

Community Builders and Philosophy Games for EYFS

There's a whole section of our book, *Philosophy Circles*, on the importance of Community Building games for developing philosophical skills. Here's a few of our favourites to get EYFS focussed in their listening, and confident in their speaking:

For taking turns as the focus of attention – Mirroring

It's best if the players are in a circle, but any format where they can see each other is OK. Start as "leader", making slow gestures which the "followers" copy. Then point to someone else who becomes the new leader. They make some movements which the rest copy, and then pass on the leader role again. Lots of people get a turn, and it echoes the process of listening in which people take it in turns to speak and listen, be the focus of attention and give their attention to others.

For risk-taking and creativity – This is Not a Spoon

Pass a large wooden spoon around the circle. The first person says (for example): "This is not a spoon, it's a tennis racquet" and mimes accordingly. The next person says e.g. "This is not a spoon, it's a guitar, etc., and the chain continues. Works equally well with a mugstand.

For eye contact - Eye Swap

Stand in a circle. Make eye contact with someone and then maintain the connection as you swap places with them.

For relevance – Forgetful Storytelling

This is technique adapted from a solo show by NZ improviser Clare Kerrison. The conceit is that you tell the story and then hesitate, leaving the children to fill in the gaps, so that between you are improvising the story. Don't explain the format in advance, just gesture to them and they'll soon get the idea. For example:

Teacher: I want to tell you a story. It's about a time before I was a teacher, when I had a completely different job as a... as a...

A: Firefighter?

Teacher: Yes, a firefighter. One day we got a call that someone's pet was stuck up a tree, but it was a very unusual pet. It was a...

B: Lion!

C: Monkey!

Teacher: Yes, a lion. So because it was a lion we were, we were...

D: Scared

Teacher: Yes, scared. Absolutely terrified. So we decided we ought to take a...

C: Zookeeper.

Teacher: Exactly, a zookeeper.

As they get used to it, they will supply more and more of the story and you just keep it coherent, if bizarre, by choosing the first suggestion that is made each time so that just one story is being told. Once the story has run its course, you can get a child to take your place or split into three groups, each with its own forgetful storyteller.

For consequence giving – What Would Happen Then?

This activity emerged in a discussion with reception children at Normanton All Saints school. Their topic was Superheroes. I asked if there would be anything bad about being super-strong.

"You might pull off the door of your house."

"What would happen then, if you pulled off the door of your house?"

"It might squash you."

"What would happen then, if you pulled off the door of your house, and it squashed you?"

"You might die."

On this occasion, the story went round in a circle, with the protagonist going to hospital, then to heaven, coming back to life, going to his house again, and opening the door. Of course, it could have gone anywhere, and all you need to get started is a single event.

Both storytelling approaches tease out a chain of consequences and provide practice in following the thread of an emerging conversation, as things mentioned early often come back. Children are on their home ground with story-based talk, so such skills can sometimes be better practiced through narrative, ready for use in philosophising.

For focus – Pass the Clap

With pupils in a circle, start a 'Mexican wave' style clap going in one direction. Remind pupils that it's one at a time, and they only clap when the first next to them has. To make it harder, challenge them to do it quicker, then back the other way, and then going across the circle with the call of someone's name. This last move nicely replicates passing speaker responsibility which might follow in your enquiry.