Creating a P4C - inspired curriculum

Increasingly, Philosophy For Children is seen as a worthwhile activity in primary schools. But it could be much more! Gavin White puts the case for its becoming the main organising concept for re-constructing the whole primary curriculum.

'What value do philosophy sessions have within the curriculum?'

At this point I am sure that many people who are well practised in delivering philosophy sessions to children will be raising a slightly indignant eyebrow –they may wonder how I dare question the value of philosophy. I'd like to reassure you all at this point that indeed I am on your side. I truly think that philosophy sessions are of great value within the curriculum, but I would like to go further than this: I think the whole curriculum should be based upon the principles of P4C.

Let's change the opening question slightly:

'What value does a philosophy session during the third lesson on a Tuesday have within the curriculum?'

Philosophy lessons equip children with skills that they can apply across the curriculum. In their other subject areas, there is an increased chance that when working in groups the children will show improved speaking and listening skills. There is also an increased likelihood that they will listen well to inputs and be prepared to raise questions, and the chances of them being able to think more deeply when solving problems is also increased. All is great we may well think! But wait a moment, there's something missing...

That missing ingredient is 'empowerment' or perhaps we could call this 'child-directed learning' or 'child-led learning'. By 'child-directed/led learning', I mean providing children with opportunities to shape the direction of their own learning experiences. This entails the children raising their own questions, pursuing their own enquiries and selecting or designing their own tasks.

It is my argument that we can learn from P4C sessions to develop a curriculum structure where child-directed learning is at the very core of all that happens. I will break down the key features of P4C sessions and demonstrate how these features can be applied to a broader curriculum structure.

How do P4C sessions provide a child-directed learning experience?

Let's begin by focusing upon the individual philosophy session. A typical session will consist of many elements, which provide either direct opportunities for self-directed learning or opportunities to develop the aptitudes for self-directed learning.

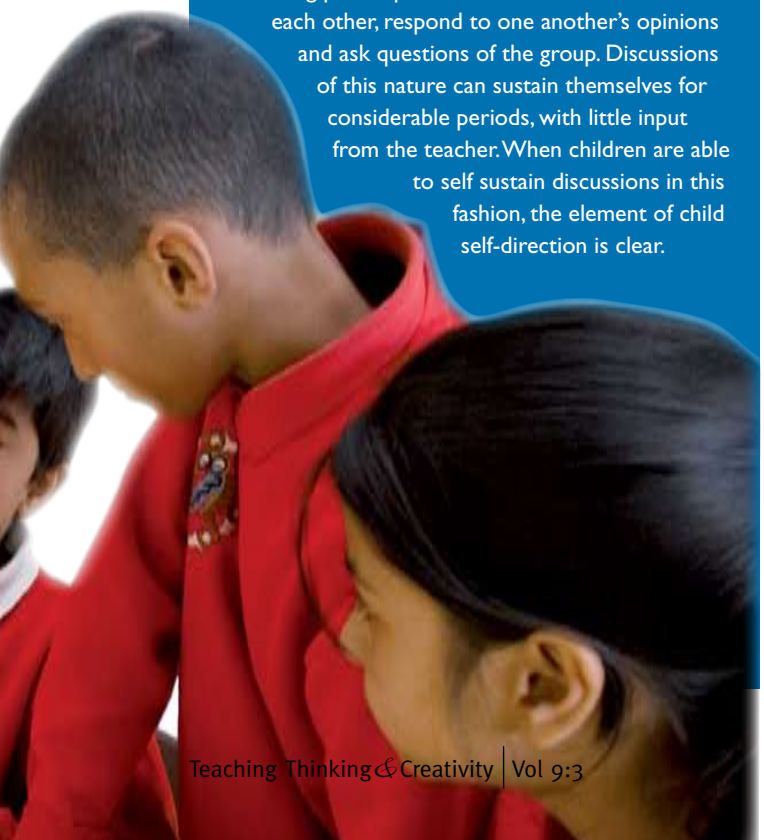
1. Early Thinking and Questions

After the sharing of an initial stimulus, a philosophy session moves on to the question setting stage – this is the start of the personal thinking journey for the children. It is their opportunity to ask questions about the things they find interesting and want to learn more about. When children's questions are shared, the children have a greater sense that their ideas are valued and valid. This emphasis upon allowing them to interpret stimuli from their own viewpoint or ideas is a crucial element of children being able to self direct their learning. (Only when children are allowed to interpret the learning for themselves, can we truly say this.) Similarly, when the class move on to select a question for discussion, the children are making a collective decision about what they want to learn – once again, children are directing their own learning.

