Inquiry Curriculum context planning

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<th>Title: Fairy Tale Problem-Solvers</th>
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<td>The Problem-Solvers are a team of experts experienced in solving difficult problems, through active listening, careful negotiation and creative thinking. They are also known for being fair and for being willing to work with anyone, regardless of past history.</td>
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<td>Fairy tales and traditional stories follow a familiar narrative arc (see pic.1 in appendix). There is a character (essentially good), that has a problem (often with an evil character), which they manage to solve (after a bit of a struggle) and (as a consequence) become happier, for example, Red Riding Hood, Rupunzel, or The Three Little Pigs.</td>
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<td>The Problem-Solvers are a team of experts who solve problems, none too big or too small, through careful listening, thorough planning, and creative thinking. Each fairy tale or traditional story introduces a new client (for example, Red Riding Hood) and a new commission (getting her safely through the woods). Sometimes it might introduce more than one client/commission (a hungry wolf who hasn’t eaten in days).</td>
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<td>The Problem-Solvers take on each new client/commission as they come, helping each new client in any way they can that doesn’t injure, hurt or upset others. Sometimes this can be a difficult business as different characters often see things in different ways, for example Cinderella and her <em>ugly</em> sisters. When this happens the Problem-Solvers have to work hard to understand their different points of view and strive to resolve their differences in ways that will satisfy both parties.</td>
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**Note:** This context is designed for young children EY, Reception. It allows for short inquiries within an ongoing narrative. It works well, both as a one-off lesson, and, as a series of connected lessons. It is important to mention that the problems encountered by the team don’t have to be exclusively from fairy tales or traditional stories but can involve a problem from any appropriate story or social context (see the hungry caterpillar scenario below). |
| In a sense, problem-solving is the genesis of all mantle of the expert inquiries, since in using the approach the students are always operating, within the imaginary context, as a responsible team engaged in solving one problem or another. |
Main Curriculum areas:
• Personal, social and emotional development
• Communication, language and literacy
• Problem solving, reasoning
• Knowledge and understanding of the world
• Creative Development

Overview:
Author: Tim Taylor
Theme: Fairy Tale Problem-Solvers
Age Range: EY/KS1
Main Curriculum Focus: Personal, social and emotional development; Communication, language and literacy; Problem solving, reasoning; Knowledge and understanding of the world; Creative Development
Inquiry Question:
Expert Team: Problem-Solvers
Client(s): A range of different clients from fairy tales, traditional tales and other stories
Commission: To solve a range of different problems for different characters and to help resolve different points of view.

Inquiry Questions:
Factual: What information do we need to know in order to plan and act to solve problems?
Social: How would we collaborate to solve the problems?
Cultural: What does this tale tell us about the structure of traditional/fairy tales and their cultural/social purpose?
Political: What responsibilities do we (society) have to help people in trouble?
Historical: In what ways can traditional/fairy tales tell us about how the world was different in the past (i.e. as cautionary tales to warn children about the dangers of the world)?
Critical: What is the perspective of the wolf? Are wolves ‘evil’? Isn’t the wolf just being true to his kind? What about ogres, step-mothers, witches etc?
Ethical: What is the right way to ‘deal with’ the wolf and protect the pigs and the characters from other fairy tales?
Philosophical: The characters in traditional/fairy tales are typically on binary opposite scale of good and evil. What does this really tell us about the world and aren’t real animals ethically neutral?
Spiritual: Do animals have souls? Do human beings? Is what happened to the two unfortunate little pigs (the ones that get eaten) an inevitable part of animal life?
Steps in:

1. The convention being used
2. The language of the teacher (particularly the questions)
3. The use of role and its purpose
4. The activities/tasks being done by the students (iconic, symbolic, enactive)
5. Resources
6. Short notes explaining your thinking

Resources:
- A stack of A5 paper
- Some big sheets of sugar paper
- A picture of the Three Little Pigs (no wolf) for the mother
- A meter ruler

1. Introducing the client: The children as themselves watch an adult representing someone who is very upset (AIR):
   “I’d like you to look over here, Mrs. B. is going to be someone in a story, watch her and see what she does.” The lady in the story takes a handkerchief out of her handbag and starts crying.

