A Bit More On Generalizing Philosophy For Children

Richard Morehouse has identified two crucial areas, central to the pedagogical core of Philosophy for Children (P4C). These, he claims enable techniques associated with P4C to be genralized to other contexts. After Lipman, he reminds us that the power of the P4C curriculum is found, first in the novels which are written to be "capitivating and beguiling, designed to liberate the literary and illustrative powers of the children and to stimulate their thinking."[1] This philosophical 'liberation' is both enabled by and enables the child's insight into the individual (or themselves) as 'concrete wholes existing in relationships.' [1] The reading of the novels is the basis for the other major program component, the discussion that prompts the 'reflection on that experience,' 'the pulling of leading ideas from the narrative and the application of conceptual tools to the understanding of those ideas.'[1] The ideas that constitute the content of the P4C program are drawn from the philosophical texts and are applied to the text in the discussion. These ideas include the 'basic tools of philosophy.'[1]

Professor Morehouse has, undoubtedly, chosen the most central and characteristic aspects of the P4C program. But the point of his paper is to do more than identify these crucial factors; rather it is to show how these factors can be utilized within a freshman college psychology course through the use of a "Great Books" program. I have no argument with Professor Morehouse's use of non-P4C materials within a context that utilizes P4C techniques. I take a similar approach in dealing with the problems peculiar to the secondary school setting. This paper attempts to exhibit some of my solutions and also serves as a reminder that there is more to the P4C curriculum than is apparent from Morehouse's discussion: more to the aspects of the program that he discusses and more to the program than he identifies.

I

In "Teaching Ethics in Secondary School,"[2] I discussed factors in a particular educational setting that worked against the acceptability of the P4C program as the vehicle for an ethics curriculum with philosophical goals. In particular I mentioned that both students and faculty found the materials (Lisa and Mark) unacceptable due to the standards for course readings implicit in their ordinary curricula. I believe that this problem is not limited to the school setting that I discussed, but is general in respect of secondary schools. The reason for this has to do with the relative sophistication that is demanded of secondary school teachers, based on the requirement that they be specialists in their fields. And the further factor that, generally speaking, philosophy is neither an element in the secondary school curriculum, nor an aspect of the teacher's professional training. So, for example, if we take a high school English teacher, one who is a fine teacher and dedicated to the development of new professional skills, and induce her to include a philosophical curriculum in her repertoire, she is certain to demand that the curriculum, as a minimum, satisfy the high standards that she would apply to any curricular offering within her field. Whence, as far as an English-based context is concerned the plausibility of an approach similar to that found in "Great Books." But there is a problem here.

Morehouse mentions Lipman's observation that the P4C matierials provide a 'model for feeling, thinking, problem solving and discussion.' (p. 25) This creates a real problem when using non-P4C material, such as literature, for a philosophically based program. For there is little if anything found in literature that offers the careful development of the sort of dialogue that Lipman's novels are a singular and extraordinary example of. Not only are Lipman's novels examples, par excellance, of dialogue, but they are dialogues written by a master philosopher for the express purpose of exhibiting philosophical dialogue and presenting philosophical problems. Similar dialogues, outlining philosophical positions and offering dialogical counters within a dramatic narrative in a contemporary setting are just not to be found anywhere else.

Lipman's novels, at their best, outline a range of philosophical alternatives through the plot development and through the characters' conversations. These conversations not only present a range of substantive philosophical positions, but equally important, present a variety of cognitive styles and strageties. Examples of this include Mark, chapter 4, part iv on the problem of law, Suki, chapter 7 part ii on experience and reality, or even Harry and the discussion of theories of mind in chapter 6. The array of concepts and attitudes present in Lipman's novels is so philosophically rich that I would maintain that they are almost impossible to replicate in any analagously unified body of literature (with the exception of classic philosophical texts.) This creates a problem, not for the philosophically sophisticated educator like Professor Morehouse, but for any attempt which like P4C attempts to introduce philosophical content into areas where standard philosophical texts are inappropriate and where there is a need to develop staff that has little or no prior philosophical training.