2. Child-led Enquiry

a) Child-led discussions

Philosophy sessions are the collective property of the children and this is typified by the term 'community of enquiry'. Once children feel secure within this community, they become increasingly self sufficient at sustaining philosophical discussion. Children listen to each other, respond to one another's opinions and ask questions of the group. Discussions of this nature can sustain themselves for considerable periods, with little input from the teacher. When children are able to self sustain discussions in this fashion, the element of child self-direction is clear.



b) A culture of questions

Establishing an ethos where questioning is welcomed within the classroom is key to the development of child-led enquiry. A philosophy session may start with the choosing of an individual question by class agreement, but during the ensuing discussion, this question can often be reassessed. The principles of philosophical thinking are based on the constant re-evaluation of that which we seek to be true. When children engage with this idea, they realise that learning is not something which just happens to them, but something in which they take a leading role. They have a greater understanding that learning is an individual experience and that they have the right to question others as well as to question themselves. By providing a culture in which children are encouraged to ask questions and evaluate ideas of truth, we allow them to become more fully aware of themselves as individual learners with their own thinking paths to follow – in this sense the learning is self-directed.

3. Higher Order Thinking

One of the key benefits of Philosophy for Children is that it provides children with access to higher order thinking opportunities. The thinking that takes place in philosophy sessions will encompass lower order thinking skills, such as knowledge, comprehension and application, but will also often venture into higher order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation (See Bloom's taxonomy for the hierarchy of thinking skills.) It can be argued that the higher the level a child thinks at, the more personalised their thought processes will become. Therefore, when children are provided with opportunities to develop higher order thinking, they are becoming increasingly self directed as learners.

4. Teacher as Facilitator

Within philosophy sessions, the teacher becomes a facilitator – a person who guides and scaffolds children's thinking processes so that their pupils learn and think with a greater amount of autonomy. The facilitator in philosophy sessions listens intently to the discussion and keys in to the thinking processes of the individual learners entrusted to him/her. By doing this, they can ask further questions that seek to push their learners' thinking forward. It is not for the facilitator to impart knowledge or opinions, but to steer thinking in productive paths. In this sense, the role of the facilitator in a philosophy session enables children to take personalised thinking pathways: a child with a greater aptitude for independent thinking will be more ready to self-direct their own learning.

How can P4C have an impact upon the broader curriculum?

A topic approach has long been adopted within Rushcombe First School, with topics traditionally lasting for a term or half a term. In the light of the new push towards a 'creative curriculum' the school has looked to develop its curriculum structure with the central tenet of developing child-led learning. At the moment we are piloting a project within year 3 where we are using the principles of Philosophy for Children as the structure for the curriculum delivery. The starting point in this experiment was to break the topics down into smaller projects; for example during the Egyptian topic the children explore projects such as 'Amazing Archaeologists' and 'Tutankhamun's Tomb'. These projects can last anything from a few days to a few weeks. This project-based approach provided the themes for the children's learning:

The following is an overview of the structure we have used to navigate a pathway through each project. The structure has five phases:

Overall Structure of curriculum model

Stimuli and Questioning

Early Enquiry
(individual or in groups)

Chosen Class Focus
(balance of teacher-and
child-directed activities/objectives)

Philosophy Session
(not necessarily at this point)

End of Project Task
(based upon Bloom's Taxonomy,
individual or in groups)

Let's now explore each phase in greater detail:

1. Stimuli and Questioning

Philosophy sessions typically use a stimulus to initially engage the children and to stimulate thinking, and it is this model which we are applying to the beginning of each project. For instance, during the 'Amazing Archaeologists' project, the children begin their week by viewing a video clip of archaeologists at work. The children are then asked to start thinking about this stimulus; for example, they reflect with their learning partner about what they have seen, try to come up with explanations, set questions. Thus, they are immediately being asked to engage in the thinking process without 'contamination' from the teacher.

