



Teaching Toolkit

Photo-Response

Summary

This is an exercise in using photographs as stimulus for developing questioning technique, in a manner close to the Philosophy for Children approach. I first set about using this approach as part of the virtual summer school for the DfES Virtual Education Action Zone

Key Concepts

Thinking skills ; Philosophy for Children ; Questioning Techniques

Uses

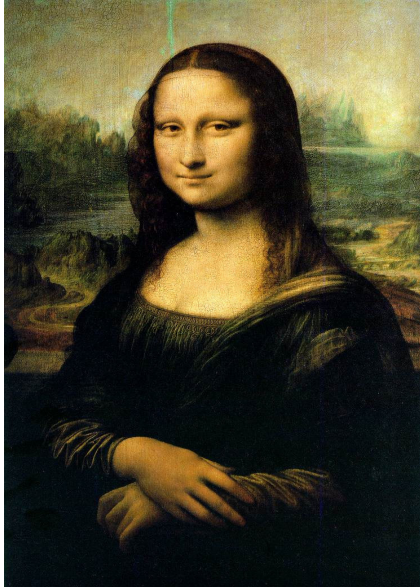
Can be used in all subject areas and with all age groups

Organisation

The first step to take in this type of exercise is to ensure that the ground rules are decided, understood, accepted and abided by. It is usually best to have the students themselves involved in establishing these. The intention is to ensure that everyone gets an equal chance to contribute and that students listen effectively to the views expressed by other students. Key ground rules would include...

- You can make any statement that you want, so long as you are able to justify it.
- You can ask questions of any other student's statements, but you are NOT to pass any judgemental comments
- Only one person speaks at a time

Step two is to give the students the image. This can be anything that will stimulate discussion. It does not have to be a specifically complex issue or image. An example from the Virtual Summer School was that of a photo of the Mona Lisa with the question being simply "Why?" This simple combination prompted some amazing discussion from a group of 10-11 year olds including the idea that the answer to why the Mona Lisa was smiling that way *was that she knew that Leonardo was illegitimate, but was not sure if he knew that she knew and so was embarrassed, but still felt there was a bond of friendship between them.* Clearly some research into the image had gone on there.



The third step is to give some processing time for the students, including at least one overnight spell. After this they sit in a circle and volunteers submit their statements in answer to the simple question. The teacher plays the “Socratic role” and asks questions to prompt the other students into delving further into the issue, but more importantly into the thinking behind the statements made by each student.

This exercise can be content neutral. On the other hand it could be specifically related to content from within the curriculum. In History there could be an image of wartime with the obvious questions. Similarly in Geography there could be an image of a mass migration taking place. English might use this for stimulating ideas for a piece of extended writing, whilst Maths might simply have a number with the question “How?”

Other obvious variations would include changing the type of stimulus from a photograph. If this is done then bear in mind that this exercise is about student interpretation and so the stimulus should not give answers. It might be a newspaper headline, with no story. It might be lines of verse. It could be anything that allows students to think free from a set of “right answers”.

Resources

Photographs or other stimuli