

## **THINKING ROOM**

There are a number of techniques that have proven very effective in setting the scene for the philosophy class. The most effective exercise, and the one preferred by most children is the *Thinking Room*.

This exercise can be done as a straightforward creative exploration, or can be made into a mindfulness exercise. This is done by taking the exercise at a much slower pace, using breathing to help create and maintain focus, and examining the feelings that are connected various aspects of the process of creation.

It is recommended that you only use this as a mindfulness exercise if you have experience in leading meditations or have undertaken Blooming Minds training in this area. Performing the exercise as a creative exploration is still of huge value in a class. It is something that can be returned to on a regular basis and expanded into other exercises and activities.

### **Preparation**

Ask the class to sit quietly with their eyes closed. Ideally they should be sitting upright, in a relaxed but straight posture. Feet should be on the floor and hands in laps. It is important that there is no contact with other children. Eyes should be closed. For those few who find this too challenging, eyes may remain open but the head should be relaxed so the gaze may be kept on the floor, to avoid being distracted.

Try to deliver the instructions (on the next page) quietly and calmly, with long pauses to enable the children to carry out each step of the exercise.

If the class is very unsettled, this exercise should not be attempted. Where classes have performed the exercise previously however, the prospect of it often serves itself as a device for calming down even a very distracted class.

### **Follow-up**

Children are often very keen to discuss their thinking room after the exercise. Try to focus discussion around how they found the exercise rather than their descriptions of their room. Not sharing a description of the room is often a good way of ensuring that the room remains private, and it is worth sharing this fact with the class.

This said, many children like to make drawings of their thinking room, especially if they are keeping a thinking journal, and this has not proven to lessen the value of the exercise.

### **Practice**

Ask the class to try and find some time before the end of this day to re-visit their thinking room. You might ask them when they think they might be able to do this.

Some children may be concerned that, if they visit their room at bedtime they may fall asleep there. You can explain that falling asleep in the room is not a problem. (I myself do this quite often! It is a lovely place to wake up in.)

The exercise is very popular and you are likely to have requests to repeat it often.

New visits can be made at the start of philosophy classes to do a bit of re-decoration, which lends a positive creative energy to sessions. It may also be used at the end of a session as a 'treat'.

There are a number of related and extended thinking room activities which will be detailed in the forthcoming Blooming Minds book.

Final note. The most effective way of presenting this exercise will be if you have practiced it yourself to begin with!

## The exercise

*We are going to create a special room for ourselves.*

*This is a room that will exist inside of us. Inside our minds.*

*It will be our own private and personal space, a place where we can go when we need to think about things. A place where we can think things through away from distractions, where we can be calm and quiet.*

*Imagine a door, open it and go into a room.*

*(Try not to move your body at all. This room is inside your mind, so only your thoughts should be moving.)*

*This is your own private thinking room.*

*Look around.*

*If there are windows what shape and size are they? What can you see through them?*

*Are there other things on the walls: Pictures perhaps? A mirror? Decorations?*

*You can put up or take down whatever you like.*

*You might want to paint the walls or design wallpaper or murals. Do this now.*

[Note that some children may find it difficult not to move their bodies when guided to these sorts of actions. In this situation you can gently remind them that as this is a 'thinking room', all the things they are doing should be happening in their minds, so their bodies should be still.]

*Now look at the floor. What is it like? Do you want a carpet? What kind? What colour and thickness? Or perhaps you want a wooden floor, maybe with some rugs? Or you might like your floor to be covered in sand, or grass, or glitter; whatever you like.*

*Choose something to sit on: a comfy armchair, a big cushion, a sofa, whatever you please.*

*In the corner of the room there is a letterbox. It leads to the outside.*

*Go over and have a look at it.*

*In here you can put anything that is troubling you. You just post them through the letterbox and off they go out of your room, and out of your mind.*

*You can put anything into the letterbox: sad feelings, and angry ones too; an argument you had in the playground; something that happened at home this morning. You can post away anything that might stop you from being calm, and peaceful, and relaxed.*

[Note. If you are doing this as a mindfulness exercise you may want to qualify this in some practice sessions in order to have the class examine some of these feelings before posting them away.]

*Look around. This is your room.*

*This is a place that you can come to when you need to think about things.*

*No one can come here but you, it is your own personal and private space.*

*We are going to leave the room now, because we want to think and talk together.*

*Have a good look around so that you will remember what it is like next time you visit.*

*Close the door and, if you like, put up a sign. This might have your name on it, or a 'do not disturb' sign, or just a picture that you like. Something that will help you find your thinking room in your mind next time you want to visit.*

*Open your eyes.*