This model is surely the basis of successful teaching; firstly, children need to be 'hooked' into their learning, they need to be enthused and gain a sense of wonder. Time spent developing interesting and inspiring stimuli to 'hook' the children into the project has proved well worthwhile. Secondly, children initially need to have freedom to interpret their learning in any way they want. The teacher may seek to adjust this interpretation with time, but initially it is important for the child to approach their learning from their own perspective and to generate their own ideas. Each project has started with the key ingredients: get the children interested and get them thinking!

This approach at the start of a project also has the benefit of providing the children with an opportunity to raise the questions they want to ask. It is these questions that act as the focus of future lessons. Questions, which are set at the beginning of the week, are put up on display as a point of reference for the children's learning throughout the project and they can be added to at any point (see fig.1). Because they have been given the freedom to ask questions and then use them as the focus for future work, the children have played a key role in shaping the curriculum they experience and therefore they have felt more empowered.

2. Early Enquiry

After the question setting stage, the children then move on to carry out an early enquiry into the key questions they have raised. At this early stage, the focus is upon children carrying out an enquiry that will either improve their knowledge base or raise further questions in their heads. The expectation isn't that the children will necessarily answer all the questions raised, but it allows them time to find out new facts and to immerse themselves in further thinking about the project.

At this stage the learning emphasis is about engagement with ideas, triggering thought processes and experiencing the project first hand, rather than the teacher dictating a specific learning outcome. Their enquiry could include exploring materials in response to a D+T stimulus, looking at maps in response to a geography focus or beginning to explore the idea of friction in response to a science stimulus. The children lead this early enquiry – they decide upon the question they wish to pursue and how they are going to try and answer it, often working with a learning partner or in small groups. Of course, there is some guidance from the teacher in this process; for example towards choosing suitable questions for enquiry or providing support/scaffolding for the planning process.

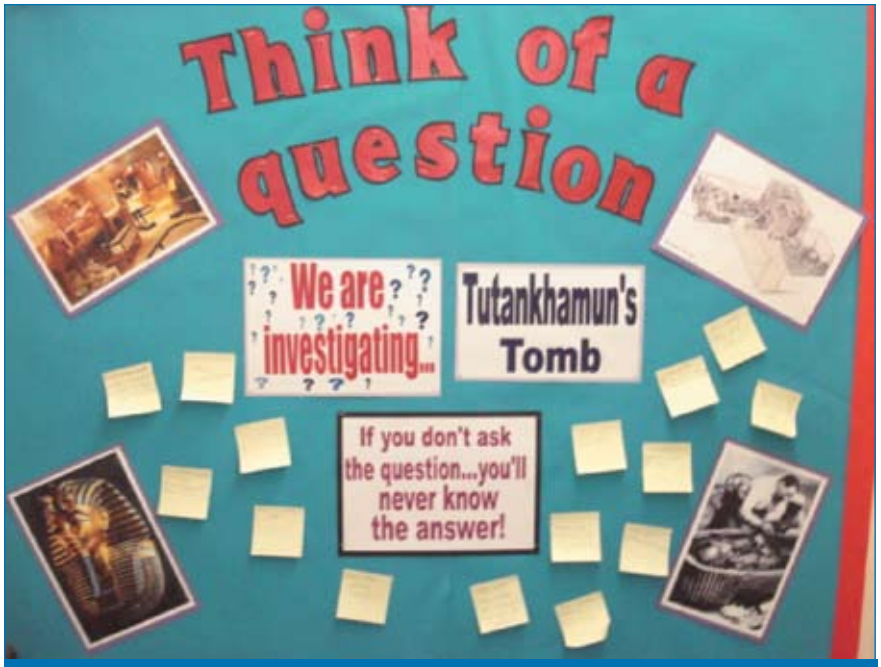


Fig.1 'Think of a question' display board – the children write their questions on post-it notes and add them to the display

When the children return from their early enquiry, they share their findings with the class. Some questions may be answered at this stage, and new questions may be raised which can be added to the question board. Early enquiries help the children to engage with the project, find a starting point for their thinking and identify the routes forward they would like to take.

3. Class Focus

Of course, one of the demands of modern teaching is that schools and teachers are expected to include a certain amount of subject coverage within the curriculum they offer to their children. Whilst these restraints remain, it will always be necessary to have class focuses for the learning, where the teacher has specific objectives. The curriculum model we are developing seeks to capture a balance between child-led learning pathways and whole-class learning focuses. Part of the structure we have developed has included the class making collective decisions about the pathway they wish to take through a project.

