What is Generalizable in the Pedagogy of Philosophy for Children?

In order to find what is generalizable in the pedagogy of Philosophy for Children, an analysis of its major components will begin the exploration. After breaking down Philosophy for Children into its major components, the text and the discussion, an explanation of the effectiveness of the "story" will be presented, followed by a discussion of some of the discussion techniques. This analysis will be used as the basis for a comparison to the Great Book discussion method. The final portion of the paper will present a new application of the pedagogy of Philosophy for Children, *i.e.*, the case of the short stories in conjunction with a textbook in a college course in "Healthy Personality."

Analysis of Philosophy For Children

Philosophy for Children has two major components — the novel and the discussion. The novel is the most significant innovation in the teaching method of Philosophy for Children. According to Lipman *et al, (Philosophy in the Classroom,* 1980), the novels are written to be captivating and beguiling, designed to liberate the literary and illustrative powers of the children and to stimulate their thinking. This is accomplished by two major approaches: 1) providing models for feeling, thinking, problem solving and discussion, and 2) presenting content which is intrinsically meaningful. Chapter one of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* provides an excellent example of the kind of modeling; Harry discovers a problem and works (thinks) toward a solution. Perhaps the less easily seen demonstration of Philosophy for Children is its intrinsic meaning. To identify the intrinsic meaning in Philosophy for Children it is helpful to define "intrinsic meaning" in Lipman's terms. Meaning emerges from the perception of whole-part relationships as well as from means-ends relationships (Lipman *et al,* 1980 pp. 8&9). What does this mean in a story? If something is to have meaning for me, the meaning will always be in context. Isolated facts have no meaning. Again, to refer to Chapter I of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, Harry's problem, *i.e.*, the if-then sentences, have meaning because of Harry's daydreaming, his attempt to save face by quick thinking, his relationship with Lisa and many other relationships. The part, the if-then sentence, has meaning for Harry and for the reader because it is within a whole — Harry's lived experience. Likewise, the solution to the problem is one which uses a mean, *i.e.*, an if-then sentence, to reach an end, *i.e.*, the solution to a problem (why was Harry's answer incorrect?).

The above discussion should clarify the use of the novel from Lipman's perspective, but there is another dimension to the explanation of the effectiveness of the story method. Philip Phenix says that one important way in which we learn is through engagement, especially the type of engagement which occurs in literature. In literature we can find "direct insight into other beings (or oneself) as concrete wholes existing in relationships." (Phenix, 1964, p. 193). This statement confirms the orientation to meaning discussed in *Philosophy in the Classroom* as being whole-part relationships but extends the point to include "direct insight." This type of meaning Phenix calls synnoetic meaning. Synnoetic meaning is concrete rather than abstract.

Michael Polonyi points to this basic concreteness in his discussion of the personal element in all knowledge. He distinguishes between "explicit knowledge" such as occurs in the abstract formulation of science and even of everyday descriptive discourse, and "tacit knowledge," which is unformulated and is the basis for making sense of experience, *i.e.*, for "understanding." "The structure of tacit knowing" says Polonyi

> " . . . is a process of *comprehending*: a grasping of disjointed parts into a comprehensive whole . . ." According to the Theory of Personal Knowledge, all meaning lies in the comprehension of a set of particulars in terms of a coherent entity — a comprehension which is a personal act that can never be replaced by a formal operation. (Phenix, 1964, p. 195) (Phenix is quoting Polonyi in *Personal Knowledge* and *The Study of Man*).

Phenix's discussion of synnoetic knowledge is not different from Lipman's use of the novel for the presentation of philosophic ideas, but it ties together the importance of whole-part, means-ends relationships with the need for self-discovery. By examining the lives of people in a fictional setting, one is drawn to understand the persons in the story and it is the story as well as the characters in the story which make the educational process work. It is the richness of the relationships, the inner connection of people, ideas and events that attracts and holds the students' attention. It is not "school: it is life, that attracts the students." As Lipman states, "the text book should be an adventure filled with discovery . . ." (p. 9).

The story is a vital part of Philosophy for Children, but it is only the first part. Reflection is the second element. As John Dewey states, "Experience is not always instructive." The observation is intended to bring to the reader's mind the importance of reflection in learning from experience. We learn not from experience but from reflecting on that experience. This need for reflection is important if the experience is our own or if it is vicarious. Perhaps it is even more important for vicarious experience.

We may be drawn to understand an issue, problem or incident because of the texture of its presentation which can pull us into the story and allow us to experience with its characters. However, to understand in an articulate way what is usually understood only in a tacit way, we must reflect on the situation. One of the most effective ways to reflect is via the "community of scholars" discussion which is one of the goals of Philosophy for Children. In a "community of scholars," students discuss leading ideas from the reading. They do not, however, engage in "shared ignorance" or what adults might call "telling war stories."

Shared inquiry uses the text as its springboard, and allows students to use their own experiences and values, not as the center of the discussion, but rather as a backdrop for a more scholarly discussion. This discussion is based on the use and the development of the basic tools of philosophy, *i.e.*, cause and effect, ambiguity and vagueness, formal and "common sense" logic, *etc.*

This discussion is furthered by the complex role which the story plays in the discussion. The story is what grabs the students' attention. It provides the bridge between their own thoughts, doubts and concerns. It provides the students with the synnoetic experience. It allows the students to relate to the character in the story in a subject-to-subject manner, to be aware of the issues on an intermediate level, and to see how what is happening to the characters in the story is also similar to what is happening to them. Here lies the key to the effectiveness of the method. This is the powerful pedagogic one-two punch of philosophy for children. It attracts students by its personal stories and allows them to discuss the issue in an objective way while using the tools of philosophic thinking.

