Suki is an exciting, yet demanding, program for teaching children how to make the often painful transition from speaking to writing, to encourage them to develop a poetic sensitivity and an appreciation for some main themes in the philosophy of art and even metaphysics. In what follows, I would like to indicate some of the reasons I find the program exciting—besides the fact that it can be successful in accomplishing its objectives—as well as some reasons for believing it difficult to teach. Moreover, I believe it is the most difficult in the series of readings published by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC).

For those readers who are either not familiar with Suki at all or, if they are, have not yet used the program with children, a few introductory words are necessary to appreciate what I want to say about my experiences with it. First, the program is designed in principle for children in grades 7-9. But in actual fact, and with other IAPC materials, there is quite a lot of "stretch" possible in appropriate age levels. In my own case, I have employed Suki over the last three years in working with sixth-graders, eighth-graders, and high-school seniors in the United States and with 12-14 year-old children at a workshop in England. In each instance, the children concerned related well to the text, although some changes had to be made for sixth-graders. These alterations consisted largely of substitutions of poems to eliminate the more difficult ones.

The second, the fulcrum on which the book's strategy turns, is not, as it might expect from the title, the character of Suki, but rather Harry Stottlemeier. Indeed, had such a choice not been dreadfully pedestrian, the title might well have been Harry Stottlemeier's Second Discovery or (worse yet) The Continuing Education of Harry Stottlemeier. For what happens to Harry is that he finally manages to see the world and himself in a different way and this he has to learn in order to cope with two interrelated crises. In his English class, he is to get resigned to in the experiment, he finds that his language, his English, his set of facilities, Harry is difficulty very typical of many youngsters, and certainly those whom I have taught over the last three years. The first of these crisis is apparent in Harry's reaction to the first assignment, a essay, "the character of Suki," Newberry, sets in. Harry "stared at the board unbelievably. He'd never had an assignment before that had anything to do with writing fiction or poetry. Yet here, suddenly, was this terrifying and incomparable assignment. "I can't write," "the thought beat in his mind like a drum." Harry's second pitfall is that he cannot relate well to poetry or feelings generally—except for fear and anger at being forced to write about a subject in which he does not seem to know much.

When, for example, Suki wants to share with him the pleasure of Robert Frost's poem, "Tree at My Window," Harry's uncomprehending and brusque response terminated: "I know it's trees, but as for poetry."

Harry's rationalization for his inability (later on, he even convinces himself that it is a disability) is equally typical of children in his situation: "I have nothing to write about." This he means that he has not exciting experiences and thus no impetus to write. He just goes to school, and that's it. Indeed, in one rather pathetic scene—born out of increasing desperation at having no ideas for a composition assignment—he even takes to hanging around the fire station in a vain effort to vicariously absorb some real adventures. (The fireman to whom Harry mistakenly attributes a life of intrigue and adventure is just as eager to engage in a dialogue cut short when the alarm signals a fire at, of all the adventurously boring, and ironic places for Harry, the high school, the school's gymnasium.)

If Harry's self-perception and rationalization are typical of many youngsters and young adults—as I believe they are—what can be done to break down these barriers? Exactly what happens to Suki? Mr. Newberry, I believe, does not expound a set of values for Harry to accept such as the values in the story. He is a partially exact, but more broad, and the like, in working with Suki, I can testify from my own experience that it is to overwhelm this crucial part of the program. Rather, Mr. Newberry has written the story as a means of giving children this essential practical. Part of the reason why can fall into such a trap is that it is more difficult, and some may be overcome by a desire not to alienate children—especially in the beginning of the program.

But, I submit, it is only on the basis of such practice that children can finally achieve an insight into the concept of poetry as liberation, a freedom of the spirit, which forms the main theme of Chapter 4 and on. [Hereafter, chapters and their sub-sections will be abbreviated as say, 4.6.] The most effective way to make sure children get enough practice in writing is to constantly repair to the teacher's manual, Writing How and Why, for a gold mine of discussion questions and exercises.

(3) Teachers of Suki should also be sensitive to what is too easy to miss the first time through the book, namely that the theme of freedom and constraint permeates many of the episodes, not the least of which is Harry's struggle to write. It is also central to the discussion of dating relationships in 4.6.)