A regular feature of the beginning of this phase is the involvement of the children in a planning session for the project. At this point, children may refer back to the questions they have raised so far; alternatively they might be asked to mind-map further ideas for the project they have been given. This planning session is also a time for the teacher to introduce key objectives which have been identified as being important to achieve during the project. In this sense, the planning session is a two way process, where the teacher and the children present and discuss their ideas for the learning during the project. Once ideas have been gathered and different activities discussed, the children then decide upon their starting points for the project.

We have found it useful for the planning session to be situated either at the end of a day, or at the end of a week, so that the teacher has time to adapt to the decisions made during the session. Similarly, it is important to remember that the teacher will be able to pre-empt many (but not all!) of the ideas that may be raised by the children. Bearing this in mind, the teacher can draw up plans beforehand for much of the coverage. The important principle here is that the teacher has shown a willingness to listen to and to adapt to the ideas of the children.

The next step in this journey is to then carry out the class focus sessions, which have been decided during the planning session. The expectation is that the teacher's plans would have been adapted as a result of the planning session, rather than completely overhauled. This principle runs throughout this phase of the project: the teacher is encouraged to discuss the direction of the learning with the children at regular points. If new and exciting learning pathways emerge, which haven't been planned for, then they are encouraged to follow those and they have the freedom to 'go off plan'.

4. Philosophical Discussions

This section probably requires little further explanation, other than to say that P4C sessions remain an integral part of the curriculum structure. The location of the Philosophy sessions within each project can vary greatly for example, they may be used as a way to start a project during Phase 1 or an opportunity may arise for philosophical discussion in the middle of Phase 3. Once again, the principle is based upon reacting to the natural flow of the learning journey taking place within each project.

5. End of project task

At the end of the project, the children move on to plan and produce their own piece of work in response to the learning that has taken place during the project; in year 3 we have called this 'My Learning Challenge'. Children consider the different activities they could carry out for example; they could produce a PowerPoint presentation, create a short play in a group, carry out a scientific investigation or make a model: what they do is completely up to them.

Within this phase, we use Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework to help the children decide upon the activities they will carry out. They are given the following choices to make:

Will I:

Find new facts (knowledge)

Show what I have learnt (comprehend and apply)

Investigate something I don't know (analyse)

Create or design something new (synthesise)

Improve something (evaluate)

By asking children to identify their task from these five choices, the teacher is able to identify the level of thinking the children will be working at (using Bloom's Taxonomy). A record can also be kept of the type of thinking that children are choosing to engage in, and then the teacher can choose to guide children towards higher level tasks if they feel their activities are limited.

The next step for the children is for them to draw up a plan of the activity they will carry out (see fig.2). From the teacher's perspective, the challenge consists of the fact that there will undoubtedly be a wide range of activities taking place within the classroom. This can be managed, however, by identifying areas within the classroom where certain activities can take place; for example a model making area, a painting area, an ICT area, a writing area and so on. The number of children who can go in each area may also need limiting, and if this is the case, then a record should be kept of those children who will need their first choice during the next end task. These logistical limitations can be resolved amicably through discussion with the children during the planning stage. The children then set about writing their plans: they give an overview of their task, set their own objective and identify the equipment they will need. Now they are ready to lead their own learning task!

Fig 2. The above photographs of artefacts were discussed philosophically using the key question which was provided for this Philosophy session.

Throughout this end task, the teacher will often act in the role of a facilitator. This role can be likened to the role of a captain on a ship - we are responsible for carrying a very precious crew of learners towards their individual destinations, but crucially, we only have a light hand on the steering wheel! The teacher uses questioning and discussion to guide children forward and to help them improve and develop their work.

The teacher will also need to realise that the work being produced is completely child-led, without input or teaching, and this can sometimes lead to disappointment (from the teacher's perspective) in some of the end products. The opportunities for assessment

however are clear: when children are working with independence, their skill or retention level can sometimes be very eye opening! Similarly, including time for individual and group evaluation of the work being produced has proved a vital part of the process in developing children's independent work. As an aid to this process, the production of standard success criteria to help with independent tasks has also proved useful.

Practical Example

So far, I have very much concentrated upon explaining the theory of a curriculum structure which uses P4C principles as its basis. I will now move on to outline an example of a project we have carried out in Year 3.

