PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN: A VEHICLE FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN GUATEMALA

INTRODUCTION

The Central American country of Guatemala committed itself to democratic values and processes in its election of December, 1985. Guatemala, like most other Central American countries, has been through the dictator-constitution-election revolving door many times. For almost half a century, Guatemala has been afflicted with coups, general-presidents and dictator-presidents. Again, in 1985, Guatemala created a new constitution with provision for democratic presidential elections monitored and declared "democratic" by a score of other nations. The new president, Vinicio Cerezo, and his Minister of Education, Eduardo Meyer Maldonado, emphasized that the elementary school, the only formal educational institution attended by the majority of Guatemalans, must provide those learning experiences required to develop, to nourish and to sustain democracy in Guatemala.

Thus, democracy in Guatemala ought to be nurtured by carefully designed educational programs which are subjected to long-term personal commitment and to longitudinal evaluation. Such programs must provide both the teachers and youth of Guatemala with those learning experiences which are basic for effective democratic living. The elected government must ward off coups for the time being while democracy takes root. It is this "time being" that is critical. The life-sustaining blood of democracy must begin flowing through the veins of the elementary school children of Guatemala rather than in its streets. Only when the majority population of Guatemala can freely take advantage of the promises made in the name of "democracy" will democratization have a chance of being realized.

The population of Guatemala is approximately eight million with nearly 50% being Indigenous (the term preferred by the native Indians). The elementary school population is about one million, with approximately half attending. Of these 500,000, about 200,000 attend the secondary school. Consequently, the development of reflective and reasonable citizens must occur in the elementary school, if ever.

In light of these realities, the message for Guatemala would be that "Philosophy for Children" (P4C) contains the content and methodology that can develop reflective and reasonable citizens with the ability to infer meaning from what they hear and read, and to impart meaning to what they say and write. Responsible consent and responsible dissent require adequate reasoning competencies (i.e., inferring and finding underlying assumptions) and adequate inquiry skills (i.e., forming hypotheses and explaining). It is the function of Philosophy for Children to develop competencies that form the foundation upon which democratic values and processes are built.

1985-1986 P4C ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

While the primary author of this report was a Fulbright scholar to Guatemala in 1985-86, discussions were held with various university professors and others about the concept, P4C. This occurred at the time just prior to the national elections for president under the new constitution. The military was in charge.

In late 1985, university students organized marches in opposition to the military raising the fare for public transportation. In reaction, the military took over the national university, San Carlos, and in its search of the campus, batches of "evidence" were uncovered proving that San Carlos University was a hot-bed of communism and other subversive activity. This was the climate in which P4C was first explored in Guatemala.

Previous to the national elections, Lic. Gumersindo Cabrera, a professor of philosophy at Rafael Landivar University, and Lic. Pablo Lacyo, the Director of Teacher Education at San Carlos University, met with the Minister of Education to discuss P4C. Permission from the Ministry is needed to initiate any new program in public or in private schools even on an exploratory basis. Shortly after the election a meeting was held with the new minister. After reviewing selected P4C materials and conferring with advisors, both ministers agreed that the P4C curriculum addresses the problem of democratization in Guatemala. Both expressed the belief that P4C would provide the youth of Guatemala with those learning experiences which are basic for effective democratic living. Consequently, in February of 1986, P4C earned the approval of the Minister of Education as an experimental curriculum specifically to promote democratization in Guatemala. Orientation programs funded by Marquette University were held in Guatemala City, Antigua, Quetzaltenango, Poptun, and in Bananera for public and private school teachers, urban and rural, supervisors and administrators. A number of radio and television interviews were given. Those involved in the orientation programs and interviews were clear in their belief that, because most of Guatemala’s children would not attend the secondary
school, the future majority population is now desperately in need of a curriculum such as P4C if democratic values are to have a chance of maturing in Guatemala. From the teaching/learning demonstrations which were part of each orientation program Guatemalan educators agreed that the following P4C goals are basic if the school is to meet its responsibility in Guatemala’s democratization process:
- stimulating children to think;
- improving children’s cognitive skills so that they may reason together;
- developing children’s ability to think reasonably and responsibly when confronted with moral problems whether personal, social, or political;
- challenging children to think about significant concepts from the philosophical tradition.

These orientation programs prompted several educational leaders in Guatemala to request that Marquette University sponsor a second project for the summer (winter in Guatemala) of 1987. In August of 1986, Cabrera and Lacayo attended the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children in New Jersey for an intensive workshop partially funded by Marquette University.

1987: P4C in GUATEMALA

The Guatemala P4C network established in 1985-86 was involved in planning an eight-week pilot project involving six elementary schools. Four of the schools selected were from the Fe y Alegría group which serves the poorest urban children and youth of Guatemala City. Colegio Loyola, which some identify as “near” middle class, and Colegio El Camino, middle-class, were also selected.

