

International Conference on Thinking 2018

Miami Florida

Interactive Workshop Proposal

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Exploring Big Questions through Critical Discussion

Abstract

The workshop I have designed, 'Exploring Big Questions through Critical Discussion', is a chance for educators to take part in a practical classroom experience involving the exploration of philosophical questions through dialogue with peers. This workshop is a snapshot of how I run a Philosophy session in my grade 3/4 classroom and focusses on teaching children skills in critical, creative and collaborative thinking. One of the big questions being explored by the conference this year is 'How can we make better use of brain power and thinking skills to optimise our human experience and expression?' and it is my belief that one way we can do this is by engaging students in deep discussions about complex concepts such as fairness, beauty, tolerance and power to name just a few; teaching them to pose philosophical questions, and think logically to better perceive to world around them.

Our human expression is a manifestation of the ideas we as a society put out into the world, the beliefs we hold and solidify in the form of culture: art, music, literature. In order to optimise our potential to express our humanity in valuable ways, we need to be able to clearly perceive the world around us, find truth and beauty in what we experience, and turn it into a form of personal expression that contributes positively to our community. Learning to pose questions about complex concepts and use reasoning and logic to see multifaceted issues more clearly is a stepping stone in equipping students to become socially aware global citizens, comfortable with engaging in complex issues and thought-provoking discussions.

This workshop is based around the following understanding goals:

Understanding Goal 1:

Thinking critically and collaboratively allows us to see things more clearly and grow as a thinker

Understanding Goal 2:

Engaging with complex issues provides students with skills to deal with the complex issues they will face as a global citizen in the 21st Century

Understanding Goal 3:

Philosophical thinking skills are transferrable across curriculum areas and enhance student understanding of a broad range of topics.

During this workshop, I will share with participants planning documents for thinking skills in the classroom, resources for running Philosophy sessions at a primary years level, a successful lesson structure that optimises student engagement, understanding and collaboration based around big concepts and thought-provoking questions, and model a range of questioning strategies to promote critical discussion and logical thinking. The workshop will be run as a model of a lesson, allowing participants to engage as a student would, and maximise their engagement in the session.

Currently, I am a generalist classroom teaching at Kingswood Primary School in Melbourne, Australia. I have successfully run this workshop as professional learning sessions at various schools and have received excellent feedback relating to engagement, clarity and usefulness for classroom practice from classroom teachers and school principals. I also play a large role in implementing the Curiosity and Powerful Learning program at our school, mentoring colleagues and new teachers in embedding Thinking Dispositions and the Cultural Forces, as well as in using Visible Thinking Routines to build a Culture of Thinking in our school. I am a passionate classroom teacher who strives to impart to students a sense of community, responsibility and hope for the future that they will create.