

Teaching Thinking

Network launched at conference

Over three hundred people attended the *Teaching Thinking* Conference and the Seminar on Creativity held in March, making them two of the major thinking skills events of the year.

At the conference, Steve Williams, editor of *Teaching Thinking*, announced the launch of the *Teaching Thinking* Network, an ongoing programme of events and online discussions for subscribers.



The online forum is now open on the *Teaching Thinking* website for debate, support and information sharing. Steve Williams, editor of *Teaching Thinking* said: 'teachers and schools who want to innovate often work in relative isolation. The online forum is a way to keep in constant touch with other people who may be keen to develop similar projects. It also provides an opportunity to debate the central issues of effective teaching using critical and creative thinking. We invite all subscribers to introduce themselves and take part.'

New regional events announced

The Network will also provide a programme of regional events in response to requests from subscribers and attendees at the conference. These will be carefully targeted at particular Key Stages and will often involve a group of experts working together. Their aim will be to devise an event that is not so much a series of isolated workshops, but more like a complimentary set of strategies. The strategies will be designed to excite teachers and pupils and raise standards of achievement.

The first regional conference, *Stories and Strategies for Thinking*, is targeted at primary schools. It brings together four renowned experts. Karin Murriss and Grant Bage will show how stories can be used to improve children's thinking across the curriculum. Luke Abbott will demonstrate how a particular form of drama can transform children's experience of learning and make them think. Steve Higgins, one of the main speakers at the *Teaching Thinking* conference who got excellent evaluations from primary delegates, will explain the sorts of strategies that can be used to develop pupils' thinking skills. The conference will take place in York (November 11), London (November 15) and Loughborough (28 November).

A secondary regional conference is planned for the spring term.



Philosophy for Children conferences

SAPERE (Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education) held its first Northern Conference on 8 March in conjunction with the School of Education, Sunderland University.

Professionals from education, the social services, health, and charities, together with FE/HE students made up the 150-strong delegate list. Main speakers and workshops were well received by delegates.

In the afternoon, Dr Mary Midgley – one of the UK's best-known moral philosophers – offered the conference a timely reminder of how crucial dialogue is in the process of thinking and learning.

The feedback that the University and SAPERE received after the conference was so positive that they aim to hold a similar Northern Conference next year. Details will appear on the SAPERE website: www.sapere.net.

SAPERE Annual conference

SAPERE is holding its annual conference at the Department of Educational Studies, Oxford, on Saturday 6th July. With the citizenship curriculum coming into full effect for secondary schools in September, the focus for the conference will be on the key role that 'communities of enquiry' could play in enabling teachers and students to 'own' that part of the curriculum. Will Ord, a former Head of RE, and now a freelance specialist in citizenship, will be the core presenter, along with Robert Fisher, who will bring his latest perspective on thinking skills in relation to the curriculum. Delegates will be welcome from primary as well as secondary levels, and workshops will be led by a range of teachers who use the Philosophy for Children approach in their practice. For those interested in following up the day, it will be possible to do one further day's training to qualify for the SAPERE Level 1 certificate in philosophical enquiry.

Literacy hour inhibits thinking

The literacy hour may not be a good format for developing children's oral work and thinking skills.

Infant teachers, anxious to 'cover the ground' do not pose enough challenging questions – the sort that develop higher-order thinking. The result is that classroom discussion is limited.

Researchers from the universities of Durham, Cambridge and Leicester found that only 10 per cent of children's oral contributions to the literacy hour are longer than three words and only 5 per cent are longer than five words.

'In an educational climate dominated by monitoring, inspection and test results, teaching for understanding was regarded as an optional extra, permissible once the learning objectives had been met,' the researchers said. Yet the development of oral ability and thinking skills are two of the national literacy strategy's main objectives for primary pupils.

The strategy demands that the literacy hour should be 'well-paced with a sense of urgency'. But, as Linda Hargreaves of Cambridge University and her colleagues point out in the *Cambridge Journal of Education*, this does not encourage high-quality oral work and extended contributions by pupils.

Teachers told the researchers that they felt frustrated and confused by the strategy's conflicting demands. They knew that by maintaining the pace of lessons they were leaving little time for children to develop and expand their own ideas.

Dr Hargreaves and her colleagues reported that uninterrupted 'interactions' of more than 25 seconds between teachers and one child or small group had declined dramatically since the introduction of the literacy hour.

In 1996 these dialogues made up around a quarter of the communication between pupils and teachers during KS2 English lessons. But during the literacy hour this type of

communication has dwindled to only 5 per cent at KS2 and 2 per cent at KS1.

Class size also affects the quality of communication. In classes of fewer than 19 children, the researchers found that the incidence of sustained discussion between teacher and pupils more than quadrupled.



However, the study suggests that the use of video may help teachers to reflect on their classroom practice and focus on the quality of oral work during the literacy hour. When teachers watched and analysed their own lessons, they often realised that their pupils had already met most of the curriculum targets, so they felt freer to allow children time to reflect and respond.

Pedagogical Dilemmas in the National Literacy Strategy: primary teachers' perceptions, reflections and classroom behaviour, by Eve English, University of Durham, Linda Hargreaves, University of Cambridge, Jane Hislam, University of Leicester. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol 32, No 1, 2002.