The goal established for this eight-week pilot project was two-fold:
- to determine the extent to which training in P4C affects the development of both reasoning skill and to develop democratic behavior for selected Guatemalan teachers and their students.

To achieve the first phase of the project goal, the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skill (NJTRS) would be completed by both teachers and students as a pre- and post-test to determine differences. The second part of the project goal would require that a “working” instrument be developed to guide the perceptions of classroom observers while identifying concrete evidence about teacher and learner behavior which reflect the following “democratization themes”. This preliminary instrument was developed in cooperation with Marquette University professors of philosophy, history, sociology and education, and in consultation with Matthew Lipman, Director, Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. Eugenio Echeverria also contributed. To continue with the

instrument’s development, Echeverria was asked to join the 1987 Guatemala project. The Bradley Institute for Democracy and Public Values at Marquette University agreed to fund this part of the project.

FORMAT FOR THE DEMOCRATIZATION OBSERVATION TEST (DOT)

INSTRUCTIONS: The purpose of this instrument is to guide your perceptions while you are observing a class working with Philosophy for Children. Your task is to identify concrete, specific facets/evidence of teacher and learner behaviors (verbal and non-verbal) which exemplify the following 15 democratization themes. Write the observed evidence supporting your belief that specific themes did occur in the P4C classroom.

DEMOCRATIZATION THEMES

1. Accepts consequences of personal behavior

   DEFINITIONS
   1. Recognizes and understands the realities of consequences for speech and other behavior.
   EVIDENCE
   1.

2. Personal integrity
   2. Respect for others' property, personal honesty, respect for truth.

3. Tolerance for dissenting opinion
   3. Responds to dissenting opinion on its merits rather than responding against the person.

4. Respect for majority opinion
   4. Accepts majority opinion in situations wherein voting is meaningful.

5. Reaffirms opinion despite majority
   5. Recognizes situations wherein voting is irrelevant.

6. Openmindedness
   6. Readiness to revise opinions in light of further evidence.

7. Absence of intimidation
   7. Avoids threatening behavior and does not make threats of retaliation.

8. Controversial issues
   8. Emerge as they apply to specific content being taught/learned.
The Students

The students in the pilot were fifth- and sixth-graders with an age spread of 12 to 15. Cabrera and Lacayo worked with four different Fe y Alegría (Faith and Happiness) schools. There are nine such schools in Guatemala City serving 10,000 children. The Fe y Alegría schools were established by the Jesuits to serve the poorest of the poor. These schools are built where the “pavement ends”. A morning session is held for one group, and an afternoon session is provided for a second. The average class size is 55. Since learning and basic nutrition appear to be related, many of these children received their first complete meal of the day at the school. These children’s homes have no books, magazines, newspapers, nor telephones. Some may have T.V. and many a radio. Families are large and extended. Few if any of these children will attend secondary school because of the need “to go to work”. The upper grades have fewer and fewer children because of the drop-out rate. This is also true of the public schools. It is not unusual for the first grade to have 100 children in one room. But by third grade that class may have 50 children. Once reading and writing are under control, for many more school is a luxury which may have to be foregone in order to enter the world of work.

Thompson’s groups represented a range of middle-class children attending private schools also. Some claim that as many children attend private elementary school in Guatemala City as attend the public school. The average class size for El Camino is 17 and that for Loyola is 50. We had two groups in the P4C class at El Camino, 34 total. The Loyola group was 44. All students at these schools could read and write well. These students, as those at Fe y Alegría, were highly motivated and functioned well. The majority in the Thompson groups received a daily newspaper and many had some kind of encyclopedia at home. Children came from all over the city to attend these schools by bus and car. Although these schools are but a stone’s throw from the presidential palace, the situational factors for learning in them are not very different than those in the Fe y Alegría schools. Rooms are small, overcrowded and generally the rooms are uninteresting.

Teachers

As stated previously, Fe y Alegría teachers must pass the test of being both faithful to children and happy as persons. Generally, to teach in an elementary school in Guatemala, one must have completed six years of secondary school. (To be a secretary, five years are required.) This follows six years of primary
school which begins when the child is seven years of age.