Analysis of Great Books

Great Books have a similar punch and for somewhat similar reasons. Stories (usually short stories) are selected, rather than written for the series. "Each reading has been chosen for three reasons: we believe you will enjoy it; we believe it has more meanings than any reader is likely to find on his or her own; and we believe that discussion of these meanings can affect the way you look at yourself, other people, and the world." (Elements of Shared Inquiry in Series 7, Vol. 1 Junior Great Book p. 111). By looking at the first reason for selection we find enjoyment synonymous with synnoetic meaning. This conclusion is drawn from the way in which students are asked to "enjoy" the story. Enjoyment is built on interpreting the author's meaning. Asking questions like: "I wonder what the author means by that?," "Why does the character act this way?," "What does this word mean in this context?"

In dealing with reason two for the selection of the reading, one must move away from the story and toward a discussion. The discussion is important because no one reader will be able to draw out all of the meaning of the story. The meanings are found in the selection and your interpretation must have textual support. The seeking of textual support for various interpretations is the strength and vitality of the Great Book discussion. In seeking support for one's interpretation by using the author's own words, the participants are asked to go beyond their personal experience and values and look to those presented by the author. Importantly, they are not asked to ignore or deny their own feelings and values, but to support their understanding of them by finding textual support for their application. Many of the selections will elicit strong emotion, but the discussion centers not on the emotions but uses the emotion to lead to meanings.

The last reason for selection points to the application of the technique beyond a Great Books discussion. It states that you will increase your ways of looking at the world. This is one of the apparent weaknesses of the method in that there are no specific ways which are suggested to increase one's perspective. However, one tool is provided. Students, during the course of one series of stories, are gradually taught first to identify interpretive questions and then to ask them. By learning to ask interpretive questions, one increases perspective on one's self, others and the world. world.

Great Book discussions are somewhat similar, though different. The difference is one of degrees and not of kind. A content-rich story is the center of a Great Book discussion. The discussion focuses around an interpretive question; a question, the answers to which, will bring out the multiple meanings of the story. In leading the discussion, the instructor entertains personal opinion and values discussion, but only in a limited way and always with an eye to understanding the meaning of the novel, short story or essay. The meaning of the story must be gained from the text, not from the imagination or life experience of the discussants.

The search for meaning in a Great Books discussion is not unlike the search for leading ideas in Philosophy for Children. The major difference is that leading ideas are largely or most often viewed as separate items, each to be considered in turn. Once a leading idea has been identified, it is to some degree no longer considered contextually. A Great Book answer to a question about the "meaning" for the story must be defended against competing ideas by using the text of the story for support. This method helps students to more carefully analyze the text and to understand relationships among ideas, issues and characters in the stories. A Great Books discussion ends when the multiple meanings of the story have been exhausted. A Philosophy for Children discussion begins when the leading ideas have been identified.

The difference points to the major strength of Philosophy for Children — the application of philosophic tools to the solution of problems presented in the story and those found in the world. While both Philosophy for Children and the Great Book method encourage individual "thinking styles," only Philosophy for Children insists "that each child's thought be as clear, consistent, and comprehensive as possible so long as the *content* of the child's thought is not compromised." (Lipman *et al,* 1980, p. 89). This goal is aided by asking philosophical questions:

What reasons do you have for saying that?
Why do you agree (or disagree) on that point?
What follows from what you just said?
Are you sure you're not contradicting yourself?
What alternatives are there to such a formulation?
(Lipman *et al,* 1980, p. 112)

Application to Psychology

To apply these ideas to a college freshman psychology class, the author has selected a series of short stories, one per chapter. The short stories were selected both for their interest and their content. After spending considerable time discussing the psychological content from the text, students read the short story which accompanies the chapter. An in-

class discussion begins using the Great Books method, *i.e.*, an interpretive question to uncover the multiple meanings of the story. This is followed by an attempt to find the leading ideas from the short story. Leading ideas in this case are ideas which illustrate concepts discussed in the chapter of the psychology text book.

The discussion continues by asking students to ask critical questions of the short story using concepts developed in the psychology text and raising critical issues of the text by citing examples from the short story. It is this critical exchange which greatly enriches the course.

The dynamics of using literature in a psychology class are best expressed as follows:

> The artistic imagination is a magnifying mirror in which I may recognize myself if I only dare to look. I have to be brave to do so, for what I see is not always pleasing; at times it may evoke dread and terror. Unconsciously, I may be so fearful of self-discovery and its concomitant agony that I remain complacently unaware of the theme of a novel or drama in spite of my conscious desire to discover it. I may need to be prepared for the pain and splendor of my baptism of self-discovery. Psychology and Literature may be partners in this revelation.
>
> (vonKaam & Healy, 1967-82, pp. 43 & 44)

After using this approach for 2½ years, it appears that students are able to better understand the psychological content because it becomes less abstract. Additionally, they learn to appreciate that even though the content may be stated in simple and straightforward ways, in practice it is complex and multidimensional.

Summary

In summary, what is generalizable about the methodology of Philosophy for Children is the use of the narrative to attract the interest of students, the pulling of leading ideas from the narrative and the application of conceptual tools to the understanding of those ideas. Perhaps this analysis is based on an overgeneralization of the methods, but it is hoped that it might provide the basis for further exploration in an attempt to better teach Philosophy for Children and also to extend what is transferable to the teaching of other subject matter. The author is confident that his training in and teaching of Philosophy for Children has enhanced his abilities in teaching psychology.

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