Project Example: Tutankhamun's Tomb

1. Stimulus and Thinking

The starting point for all of the projects we have trialled is the allocation of learning partners. Learning partners are pairs of children who at different times within the project will be able to support each other with their learning – this may be during discussion time in class inputs or plenaries, but also during independent working time. The learning partners are selected at random by pulling names out of a hat. This means that children will be working in mixed ability pairs: in some projects the children might work with a partner they have to give more support to, whilst in other projects they might work with a partner from whom they get more support.

Once the new learning partners were established, the children were introduced to the new project. Before sharing an initial stimulus, the children were asked to reflect upon what they knew about 'Tutankhamun's Tomb', and as a class we created a floor map of the children's existing knowledge before the start of the project. After this, we moved on to share the stimulus. This took the form of sharing a short video clip about the discovery of Tutankhamun's Tomb. Learning partners were asked to watch the video clip twice: after the first time of watching the class discussed initial thoughts and reflections, picking out key points of interest and raising some initial questions; on the second time of watching they were free to record any questions that had come into their head when they were watching the video clip.

After watching the video, the learning partners were then given more time to generate questions which had been raised in their minds. These questions could be factual or philosophical. The pairs then selected one of their questions to add to our class display, writing it on a post-it note. If a similar question had been set by another pair, this was discussed and the children chose a different question to add to the display. By the end of the session the class had a bank of different questions which could be utilised throughout the project. All of the questions set by the learning partners were also kept within their books, for future reference.

2. Early Enquiry

After setting initial questions, the children then set about the early enquiry stage of the project. Many of the questions generated were of a factual nature, due to the history thrust of the project. The children now started to research the answers to the questions they had set with their learning partner. The research was carried out using a range of texts (including electronic based) and the children recorded the answers they were able to find. By the end of this process, the children shared the answers they had found with the class. They wrote their answers on a different coloured sticky note, which was then added to the class display, along with the accompanying question note. The knowledge that was gained now became the property of the class and could be used and referred to in future discussions during the project. Another useful element was that the early enquiry also identified questions that were as yet unanswered and these could be referred to during later stages of the project.

3. Class Focus

After the early enquiry, the next stage was to decide upon and plan a class focus for the learning. The class were asked the following question: 'What shall we learn more about first?' We began by sorting our questions from Phases 1 and 2 into groups: those that linked to 'Howard Carter', those that linked to 'Tutankhamun', and those that linked more generally to 'Ancient Egyptian tombs'. The class now voted upon the focus they wanted to start with, and in this instance, the chosen focus was 'Tutankhamun'.

We began by discussing whether the class felt we had gathered enough information or knowledge about Tutankhamun. The principle here once again refers to Bloom's Taxonomy, recognising that 'knowledge' is an important pre-requisite for any of the other thinking levels. The first session was based upon a history objective, introduced and planned by the teacher, but discussed with the children during the planning stage. The children explored and philosophically discussed a range of photographs of artefacts from Tutankhamun's tomb. The children had agreed that this session should come at the start of the project, because it would help them to learn more about Tutankhamun before they went on to use this knowledge in future activities.

After exploring the evidence from the tomb, the class were then asked: 'How can we find out more about Tutankhamun?' We explored the class list of activities (on display in the classroom) and identified that 'to carry out research' would be our initial starting point. This then allowed the teacher to carry out two teaching sessions focused upon research and taking notes, thus achieving key Literacy objectives as part of the natural learning journey. By the end of these sessions the children had a bank of knowledge that was ready to be applied to another context.

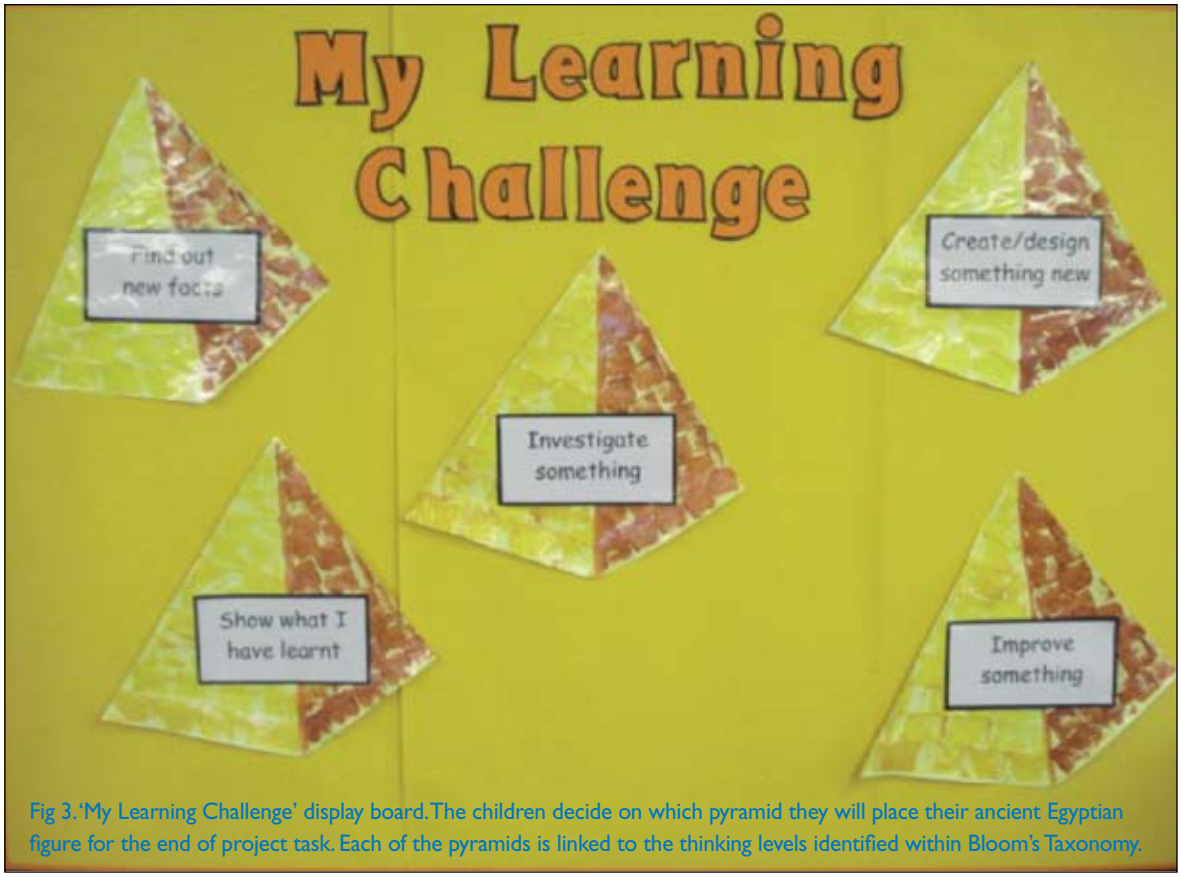


Fig 3. 'My Learning Challenge' display board. The children decide on which pyramid they will place their ancient Egyptian figure for the end of project task. Each of the pyramids is linked to the thinking levels identified within Bloom's Taxonomy.

At this stage we referred back to the class list of activities. The class then discussed different ways in which they could use the knowledge they had gained. The class decided upon two ideas: firstly, creating a drama to show the life of Tutankhamun; secondly to produce a report about Tutankhamun using ICT. The next two focuses for class learning had therefore been set. This selection took place at the end of the day, so that the teacher had sufficient time to plan the activities.

The subsequent day was spent developing ideas for short dramas about Tutankhamun. It included a focused teaching session on developing a play script, a session for planning and developing the drama, and finally a performance session. Throughout the day, a wide range of Literacy and history objectives had been achieved, although the children had little (if any) awareness of doing 'Literacy' or 'history' lessons. Instead, they were taking part in learning activities which had been decided by them and in which the skill session on learning how to write a play script made entire sense in the bigger picture of their learning.

The following day focused upon the children's second activity choice: we used our notes to write a report on Tutankhamun. A focused session was taught on turning notes into sentences, then other sessions during the day took on an ICT focus, where direct teaching could be carried out on importing images. By the end of the day the children had all produced reports and had achieved objectives in Literacy, history and ICT.

By the end of the class focus stage of the project, the teacher had therefore achieved focused teaching with the children, whilst the children felt in control of the learning journey they had taken part in. This learning journey had also taken a natural flow because the learning wasn't boxed into 'lessons'; instead it flowed sequentially. It should be noted however that the Numeracy sessions during this project did remain separate from the 'learning journey', although investigations and worded problems were linked to the theme of the project.