   It is important to go at the speed of the children at this point. This might be the first time they have seen an adult in role, some might be confused, other giggle. Usually they are just fascinated. If they do giggle (often its because its because of confusion), try: “Um, it is a bit funny. But I’m not sure Mrs Brown is doing this to make us laugh. I’ll ask her, Mrs Brown.”
   “Yes?”
   “Are you trying to make us laugh?”
   “No! This person is very upset.”
   “Oh, I see. Right then we’ll have to be careful not to laugh.”
   “She does look very upset. I wonder if we could ask her what’s the matter.”

2. The expert team: "Excuse me, you seem very upset…"
   “Its my boys... They’re all leaving home and they don’t know how to properly look after themselves.”
   As this dialogue develops, check with the children to make sure they are following and give them the chance to join in.

   After a short while, ask:
   “Oh I see, can you tell us where you are?”
   “I’ve come to see the Problem-Solvers, I’ve heard they are very good. I hope they can help me. I’m outside their office.”

   At this point tell the children you are going to ‘pause’ the story for a minute so the lady can’t hear you. Then ask the children what they’ve heard. Check to make sure they understand the idea of the problem-solvers. If they need information, ask the lady what she knows. "Excuse me, we’d like to know do they solve-problems for everyone.” “Oh, yes. They are very generous.”
   “Sorry another question, do they solve big problems and little ones?”
   Keep asking until you’re sure the children understand enough, then pause the lady again.
Steps in continued:

3. The office: The next step means ‘framing’ the children as the expert team. To do this you’ll need to invoke the team’s HQ. There are two simple conventions you can use to help with this,

- The first is to stand between the children and the AIR and slowly draw a door in the air, while saying... "If the lady is out there and the door is here, then we could be... the problem-solvers. We could try that for a while and then we might be able to help the lady with her problem. What do you think?"

- The second is to make the sign next to the door. "I guess we’ll need a sign so she know when she gets here that she’s in the right place.” Take a large piece of paper and work with the children. "Um, what should we put on the sign?” Write down the children suggestions (hopefully Problem-solvers!) and ask for their help with the spelling. Go slow. "So, that would start with a...” etc.

When finished draw a screw head in each corner of the paper, “Ok. That looks about right. Now we’re going to need to screw into the wall. Have you got your screw-drivers? Mine’s here.” Reach behind a pick up an imaginary screw-driver. Wait and see what the children do. Then all screw the sign up in the air, not on the paper otherwise only those near the paper can do the work. Once finished pick up the paper sign and stick it on the wall using blu-tak.

‘Invoking’ or creating, with the children, the offices of the problem-solvers is very important, since it helps ‘frame’ the children in their new role. Remember, they are not role-playing or pretending to be people working in an office, what they are doing is beginning the process of representing a point-of-view. The point-of-view of a team of people who want to help others and have the expertise to do it.

Depending on the amount of time you have and/or want to spend on this you can either stop with the sign or work with the children to create their offices by moving chairs and tables around, and by drawing computers and phones etc. As you work, ask them questions like, "Where shall we meet the lady when she comes in? She seems very upset, I wonder if a cup of tea will make her feel better. I guess we ought to have some tissues close by.”

4. The commission: When everything is prepared as Mrs Brown to knock on the door. Let the children bring her in and get her settled. "Good morning. Thank you for coming to our office. I understand you have a problem. Could you tell us about it?"

"Well it’s my boys... They’re all leaving home and they don’t know how to properly look after themselves. Well one of them does, I think he’ll be all right. But the other two, they’re not very sensible and I’m worried they are going to get hurt or get into trouble. I don’t know if you can help. I’m so worried.”

