ask questions?
- What skills could have helped to complete the task?

The discussion should lead the group to talk about questioning, collaboration, research information, reasoning, communication, etc.

Activity 2

The trainer split the participants into groups of 6 to 8 and provides them with a large sheet of paper.

Participants are then asked to draw a large rough outline of a body. The trainer asks them to discuss in their group what skills and attitudes to learning children should have. They are tasked with writing the skills on the outside of the outline of the body and the attitudes on the inside.

On completion of the task each group presents their version of metacognition skills and attitudes.

Using the Bliss Charity Metacognition Project, the trainer introduces to the group the 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

Activity 3

The trainer divides the participants into groups of maximum 4. Each group is given a book and they are tasked to select in 1 minute a selection of 6 words which they find interesting.

Each group is then tasked with creating a poem in 10 minutes using the 6 words selected.

On completion of the task, the participants are asked which skills and attitudes they used to complete the task.

Each group presents their poem and the skills and attitudes they have used.

This will lead the group to talk about similarities and differences in approaches used to complete the task.

The groups are then encouraged to use the metacognition cycle to further reflect on the learning process.

Materials

- A selection of books
- Post-it Notes
- Pens and coloured pencils
- Markers
- Flip-chart paper

Notes for trainers

The trainer should refer to the project training guidelines when appropriate and necessary.

Topic 3

Metacognition in action

There are many strategies that can be used to support the development of metacognition skills.

One of these is Philosophy for Children (P4C) by Matthew Lipmann. The P4C uses a defined framework that encourages learners to follow a philosophical enquiry.

Activity 1

The trainer introduces the participants to the defined P4C framework as follows:

1. Getting set
2. Presentation of stimulus
3. Thinking time
4. Question making
5. Question airing
6. Question choosing
7. First thoughts
8. Building
9. Last thoughts
10. Review

The trainer explains each of the steps and invites the participants to ask questions if necessary.

Activity 2

To demonstrate how the process works the trainer engages the participants in a P4C style session.

Firstly, the trainer asks the participants to sit in a circle and shows them an image of the world: half lush – half desolate.

After studying the image, the trainer asks the participants to close their eyes and reflect individually on what they have seen.

After one minute, the trainer invites the participants to share with a partner their initial thoughts on the image.

The participants then in turn share their initial thoughts with the rest of the group.

In small groups, the participants are asked to write a question inspired by the image or any concepts around it.

The participants are encouraged to think creatively and deeply about the issues and dilemmas that are presented.

For example, participants may come up with questions such as:

- Why is the world damaged?
- Why is there a good world and a bad world?
- How can we keep the world a safe place?
- What will the world look like if we don't look after it?
- Can the world change?

Next, each group presents their question to the rest of the group and then they place it in the middle of the circle so that everyone can consider it.

Each participant is given two voting counters and is asked to place them on the two questions they consider the best for a philosophical discussion.

The question with the most counters is displayed on a board by the trainer.

Participants are encouraged to offer their point of view and indicate their willingness to contribute by placing their hand in the circle.

The trainer should not intervene at this stage but merely be a facilitator of the discussion.

The trainer may write up discussion points/concepts on a white board for the participants to consider. This helps with reminding the participants about their discussion.

Finally, the trainer draws the discussion to a natural close and invites the participants to offer in turn their final thoughts if they wish to do so.

After the session, the group evaluates and reflects on how they felt the session went and what they could improve on to further develop the philosophical skills.

This leads the group to reflect on the metacognition skills and attitudes used as well as the metacognition cycle.

Social philosophy workshop

The third joint staff training focused on developing a common understanding of social philosophy and how educators can embed this in the curriculum.

The joint staff training focused on reflection upon key elements of social philosophy and on the application of these through practical activities and exercises.

This training sets the ground for developing new thinking and pedagogical methods.

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.

The activities suggested in this section support staff development of specific knowledge and skills.

The key topics covered in this module are:

- Defining social philosophy
- Understanding and developing social relationships and cultural awareness including political and economic and educational factors

This module encourages understanding of specific strategies and themes to develop peaceful living, respect, dialogue and debate and peaceful conflict resolution within a multicultural context.

Topic 1

Social philosophy

“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”.

Activity 1

Divide the participants into groups.

The trainer displays the quote above and distributes a copy of the mind map example to each group.

Participants are then asked to populate the mind map with what they perceive as a definition of social philosophy.

Each group is then asked to feedback on their mind map providing justification for their choices.

Themes such as social relationships and cultural awareness political, economic and educational factors should be discussed as part of the feedback ensuring that the group arrives at a common understanding that social philosophy in essence can be informed by social and ethical values. However, with such a wide range of areas of potential discussion, most of which can be fluid and changeable, a perfect definition can be elusive.

Each group should be encouraged to add to their map following the feedback from the other groups and any additional elements suggested by the trainer.

Activity 2

Divide the participants into groups.

The trainer distributes a large sheet of flip chart paper to each group.

A pictorial display is then created by each group visualising an ideal model of what a school that promotes social values looks and feels like.

The groups are encouraged to use their mind map to inform their display.

Each group is then asked to present their display of the ideal school explaining how they have arrived at their design.

Once all displays have been presented, they are placed around the room.

The trainer then distributes a set of colour post-it notes indicating the following:

Green: we do this already in our school

Blue: we don't do this in our school

Pink: an aspirational idea we would like to do in our school

Each participant is then asked to revisit all displays and place the post-it notes according to their individual practice.

The trainer then leads a reflective discussion in current practice in school drawing attention to any potential gaps and how these could be filled.

Materials

- Coloured post-it Notes
- Markers
- Pens and coloured pencils
- Flip Chart papers
- Sticky tape

Notes for trainers

The initial activities should encourage participants to reflect and build upon their own understanding of social philosophy.

Topic 2

Social relationships and cultural awareness

Social philosophy can be regarded as a bridge 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 phenomenon in terms of ethical principles, striving to attain social good itself. There is a strong sense of determining and adhering to the prevailing moral values in pursuit of communal wellbeing.

To help participants appreciate how school has a crucial role in providing sustained and consistent opportunity to impact on current and future generation, a series of task based activities are to be provided which will support participants in reflecting upon everyday practice and promotion of social philosophy.

Activity 1

Divide the participants into groups.

The trainer displays the 'Compass Rose' image (Tide Global Learning) and explains that the compass provides the framework that will help them challenge perceptions and encourage them to ask questions relating to specific areas of enquiry.

The groups are then given a flip chart paper and are asked to replicate in a simplified version the compass ensuring it has the following 4 headings:

- Natural: changes to the environment
- Social: Changes to people and way they live
- Economic: Changes involving money
- Who decides?: Who makes decision about the changes?

Each group is then given a picture depicting various social situations. They are then asked to have a discussion about their given image. For example:

- What is happening in the image?
- What are your first impressions?
- What are your initial assumptions?
- How does this image make you feel?
- Does your group all agree on the above or do you have different thoughts and ideas?

Next, participants are asked to discuss and devise questions around the 4 themes of the compass. For example:

What possible impact on the environment could the image portray? Who could have made decisions that have resulted in the social situation depicted in the image? What is the impact of the economic situation depicted?

The groups are given time to complete the task, after which they then swap their picture with another group and the task is repeated.

The groups are then asked to share their questions relating to each image they were given and have the opportunity to identify how, based on life experience, prior knowledge, assumptions etc. their interpretation of the stimulus could differ and are given the opportunity to change their question or challenge questions.

The group as a whole are given the opportunity to reflect and ask further questions and to make additional comments.

Participants may find this task particularly challenging based on individual life experience and on social, cultural and economic background.

The trainer should then lead a discussion on the appreciation of cultural differences through critical questioning and debate.

At the same time, while not perhaps an obvious starting point for children, discussion around the impact of economics within societies cannot be overstated. 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.

Moreover, 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 whilst aiding us in restructuring our societal philosophies to achieve societal wellbeing.

Activity 2

Thinking about the themes around social philosophy (social relations, culture, economics, politics and education), the trainer displays the following quote:

‘Small actions, big impact’

The participants are asked to consider the meaning of such a quote and compare and contrast their views.

Whilst the participants are engaged in the discussion, the trainer draws an outline of a tree on a flip chart.

Each participant is then encouraged to think about what actions they take on a daily basis and how this could impact on their social responsibility.

The participants are then given leaf-shaped Post-it notes and are asked to think about an action that they may have taken on that particular day that could demonstrate their social responsibilities.

The participants are then asked to attach the leaf to the outline of the tree displayed on the wall.

Participants are then encouraged to think about their future actions and to consciously think about whether they could do something to further help on a daily basis.

The trainer leads a discussion on the idea that social philosophy is based on values, which of course may differ from culture to culture, while 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.

The group as a whole is then given the opportunity to ask further questions and to make additional comments and reflect upon how they could use the activity in their own educational setting.

Materials

- A copy of the Compass Rose: <https://globaldimension.org.uk/resource/development-compass-rose/>)
- Post-it Notes
- Pens and coloured pencils
- Markers
- Flip-chart paper

Notes for trainers

The trainer should refer to the project training guidelines when appropriate and necessary.

Activity 3

The trainer divides the participants into groups of five where possible and gives each group a large sheet of paper with the shape of a hand on it.

The participants are then given a few minutes within their group to talk about themselves, their interests, the things they are good at, their favourite subjects, etc. The goal is to identify something that is unique to each person.

After the initial discussion, using the large sheet of paper, each participant writes on one finger of the hand something that is unique to themselves.

Then, the participants are asked to discuss and identify something that they have in common and write this on the palm of the hand.

Finally, each group shares their “Hand” with the rest of the group and the trainer facilitates a discussion about the differences between them, the things they have in common and also the importance of diversity within any community.

The “Hands” are displayed around the room.

Finally, the trainer then leads a discussion 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.

Materials

- Pens and coloured pencils
- Markers
- Flip-chart paper

Notes for trainers

The trainer should refer to the project training guidelines when appropriate and necessary.

Activity 4

The trainer asks the participants to sit in a circle and introduces a short film about an important book. The participants are asked to think about some of the features such a book may have.

The trainer records the answers on a flip chart.

Then, the clip is shown:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS6F2EBWyk4>

The story is about a list of objects and natural phenomena (spoon, grass, rain, etc.) and their most important features.

The trainer asks the participants to think about the qualities and purposes of each object presented in the story and to construct a reason why it could be important and special.

The trainer asks the following questions:

- Which reasons were facts?
- Which reasons tell what it looks like?
- Which reasons tell what it does?
- Which reasons made you wonder?
- Which reasons surprised you?

The trainer leads a discussion around what could be important about oneself no matter how small and insignificant it may be.

Then, the participants are asked to think and write a short text entitled 'The important thing about me'.

The texts could be used to create a giant book which would celebrate the diversity of the social group.

The group as a whole is then given the opportunity to ask further questions and to make additional comments and reflect upon how they could use the activity in their own educational setting.



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

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