

Philosophy for Children in Australia: First Australian Workshop

CONDUCTED BY: Professors M. Lipman, A. Sharp and
Dr. L. Splitter.
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The first Australian workshop on *Philosophy for Children* gave all the participants the unique opportunity to immerse themselves both as students and as teachers into philosophical exploration and discovery. In the main, the format of the workshop consisted of class sessions conducted by the participants. The same methodology utilized with classroom children was, in fact, used with us. The leaders of the Workshop demonstrated the method initially and throughout the week. Further, they encouraged us to model on their presentations and subsequently gave us feedback on our efforts. No formal lectures were given but relevant discussion sessions were planned to help clarify issues.

The crux of the methodology of the program is to convert the class into a "community of inquiry." We devoted an entire session halfway through the week exploring the variables which are conducive to fostering such a community of inquiry. Table 1 gives a summary of the discussion.

At the conclusion of this discussion, I asked the workshop leaders if they would indicate the three priorities they valued which best fostered such a community of inquiry. Professor Sharp indicated her ideas by stressing that, firstly, the teacher must "model" self-correcting behaviour to the children. Secondly, the teacher should aim to internalize self-learning and self-teaching for the children. Finally, one should be aware that to develop a community of inquiry to the mature stage where dialogue takes place between student-student as a priority involves skill and, above all, *time* and *patience*.

The basic methodology of the program involves reading a section or chapter from a novel and then discussing it. Table 2 gives a summary of the methodologies I perceived were utilized by participants during the workshop.

The teacher's role is also to maintain relevance. Whatever behaviour the teacher wishes to evoke must be modeled for the children. Children need good models of intelligent adult-child conversation in order to learn and value proper dialogue. The roles of questioner and answerer are perhaps the most difficult to learn. The teacher assists children to become excellent questioners and to find plausible answers or to understand the questions better by striving to be an excellent questioner and explorer in the class situation. In *Lisa* we also encounter a model of an adult-child conversation which can be of mutual discovery for child and adult.

TABLE 1. CHARACTERISTICS CONDUCTIVE AND NON-CONDUCTIVE TO ESTABLISHING A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY OF ENQUIRY

Conductive Characteristics	Non-Conductive Characteristics
Participants (including the teacher) are on a par: - equal rights to speak and to learn	Teacher dominated
Value everyone's contribution Lead students to ask more questions Instigate self-motivated inquiry Tolerate diversity	Not listening
Group participation in setting the agenda	Teacher sets objectives even before discussion (private agenda)
Criticize idea not person Self-correcting Clarify the etiquette of dialogue Acquire rules by practice	Value content above contribution Teacher correction
Asks reasons for ideas	Reject ideas without asking reasons
Avoid assumptions such as one's beliefs result in actions Value exploration, logic, rationality	Value discussion as therapy
Do not block inquiry: explore even horrid ideas if raised "Sensitivity" to people	Adopt adversarial role by pushing people to justify position

The example stresses the importance of "assisting" the child (in this case, Harry) to arrive at his own answer. The teacher must also develop listening skill and non-verbal communication skill as part of the inquiry process. Learning these skills is what we spent most of the week doing.

Although the methodology appears simple, perhaps even traditional, it is adherence to value considerations as stated in Table 1 which makes the method innovative and difficult to execute effectively. Although Professor Lipman espoused values which were contrary to the "charismatic" style teacher, the teacher's role in the program is neither minimal nor non-existent. Nor does the apparent "low-key" role of the teacher imply that somehow children already possess the knowledge and all one need do is to evoke it! Lipman's assumption for the program's efficacy is that learning to reason occurs mainly through interaction between the individuals and their environment. The teacher's role is to manipulate the environment in order to enhance the possibility of "growth" in the children. The teacher must guide and elicit the themes from the reading.

The manuals to each of the novels of the program are comprehensive and essential for running the program. They are set out clearly and also contain details of the themes and relevant exercises to explore the concepts. However, to implement the program without having had the experience of learning its intricacies from its creators, Professors Lipman and Sharp, is a little like looking at the tip of an iceberg without ever knowing what is beneath the surface. The week-long workshop was invaluable to me professionally and personally and I would strongly recommend the use of the program both in schools and in other educational institutions. It provides a unique discipline of the mind crucial to the thinking (and unthinking) mind.

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TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES USED IN PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN SESSIONS DURING WORKSHOP.

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| I. | <p>READING a paragraph each</p> <p>(i) ASKING group to state anything they found interesting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - write this on blackboard - discuss <i>one</i> point first - develop discussion - utilize exercises from manual <p>(ii) ASKING group to state a <i>word</i> they found interesting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - same as (i) above <p>(iii) ASKING group to write one question on paper which is transportable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have a discussion on concepts - pass paper to neighbour at end of discussion - answer neighbour's question in writing - discuss answers - contribution to group if desirable |
| II. | <p>READING a character assigned to various members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discussion etc. as (i) above |
| III. | <p>PERFORMANCE (puppets; self as puppets) by students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use make-up, costume, music, etc. - discussion follows |