Hopefully it is also clear that this process requires the teacher to be highly flexible and reflective: the process depends upon the teacher guiding the children towards reflecting upon appropriate pathways to take. However, it is also important that the teacher respects the decisions made by the children if they are to feel truly empowered. I have to admit that when the children chose to focus upon a drama activity to show the life of Tutankhamun, this did not match my own ideas about what would make a successful activity – but I went with it, and I was pleasantly surprised by what the children achieved.

4. Philosophical Discussions

Building in time for philosophical discussion has also been an integral part of each project. Within this project we carried out three focused philosophical discussions, one of which was a discussion around a key question set by the teacher. The class looked at a range of artefacts

found in Tutankhamun's tomb and they were then asked the following question: 'What do these objects tell us about Tutankhamun?' (see fig.3) The children began by hypothesising independently about what the artefacts were and what clues they could give us. Throughout this session, the teacher used careful questioning to facilitate the children towards developing their understanding of how the objects could inform us about Tutankhamun.

The basis for the other two discussions within this project were the questions that were raised by the children at the start of the topic. We began by looking back at the questions raised in Phase 1 of the project and discussing which questions lent themselves to philosophical discussion. The following question was chosen after a class vote:

'Should they have taken the treasure out of Tutankhamun's tomb?'

Here is an extract from the discussion the class had:

Child E	The treasures should have been taken out of the tomb because it isn't fair that only people in Egypt can see the treasures.
Child M	But the treasure is somebody's property, so it's like stealing.
Child L	I agree, it is like stealing – they needed the treasures in the afterlife so they should have left it there.
Child J	But people can steal in real life, so they might have moved them from the tomb so that they could be in a safer place.
Child N	If you were Tutankhamun would you like it if they were stealing your treasure?
Child C	Wouldn't Tutankhamun have known that they were stealing his treasure because he was in the afterlife, so he would have seen it happening?
Child D	Could they see in the afterlife?
Child M	Does the afterlife even exist?

By this point of the discussion the session had nearly ended, but through facilitation, the class realised that they were now discussing a different question to the one they had started with. The children were given the chance to summarise their thoughts on the initial question and then they were asked for ideas about the question they would like to discuss in the next philosophy session. We referred back to the scribe (a child chosen from the class to make notes on the key ideas raised in the discussion) and they were able to pick out the two questions raised within the discussion itself. Therefore, the two final questions in the extract above were carried forward to the next philosophical discussion.

The point of sharing this extract in to demonstrate how philosophy sessions can have a fluid continuum: through discussing a starting question, we can raise other questions that can be discussed either during the session or in future sessions. In this sense, the children begin to see the links between different ideas.

Another useful outcome of the session was that we identified a range of factual (rather than philosophical) questions which we needed to answer in order that we could become more informed in our thinking. For instance, when discussing the treasures in the tomb, it became apparent that we didn't know exactly where the treasures were taken after they were removed from the tomb. After facilitation, the children thought that this was an important thing to know in order to answer the question fairly. Instances like this provide us with opportunities to record questions that can be the basis for future research – small research groups can even try to find these answers during the philosophy session, so that the children can see how developing a deeper knowledge base can influence and inform their judgments.

5. End Task

The first process within the end task was for the children to identify the thinking skill level that they would be utilising. Within the class we had created a display (see fig.4), where there were five pyramids – each of the pyramids representing one of the thinking levels linked to Bloom's Taxonomy. Through discussion with the teacher, the children identified the thinking level they would be using during their learning challenge and they then moved a personalised Egyptian figure onto the appropriate pyramid.

After this stage, the children then discussed different ideas for their learning challenge, initially with their learning partners, and then some ideas were shared with the class. The children were also encouraged to refer to a class display of different tasks that they could carry out. After this point, the children made their final decisions and filled out their plans.