The other half of Suki's strategy is dealing with Harry and similarly situated children is to try to get them to pay closer attention to what they see and then bring that enriched vision to poetic expression. Much of the theoretical foundation for Suki lies in...
John Dewey's "Art as Experience" which maintained, among other things, that there is a fundamental continuity between aesthetic and moral experience. He meant that aesthetic experience is somehow already immanent in non-aesthetic experience and must be pried out. And that is what Mr. Newbery and Sukhi attempt for Harry. He needs to re-sew the roof. The question is whether he will re-sew the roof or whether he will accept the mountains granted for. He needs to pay attention to, and to try to express, what is really happening rather than merely describing a certain set of data.

Thus in the following reaction to Frost's "Tree at My Window," Harry shows himself plainly insensitive to the difference between description and expression. Sukhi asks him, p. 10:

"I don't know. I guess I see what it's getting at — guy has a tree outside his window. But what's all that stuff about outer and inner weather?"  

When Sukhi tries to explain certain similarities between trees and people, Harry is clearly at sea:

"Sukhi, you've got a tree outside your window; that's a fact. But when you talk about it, it's got a head of some kind — that's just fiction!"

But how can children be taught to pay closer attention to what they experience? And how can they be encouraged to bring their enhanced vision to expression? Sukhi attempts to do this in part through the use of poems and dramatic scenes rich in sensuously immediate images. In terms of the poems, it is no accident that the very first one Mr. Newbery sets the children to analyze is a vividly observed and described poem, "The Kingdom of the Fishes" (which children will later "catch fire"") by Gerard Manley Hopkins. The latter's famous line, "There lives the deepest fresh deep down things" could well express in Naumov's goal the entire Sukhi program, and in terms of the dramatic episode, the book abounds in concrete, vivid images to stimulate the poet in us all. For example, in the text at S, "—which is surely one of the best pieces of writing all in the IAPC materials — Sukhi pays her first visit to her grandparents' farm. Two brief passages from her experiences there (p. 57, 58) are, in my opinion, deeply illuminative of the influence of Hopkins and of the power of the writing in Sukhi:

Finally, they wound their way back up the path to the house. In the living room, the great stone fireplace had been lit, and Sukhi, Anne and Kio stood warming themselves by the flames. A pleasant smell, pungent and individual. They were hungry, and the food, when it came, was so delicious they almost couldn't recognize it. The bread, the milk, the eggs, the butter, the vegetables — everything, when transformed through her mind, the pump, the weaving of broken branches, the knitting of individual spits. They were hungry, and the food, when it came, was so delicious they almost couldn't recognize it.

Sukhi watched the flames in the fireplace. In her imagnition she saw the great barn abaka, and her grandmother reaming her grandmother. "Fire," she told herself. "The industrial production of "lightbulb" food can blunt any appreciation for "the real thing" (just Coca-Cola). As another instance, Robert Flisgern observes in Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance how factories travelling the highways in theircontainer-trailers are spraying in the air, in our heads and in the bracing autumn air, the soft turf of the meadow.

"Earth, air, fire and water," she thought.

Does this simple description compare well with more overaged and abstract accounts of our fundamental unity with nature?  

But Sukhi also abounds in less obvious ways with vivid sensory images which are all too easy for first-time readers and teachers
John Dewey’s Art as Experience which maintained, among other things, that there is a fundamental continuity between aesthetic and social life, may well have been the reason that aesthetic experience is somehow already immanent in non-aesthetic experience and must be pieced out. And that in what Mr. Newbery and Suki attempt for Harry. He needs to resee the world with his own eyes. The new aesthetic awareness that Mrs. Newbery has given him to them for granted. He needs to pay attention to, and try to express, what is really happening rather than merely describing a certain set of data.

Thus in the following reaction to Frost’s “Tree at My Window,” Harry shows himself plainly insensitive to the difference between description and expression. Suki asks him, p. 10: “Do you know? I don’t know. I can’t see what it is getting — guy has a tree outside his window. But what’s all that stuff about outer and inner weather?”

When Suki tries to explain certain similarities between trees and people, Harry is clearly at sea: “Suki, you’ve got a tree outside your window: that’s a fact. But when you talk as though it’s got a head of some kind — that’s just fiction!”

But how can children be taught to pay closer attention to what they experience? And how can they be encouraged to bring their enhanced vision to expression? Suki attempts to do this in part through the use of poems and dramatic scene rich in emotionally immediate images. In terms of the poems, it is no accident that the very first one Mr. Newbery sets the children to analyze is a vivid, wistful, and somewhat morbid one (the Kingfishers catch fire . . .) by Gerard Manley Hopkins. The latter’s famous line, “There lives the deepest freshness deep down things” could well express in microcosm the goal of the entire Suki program. And in terms of the dramatic episode, the book abounds in concrete, vivid images to stimulate the poet in us all. For example, in the text at 5, p. 5—where is one of the best pieces of writing in all the IAPC material — Suki pays her first visit to her grandparents’ farm. Two brief passages from her experiences there (pp. 57, 58) are, in my opinion, deeply illuminative of the influence of Hopkins and of the power of the writing in Suki:

Finally, they wound their way back up the path to the house. In the living room, the great stone fireplace had been lit, and Suki, and Ku and Ku and Ku and Ku and Ku and Ku were warming themselves in front of it, and each other, in individual spots. They were hungry, and the food, when it came, was so delicious they almost couldn’t recognize it.

The bread, the milk, the eggs, the butter, the vegetables — everything was so beautifully fresh in its individual aspects, the blazing autumn air, the soft turf of the meadow.

“Kirth, air, fire, and water,” she thought. Does this simple description compare well with more overarched and abstract accounts of our fundamental unity with nature?

But Suki also abounds in less obvious ways with vivid sensory images which are all too easy for first-time readers and teachers alike to miss. There is (1) the episode (2, 24) in which Harry and Suki sit by Betthamer’s Brook, a name apparently not intended to inspire non-registered readers, instead of the pedestrian fact that the sun is shining. There are (2) a number of references to Suki’s father’s (Mr. Toog) furniture shop (see, for instance, 4, 113; and 10, 44) in which the author inquires into and comments on the art and the processes associated with creating such things. Few furniture shops would use for chair seats, the sounds of many different kinds of woods, and the various of which the ordinary household looks to make its furniture. (It’s the paint, of course, that these things are “brush, distemper, and intense.”) There is also (3) the culmination of Suki’s relationship with Harry’s (10, 47) in which they are awakened to the excitement of young love, the care of passage as old as humanity and yet never old enough. Do you know what has been taken from the episode, but more often — at least in my experience — intra-class social relationships are such that any unnecessary writing are probably excuses.

Several kinds of assignments could be made at this point, but one of the best is a poem about what it feels like to first fall in love. Some of these can be read aloud, since they are anonymous, and discussed by the class. (This is one exercise that never fails to elicit quite a bit of laughter.) Other paragraphs could be assigned for the students to complete on their own efforts with Gwendolyn Brooks’ superb poem, “To Be in Love” (Writing: How and Why, p. 367), in which she expresses her experiences as being “the beautiful half of a golden thing.”

After being sensitized to the concrete, vivid image in Suki, students should be encouraged to try their hands at writing poems about very ordinary, commonly present objects in their everyday experience, and to share the results with the class, being advised, the better, for the aim to pay more attention to them and see them with an eye for poetic expression.

Thus far, I have been concerned to praise Suki, and although, I do not now want to bury it, no discussion of the program would be complete without mentioning the difficulties one is apt to encounter in teaching it at least in the United States. Why is it, really, that so many children find writing inherently difficult, and find it even more difficult toatch that archroche to shut that of developing a sensitivity to poetry? There are at least three main social causes, three very large and complex obstacles to the success of Suki which originate outside the space and time of the classroom. Although each of these has already elicited many lengthy books by philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and others, here the spaces and space limitations here permit only the briefest reference.

The first of these causes consists in a variegated and pervasive mediation of the senses which makes it quite difficult for many children to perceive their own worlds, distinctly for the simple reason that the sensations referred to above. Many children today, particularly in urban centers, have their contact with nature mediated in various ways, and so are cut off (dissociated) from it. For example, the one we perceived at school as a distinct thing of “infrastructure” for which there are these proper techniques, and that where is it is being considered. Poetry and creative expression rarely fall within this category. Along with encouraging children to pay more attention to what they see and hear and feel and think — we need to teach them that really is (4) time for everything under heaven, including a reading that is not speeding, but rather reflective and meditative. I believe, incidentally, that CAlt is not only opposed to this task, but that much more imaginative uses could be made of computer to encourage children’s creative expression.

The third main obstacle which I have encountered in teaching Suki also has to do with the central theme of freedom and constraint. It is that many children, chiefly boys, have been (and continue to be) conditioned to the idea that having some control over the environment, of poetic sensitivity, an appreciation for art, and feelings generally. Here again, I think, Harry Stuttlemire is quite typical. Whether it’s Suki’s observation that some teachers and graduate students in my workshops have concluded — is another matter. Certainly on the surface, Suki looks to be a stereotype of an aesthetically gifted, Oriental female, while Harry is quintessential— very well, something like, Western, technocratic, logical and insensitive. But even if both characters were stereotypes, which I do not believe, they would not be entirely false. One could only take the case of Harry, many, if not most, boys in classes in which I have used Suki have been cut off from poetry and more sensitive feelings because of the sexist role models in which they have been cast. The roles, of course, are formed along both these dimensions for girls, while boys are good managers. Girls should be warm and sensitive and delicate (read: feminine), whereas boys should be tough and brave (Teens can be becoming in a girl or woman, but are inconsistent with masculinity). Whereas girls ought to develop their obvious “natural” talents for poetry, art, music, and literature, boys have equally “natural” endowments for “intellectual” subjects such as science and mathematics; they are assumed to know everything in many senses of that overworked word (e.g., the “hard” versus the “soft” sciences). In Suki, at p. 48, Suki is helping Harry with his poetry while he is helping her with her math. Only by being so admired in order to be less helpful than the actual was. In short, girls ought to develop their feelings, while boys ought to suppress them. The unhappy persistence of these sexist and mutually destructive stereotypes — never anywhere explicitly written down, but everywhere presupposed and absorbed like something in the air — coupled with a basic anti-intellectual and even philistine tenor to our society, at least as far as the arts and humanities are concerned, create a lot of resistance on the part of many boys to getting involved with poetry at all. They especially need to see poetry as themselves as something for them — for their satisfaction and for their peace. Certainly children are affected by this, for the demands of successful social adaptation find their way into the very bone and marrow of the school curriculum. For instance, outside school, vast majorities of children are expected to function in a society that is so different from the one they are raised in, that they consistently feel out of place and at a distance. Here, too, Suki and Toog provide an example where the child can discover powers of expression not before known or suspected.

Some popular music, such as songs by Dylan or Simon and Garfunkel, can be used to encourage poetic expression — poetry that is highly personal, that is not expected to be taken too seriously, that is meant to be understood and appreciated by others. Often there is a cheapness or even an air of triviality in the sort of music that is popular in society today — we need to teach them that really is (4) time for everything under heaven, including a reading that is not speeding, but rather reflective and meditative. I believe, incidentally, that CAlt is not only opposed to this task, but that much more imaginative uses could be made of computer to encourage children’s creative expression.

The second main cause of resistance in particular to the Suki program is tightly related to the first. It is the frustrating pace at which we live, particularly in the United States. We inhabit a highly complex, technological, industrial society in which we insist upon children to function at very high speeds. Rape. Certainly children are affected by this, and the demands of successful social adaptation find their way into the very bone and marrow of the school curriculum. For instance, outside school, vast majorities of children are expected to function in a society that is so different from the one they are raised in, that they consistently feel out of place and at a distance. Here, too, Suki and Toog provide an example where the child can discover powers of expression not before known or suspected.

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The second main cause of resistance in particular to the Suki program is tightly related to the first. It is the frustrating pace at which we live, particularly in the United States. We inhabit a highly complex, technological, industrial society in which we insist upon children to function at very high speeds. These happen, and the outside world is so changing in our way of existence, and we are as yet not from the nature they seek to enjoy. Yet again, consider all the ways that children’s experiences are mediated electronically — chiefly through television — such that an extract that media-
Does “Philosophy for Children” Equal “Philosophy in the Classroom”?

1. I would like to start with a clarification of the title. The phrase “Philosophy for Children” is used here in the same meaning it has within the I.A.P.C. terminology, i.e. the name of the program prepared by the I.A.P.C. The phrase “Philosophy in the Classroom” is used here in the same meaning it has in the title of the book by this name written by Prof. Lipman and Dr. Sharp, i.e. as indicating the I.A.P.C. program as taught in the existing system of compulsory education (c.e.). There is no real difference in the meaning of these two phrases as used now by the I.A.P.C. people. By asking the question about their relationship I want to raise the possibility that the identification of these two phrases is not a necessary one; furthermore, that it is a mistaken identification.

In other words, I will give two answers to the question expressed by the title. The first, quite weak and almost trivial: “No,” it shouldn’t necessarily be the case.” The second, strong and unfortunately not trivial: “No! it necessarily shouldn’t be the case.” Both answers fall outside the paradigm which guides the activities of all those who follow the I.A.P.C. program. The second sharply contradicts it. The people who have succeeded to obtain the huge achievement of developing and implementing the program, have done it only in the framework of the existing c.e. It seems that they have never seriously considered the implementation of the program outside this framework.

This attitude is easy to understand in a reality in which “learning” and “being educated” are automatically understood as “going to school.” But understanding the motive does not mean justifying its results. I will argue that accepting unquestionably the dominant paradigm, causes the I.A.P.C. people to ignore the huge potential of their program.

Although my argument falls outside the domain of the so natural and dominant paradigm, I hope that the people who implement a program appealing to critical attitude and intellectual openness will apply the same attitude in examining one of the basic presuppositions of their program. I hope that they will (at least) seriously consider my argument, and maybe even start a process of reevaluation of the relationship between the program and c.e. Such a process, whatever its specific results may be, will benefit education in general and the program in particular.

2. The first answer I want to defend is that the I.A.P.C. program shouldn’t be implemented only within c.e. This is almost a trivial, technical point which amounts to asking why not try other patterns of implementation? For example, an adaptation of the material into a television series, video tapes, records, children’s books or games (in this last case I have in mind mainly some of the exercises) or a combination of several of these media — all of which would be sold in the free market without any connection to c.e.

The argument in favor of this suggestion is very simple and can be summarized in two words: “Why not”? That is to say why not add additional ways of propagating the program and its message? This question becomes even more meaningful when one realizes that the number of children who can be reached by some of these ways, if successful, is much larger than the number reached now in the slow way of convincing one principal after another.

One could raise here the counterargument that Philosophy (or rational discussion) is a serious business that cannot be done with the help of games or t.v. series. My reaction: to a certain extent this is a valid claim. The only possible way to do philosophy is by dialogue. All the other ways can serve only as "provocateurs" or auxiliaries. But from this point of view the written stories, developed now by the I.A.P.C., do not differ from a t.v. movie. Reading them is not doing philosophy, but one hopes that the reading will provoke philosophical dialogue.

3. My second claim is much stronger: The I.A.P.C. program will never be successfully implemented within c.e., and therefore should be tried mostly outside it.

The reason is quite simple. The existing school system is based on compulsory curriculum which the students are compelled to study and the teachers are compelled to teach. Another compulsion which is inherent to the system is, of course, compulsory attendance. No efficient learning can take place under compulsion since in such cases one "learns" mainly because of fear and the desire to please the teachers (such claims have been clarified and defended by people like Holt and Ellich; I will not elaborate on them here).

Nevertheless there is a sense in which one can compel a teacher to compel a pupil to successfully learn a mathematical equation or a historical fact. The teacher will be quite quickly "burned out," the pupil will probably hate mathematics or history (or just relate to them as "a hore") the rest of his life, but learning although not "efficient learning") can be said to have taken place. The pupil will remember the equation, or the historical fact, for (probably short) while.

But philosophy (as distinguished from the history of philosophy) is unique from the point of view that while "teaching" it no facts or equations should be made the object of memorizing. Here (to paraphrase Melchian) the method is the message.

When compelled to study mathematics or history the student can be said to have learned them although he did not get the spirit of these disciplines. He learned the facts. It is a case of learning, although not of efficient learning. But in philosophy there are no facts; there is only a method. The philosophical method is the method of independent inquiry, based on curiosity and the will to follow it, on the basis of independent, critical, rational thought. Nobody can compel any student to be curious about a certain subject, nor to have the will to examine it critical-by, twice (or even) a week at a set hour.

In a system which is wholly based on discrediting the child's own curiosity and independent thought, and therefore on compulsion and manipulatory methods (tests, contests, grades etc...) there is very little chance that real philosophy, which stems from curiosity