The philosophical dialogue that constitutes the backbone of Lipman's novels is not the only element that the P4C curriculum offers to enable the application of philosophical skills to concrete and human centered narratives. The manuals that accompany the novels play an indispensible role in furnishing educators, inexperienced with philosophical dialogue, with a device to prompt philosophical responses and to develop the process through which a philosophical community of inquiry can be formed. The manuals function on two main levels in their development of philosophical skills. The first is an ordering of philosophical concepts that grows out of the problems in the novels. The sequence of these problems, reinforced by the exercises in the manuals, form the conceptual skeleton that supports the elaboration of the philosophical issues as they are presented. The second component is an integrated set of critical thinking sills that, while valuable in and of themselves, enable the philosophical issues to be handled with increasing sophistication.

If we are to generalize these aspects of P4C, as we must if we are to mirror the success of P4C in importing philosophical content into non-standard areas, the issue transcends the identifica-

tion of basic practices. If we are to affect the thinking of non-philosophers, who are serious and well trained professionals, we must replicate the detail and care with which Lipman has constructed his program. In the second part of this paper I will sketch out my attempt to construct secondary school curriculum that satisfies the need for literature of the highest quality while retaining the pedagogic detail and sophistication that characterises P4C.

II

Two years ago the Ethical Culture Society of New York approached me with the idea of developing a coherent curriculum strategy in philosophy for secondary schools, a strategy that would do for the high school what P4C has accomplished with the elementary and middle school. Their perceived need was the result of considerations not unlike those mentioned earlier and detailed in my paper refered to above. After a period of consultation with faculty, administration and students it was decided that a three volume series would be attempted. Each volume would be constructed and taught by faculty with specializations in standard curriculum areas; we chose English, History and Science. The governing intuition was that the books would utilize material chosen for apparent continuity with standard curriculum elements. That is, the selections used would be the sorts of readings that students in the standard curriculum areas might be expected to read and that teachers would feel most comfortable using. This created problems, each unique to the area under consideration. The most obvious area was English, where we took an approach similar to 'Great Books''.

The most immediate problem was how to chose elements that were sufficiently self contained to prompt a philosophical discussion while minimizing the elaborate rehearsal of plot development that is characteristic of secondary school literature courses. The solution was based on a review of available literature. It became apparent that there is a genre of literature that seems tailor made for philosophical discussion. Every major author who has written short stories, has written at least some that can be characterized as short, short stories, stories whose length rarely exceeds five printed pages. These stories are highly unified in theme, have minimal plot structure and usually deal with some problem of clear human significance. These stories, of high literary quality, and ranging across a wide variety of periods and styles, formed the core of the reader[3]. In addition to the short, short stories we used poetry, pieces from contemporary non-fiction, selections from contemporary adolescent fiction and a few longer pieces. We included carefully selected and highly edited portions of major philosophical works. The philosophical texts chosen were picked for readability and for their clear relevance to the areas under discussion.

The availability of literature was a strong determining factor in our choice of theme for the English reader. Happily, the most frequent focus in short, short stories reflected a theme that is universally held to be the area of maximum concern to the adolescent; the development of self. The reader is divided into three main sections, each based on a question that defines a perspective through which the idea of the self is elaborated: Who Am I?, What Controls Me? and Where Am I Going? The readings for each section are varied in tone and style, but they are ordered using a strong conceptual pattern, that elaborates, in a philosophically informed way, the underlying conceptual structures needed for a non-trivial philosophical analysis.

What we hope to have done in our choice of readings is to reflect the diversity of cognitive and metaphysical style that seems necessary if a philosophical program is to be non-indoctrinating. Although we could not have a correlate for the philosophical dialogue that forms the crucial core of P4C, we did attempt to reflect the openness in philosophical mood and posture that characterises P4C. I consider the lack of philosophical models of dialogue to be crucial weakness of the reader as contrasted to Lipman's novels. But I could see no solution to the dilemma. The model of philosophical dialogue must be sacrificed if the basis for curriculum offering requires the use of standard pieces of literature. The problem for history and science is even more severe, for here the demand for a basis that is factually rich prohibits the use of constructed artifacts.

We try to compensate for the lack of models of dialogue by the care with which we elaborate supporting exercises and discussion plans. Here we use the P4C model extensively, using series of questions that begin with the concrete adolescent experience, developing them in a fashion that, we hope, prompts an increase in depth and philosophical awareness. Since we cannot include models of dialogue in the text, we rely heavily on carefully wrought questions to induce the dialogue in the classroom. But I am keenly aware of the trade-off. I miss Harry, Tony and Lisa, miss the interaction between children, parents and teacher. But what I gain is literature of the highest quality, stories that can be read for pleasure, selections that reflect the requirement that readings represent the finest tradition in world literature.

A table of contents is worth a thousand words and so I include as appendices two versions of the table of contents for Part I of the English Reader. We are hoping to have the English Reader published by Spring 1984 at which time the Science Reader should be completed in draft form. We then begin what might be the most difficult of the three, the History Reader.

Mark Weinstein

Appendix I
The Fieldson Reader
WHO AM I?

Part I

Introduction

1. THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE, Plato
   Section I: Discovering the Self
2. MARIANA, Fritz Leiber
3. AN INQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, David Hume
4. MEDITATIONS ON FIRST PHILOSOPHY, Rene Descartes
5. THE LOST SOUL, Ben Hecht
6. A DANGEROUS GUY INDEED, Damon Runyon
7. THE MIND'S I, Douglas Hofstadter and Daniel Dennett
8. AS YOU LIKE IT, William Shakespeare
9. NOTES TO MYSELF, Hugh Prather

10. A TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE, David Hume
    Section II, The Self in Context: Culture and Tradition
11. AN ODYSSEY OF BIRDS, Georges Blond
12. A QUESTION OF BLOOD, Ernest Haycox
13. LOST IDENTITY, Time
14. LITTLE THINGS ARE BIG, Jesus Colon
15. I THOUGHT ABOUT THIS GIRL, Jerome Weidman
16. DAY MILLION, Frederik Pohl
17. NOTES TO MYSELF, Hugh Prather
18. ALYOSHA THE POET, Leo Tolstoy
    Section III: The Self in Conflict
19. CHARLES, Shirley Jackson
20. ETHICAL STUDIES, F. H. Bradley
21. THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY, James Thurber
22. THE SELVES, Lewis Thomas
23. THE THREE PARTS OF THE SOUL, Plato
24. JOEY: A "MECHANICAL BOY", Bruno Bettelheim
25. NOTES TO MYSELF, Hugh Prather
26. WUNDERKIND, Carson McCullers
27. THE GIRL OF THE YEAR. Tom Wolfe

Building Logic Skills
Building a Philosophical Vocabulary

Appendix 2

ANALYTIC TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Selection 1. the philosophical point of view
Section I: Discovering the Self
A. Illusion and Reality
  Selection 2. projecting the self
  3. the self and knowledge
  4. the self and reality
B. Identity
  5. memory
  6. social recognition
  7. physical identity
  8. permanence and change
  9. permanence and change
  10. permanence and change
Section II: The Self in Context
C. Limitations
  Selection 11. the core of the self
  12. social role
  13. professional role
  14. race
  15. religion
  16. sexual identity
D. Responsiblity
  17. the givens
  18. obligations
Section III: The Self in Conflict
E. The Complexity of the Self
  Selection 19. dividing the self
  20. good self, bad self
  21. the self and fantasy
  22. the self and function
  23. the self and fiction
F. Human and Inhuman
  24. freedom
  25. feelings
G. Success and Failure
  26. internal standards
  27. external or social standards
Logic Skills
Vocabulary Skills

FOOTNOTES

1. Morehouse, Richard, "What is Generalizable in the Pedagogy of Philosophy for Children", Analytic Teaching, volume 4, number 1.
2. Weinstein, Mark, "Teaching Ethics in Secondary School", Analytic Teaching, volume 3, number 1.
3. The Fieldston Reader: English, edited by Mark Weinstein and Beatrice Banu, forthcoming.