Once the plans had been completed, the teacher could then make preparations for the following day; for example, making sure resources were ready. The activities chosen by the children covered a wide range and the teacher needed to identify possible areas where more adult support might be needed, in this case with the model-making group. The following tasks are a sample of those chosen by the children:

Producing a leaflet on ICT about tombs
Designing a new ancient Egyptian goddess
Writing a story about discovering a tomb
Creating a tomb painting
Designing a new death mask for a pharaoh
Designing and making a model tomb
Creating a poster with facts about ancient Egyptian tombs

My Learning Challenge

<u>What I will do</u> I will …
My objective To …
My success criteria
My 5R focus The 5R focus I will use is … I will show this by …
Things I will need

Name: Date:

Fig 4. 'My Learning Challenge' planning form. The children fill out this planning sheet at the start of their end task. The section named 5R focus links to the learning powers identified within Guy Claxton's work, which is utilised throughout the school.

As you can see, there was a wide range of activities selected by the children. The children then carried out their learning challenge, with the teacher acting as facilitator, guiding children forward where necessary. During the process the children were encouraged to refer to their plans and regular review pit stops were used to evaluate progress so far.

At the end of the session, the children returned together as a group to share some of the work that had been produced. Children were encouraged to reflect upon their successes and how they would improve their work. Finally, each child completed a short evaluation independently.

A note on the Early Enquiry

The above focus on 'Tutankhamun's Tomb' outlines an early enquiry, with researching from texts as the main thrust. However, this probably doesn't truly exemplify the investigational nature intended within this phase. Please note that 'research' is not the only activity which can take place.

For instance, during a project entitled 'Picnic by the River', the children were given a Numeracy based enquiry to carry out. The children had been given the scenario of Ratty (from 'The Wind in the Willows') wanting to plan a picnic by the river with his friends. During Phase 1, they had already identified the key points that Ratty would need to consider when planning the picnic. The following enquiry was based upon how the characters would get to the picnic:

Rat, Mole, Toad and Badger all want to get to an island, where they can have a picnic.

Their boat will only hold the two smallest creatures (Mole and Rat) or one of the larger creatures (Badger or Toad).

How will all four of them get to the island?

The children worked in groups of four, with varying levels of support to help them to carry out the enquiry. This project was a particularly good example of how Numeracy activities could be included within the natural learning journey of the project.

This example probably illustrates the Early Enquiry in action better than the 'Tutankhamun's Tomb' example. Similarly, other projects have used the Early Enquiry to carry out science investigations, enquiring into questions raised by the children during Phase 1 of the project. These projects included early enquiries which have been much more investigational than the example I have outlined in 'Tutankhamun's Tomb'.

N.B. It is important to appreciate that 'Tutankhamun's Tomb' is only a one example of how the structure can be applied. Inevitably, each project presents different challenges and requires a slightly different approach – although the key elements of the structure remain the same.

Using P4C as a curriculum structure

In this article I have sought to outline how the principles on which a philosophy session is based can be applied to the broader curriculum. The reason for developing a structure based around these principles lies in my firm belief that philosophy sessions model the type of learning we should be providing our children with - not only within individual philosophy sessions, but more generally across the curriculum. The key component, of a philosophy session in my view is the strong emphasis upon child-led learning. It is this component which I believe we should be trying to develop within our curricular approaches. Viewed in the context of the personalisation agenda and the movement to extend early years practice into year 1 (and who knows where this will stop!) the benefits of utilising an approach like the one I have outlined can only be to keep schools well ahead of the game.

My example demonstrates how this approach can be applied to year 3, but, with variations in approach, there is no reason why this cannot be applied across primary education, or even beyond! More importantly, however, we are here to provide the best possible learning experiences for our children and I believe that those structures which are based on an ethos of child- led experiences will be the ones which will forge ahead of the rest.

At Rushcombe First School, we cannot profess to be at the finishing point of the development of our curriculum, but we have certainly started an interesting journey. There are certainly many points for development, and questions which we still have to answer ourselves. Similarly, I am sure that this article has left many questions unanswered in your minds – there is a lot to explain and discuss – but I hope it has also raised some interesting questions for you about your own schools. At the very least, I hope I have made you think about how we deliver our curriculum to the children we are entrusted with.

Gavin White is Assistant Headteacher at Rushcombe First School. The school achieved an 'Outstanding' in its most recent Ofsted inspection (Autumn 07) and has also achieved the prestigious NACE award in recognition of the challenge the school provides to all of its children.

Gavin has seven years' experience of teaching Philosophy for Children and has led various INSETs on this subject. He is now developing a pilot project within his year group (year 3) at Rushcombe First School, exploring the possibilities of applying the structure of a philosophy session to the curriculum structure as a whole.

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