Give the children time to talk to the lady, to ask her questions and to find out more information. Give them help if they need it. Ask Mrs Brown to repeat answers (as the lady) if the children need to hear something again. As an AIR you can stop, start and rewind her as much as you like. Even pause her, like before, and talk about her if they need it.

Would you like to see a picture?” Lady reaches into her handbag and brings out a picture of the 3 Little Pigs...

The children might have some more questions in light of the new information.
Steps in continued:
5. Designing the pig’s homes: The student/Problem-solver can set about designing homes for the boys. Use the large sheets of paper. As with other steps, there is a great deal of scope here for expansion – for example making the homes from lego, wooden bricks etc. As they work they can ask Mrs Pig for details on what her boys would like in their new homes.

Once the designs are finished, bringing Mrs Pig back into to look them over. My favourite way to do this is, is to have the plans laid out on the floor and Mrs Pig walk around them, pointing and smiling. “Now lets watch her face... How does she feel now... We did that... that must mean... etc.” This can provide very effective feedback to the children and help reinforce the values they are developing.

6. The wolf
Bringing in the wolf is the next important step and needs to be done with some caution. Some of the children’s initial response to the problem might be to kill the wolf. This is understandable; in the story the wolf is evil and represents a real danger. However, a wolf in a fairy tale is a ‘metaphor’ for peril and it is important to teach children the difference between a wolf in a story and a wolf in the real world. Not, as some retellings of the story do, by emasculating the wolf, turning it to something wolves are not, but by re-interpreting the wolf’s motivations and helping the children to understand that real wolves (like all animals) are neither good nor evil. Dorothy Heathcote calls this the ‘grace element’.

It might be that the children mention the wolf during the designing of the house or earlier. If they don’t bring it up yourself, something like the following usually works well..

“Well, Mrs Pig certainly looked happy when she left. But, of course, there’s still one more problem to solve...” Slowly draw a picture of a paw (with claws) on the board. “Yes, there is still the wolf to think about.” NOTE: If they want to trap and kill the wolf, then I think the best move to go with it, but argue that before we do anything we should catch the wolf first, without hurting it. “Yes, I can understand your thinking, it is certainly a very dangerous wolf. But, we don’t want to be making any mistakes by acting too quickly. How about if we catch the wolf first, without hurting it, find out what we can, and then decide what to do?”

This will create another activity, where the children/problem-solvers design traps to catch the wolf without harming it.

7. What to do with the wolf?
You’ll need another adult in role (AIR), which could be yourself if you have no one to call on.

Ask the children/problem-solvers to lay their traps where they think the wolf might be caught. Bring all the children onto the carpet, ask them to imagine the wolf coming along, not knowing a trap is waiting and then suddenly... Bang! The wolf is caught, quite safe and unharmed. It is now in our lock up, where we can take a look at it using the CCTV camera.

AIR stands behind the chair. “We’re going to ask Mrs Brown to be the wolf now. When she sits down on the chair, she’s going to represent the wolf trapped in our lock up. We’ll be able to see her, but she won’t be able to see us. Let’s see how things are, for the wolf.”
AIR now sits down on the chair and immediately begins looking around and biting her lip. "Um, what do you make of that?" The children will probably respond with comments like she looks, scared, or unhappy, or sad etc. We have to be careful now, not to turn this into a guessing game (don’t ask – "Why do think she is scared?" A question like that is very disempowering), instead try, "we could find out what the wolf is thinking by listening to her thoughts, because it’s a story. When I touch her on the shoulder she will begin to speak her thoughts."

The AIR, continuing to look around anxiously and says, "I hope they’re not going to keep me here long, I’m really worried about my babies."

From this point on, the children/problem-solvers now have a new client and a new set of commissions, the wolf has not been turned into a vegetarian or a ‘friend’ of pigs, but a wolf-mother who needs to eat and to provide for her young - A more complex set of challenges than those of providing homes for the pigs.
Appendix: Resources & Links: