7 Ways to Use Objects in P4C

Objects play a big role in our teaching. They're familiar, available, and engaging - 3D beats 2D. They're also a versatile tool in P4C. In this issue, how we can use objects for warm ups, hands-on stimuli, and in facilitation. Read the P.S. for a two-for-one training offer.

Warm-up Games

Pointing At Stuff - many children are held back from speaking by a fear of getting the answer wrong and looking stupid. Pointing At Stuff (in our Thinkers' Games minibook) is a good way to get pupils feeling creative, unafraid of failure, and generate plenty of laughter.

In the first round, players walk around the room pointing at things and declaring loudly what they are. "Book! Board! Chair! Fishtank!"

In the second round, they point at things and say the name of the last thing they pointed at – so if it were the same sequence of objects: "[Silence] Book! Board! Chair!"

In the third, they point at things and say what they are not, for example: "Chicken! Lake! Simon Cowell!"
It's a very quick game but delightfully disorientating, and helps everyone take themselves a little less seriously – which is surprisingly helpful for serious thinking!

Sorting Objects - A few weeks ago, we wrote about children being natural 'sorters', and how you can progress your class from sorting animals into different types to drawing distinctions between concepts. Find it here, if you missed it.

Sorting objects is another way to get pupils practise this skill. Split the class into small groups. Give each group a substantial set of something, for example one group gets coins, another get postcards, another gets cuddly toys - anything you have lots of, but which possess small variations and differences. Ask each group to divide up their set by kinds. Once done, they can inspect other groups' efforts and deduce what the thinking was.

Hands-On Stimuli

Would It Still Be A Clock? Take the classroom clock from the wall, and ask pupils to imagine you smashing the glass and plucking the hands off. Without its hands, would it still be a clock? Why/why not?

We're still surprised by the pupils' inventiveness in response to this question. Even if without realising, they are proposing theories on what gives a clock its *clockness:*

- Is it the ability to tell the time? If so, does a clock without batteries cease to be a clock?
- If once a clock, does this mean it's always a clock? Or does it turn into an 'ornament', or something else?
- What other things can lose a part of them, yet retain their *thingness*? What things would lose their *thingness* if they lose a part? Can other examples of parts and wholes to help them support their point about the clock? Are some comparisons closer to a clock than others? We've heard the hands of a clock compared to pupils in a school, leaves on a tree, and even cats-eyes on a road!

Portkeys In the Harry Potter books, a "portkey" is a magical object which transports someone who grasps it to a pre-arranged destination. Symbolic objects can act as a portkey to previous learning and associations: a poppy can stand in place of a text about the Great War; a plastic dagger can focus and invite philosophical questions arising from the study of Macbeth, and so on.

Facilitation

Lego Lives Give pupils three Lego bricks. They must give one up each time they contribute. As well as preventing the more vocal members from dominating the discussion, it provides a visual metaphor for building on each others' ideas.

Conches Use a totemic object to show who is speaking (like the conch in *Lord of the Flies*). Russian dolls are good, not only because their smoothness means they can't be fiddled with, but can be opened up and used for smaller groups to facilitate themselves. Other options include squidgy throwables or a tied up scarf.

Objects as Metaphors I used to love teaching Geography, as it gave me the chance to explain processes visually. I would often use Playdoh for this, and get pupils to do the same, gaining a more intuitive understanding than if the process was just described. In the same way, encourage pupils to use objects to explain their thinking. They're likely to create a visual metaphor for what they're proposing. This helps them think the idea through, and makes it easier for the others to *get* what they're saying. It's particularly helpful when you are dealing with abstract ideas - but for best effect the object needs to be physically there, not just something spoken about. For example, stand by/ pick up an object of which you can say, "A reason is like a..."