Elementary teachers and others with whom we worked speak with a clear voice about their perception that teaching and learning in Guatemala suffer from two major problems:

1. University teachers are negative models for both secondary and elementary future teachers because they serve only as transmitters of information, much of which is useless. A consequence is that secondary and elementary teachers function in like manner within their own classrooms. “Teach as ye have been taught” is still with all of us. Memory learning is in full bloom. All teachers can name the bones in the human hand and all of the stomachs of a cow. Right answers are prized and the teacher has them all. In the university, a passing grade for a graduate course is 75. Most students receive no more than a 75 lest he think the student be considered as smart as the professor. Teachers appeared genuinely shocked when we referred to the fact that they would frequently encounter children with greater intelligence than their own and that these children make wonderful sources for content, discussion leaders, researchers, etc. It was obvious that teachers could be smart, but learners could not be. And, just in case that’s not so, accept no questions for which you don’t know the ready answer (fake one if need be), and remember, do not solicit dialoguing.

2. Learners frequently are but numbers. They are not referred to by name in the elementary, secondary, or university classroom but by an assigned number. It was during this pilot project that some elementary teachers, for the first time, witnessed other teachers refer to students by name. One upper-grade teacher remarked that when he encounters one of his own students on the street, he thinks, “Oh, yes. That’s number 21. I don’t even know the boy’s name. My God!”

The two major problems stated briefly above preclude elementary teachers in Guatemala from experiencing student-teacher or student-student interaction at any level of their own education. Education, then, in Guatemala can be highly depersonalized. Teachers, when asked, could remember their own numbers from primary school, secondary school and the university. After witnessing how learners react in a P4C classroom, the project teachers agreed, “We’ll never call a child by a number again!”

The starting pay for beginning public school elementary teachers is a base salary of Q240 (Quetzales), plus a bonus of Q175. At the end of six years the teacher receives a 20% increase of the base. Private schools will pay whatever the traffic will bear; for example, Fe y Alegría schools start at Q140 per month. Often the Fe y Alegría teacher is attending the university and plans to enter a career other than teaching.

Pre- and Post-Test Results

All schools in the project were administered the NJTRS Test at the beginning of the program. Because of a variety of salary considerations for the Fe y Alegría faculties, emergency meetings were scheduled. These meetings interrupted the pilot schedule, consequently, these schools are not included in the results. However, there is no reason to believe that the results would not approximate those from the other two schools. Also, a one-week vacation interrupted the teaching and testing for all groups. El Camino also had a one-week test period which meant that it had twelve teaching sessions while Loyola had fifteen. The following chart reflects score distribution for each school’s pre- and post-tests.

**SCHOOL A: AFTER TWELVE SESSIONS OF ONE HOUR EACH**

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The data represent 24 sixth-graders and 10 fifth-graders. Individual increases were from a score of 23
to 37; from 27 to 35; and from 22 to 28. The average pre-test score was 24, and the average post-test score was 29.

**SCHOOL B: AFTER FIFTEEN CLASS SESSIONS OF ONE HOUR EACH**

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All of these students were in the sixth grade and their ages were 12 to 15. The average pre-test score was 24, and the average post-test score was 31. Two students increased their scores by 10 points, one by 9, two by 8, and five by 7 points. Some of the growth for this group may be assigned to the fact that the classroom teacher was highly motivated and greatly interested in modifying his teaching behaviors.

The average pre-test score for all teachers was 32, and the average post-test score was 37. One sixth-grade student earned a score of 40 as did three teachers. No teacher earned a score of above 40.

**The Democratization Observation Test**

As was stated previously, the fifteen items on this test were the key to planning and the key to evaluating the demonstration lessons conducted by Cabrera, Lacayo and Thompson. (Should this project continue in Guatemala, any classroom selected for the program would be observed, preliminary to beginning P4C, in a social science class for at least two hours to determine the extent to which selected democratic behaviors can be observed during the teaching/learning process. This period of observation would serve as a baseline for comparing observations after the P4C instruction begins.)

Teacher trainers discussed the teachers' observations after each class using the DOT to serve as a guide. The following are some selected pieces of evidence identified by teacher observers:

**THEME:**

1. Accepts consequences . . . .

   **EVIDENCE:**

   When students offer a point of view and find that point of view to be in error because of subsequent evidence, they are learning the consequences related with being wrong like feeling guilty.

   When a few students had not discussed a doubt with parents, they were unable to participate in the next day's discussion.

   When Arnaldo helped Miguel, Miguel was able to describe the flaw in his own logic.

   When a group of inattentive students was called to the board to explain the idea diagramed, but could not. The students recognized the consequences without discussion and without their being pointed out. This is also an example of the teacher being aware of the personal integrity, mutual respect and habit formation in this situation.

2. Personal integrity

   Individuals demonstrated respect as they asked for the comments of other students, saying, "Roberto, what do you think about my reason?" And, when Sammy said, "Thank you, Roberto."

   When Maria figured out how to explain her point of view contrary to that of Marta but without using words like, "No, you are wrong."

   The teacher not using words like wrong and no, and not breathing hard at some children's responses.

   When the teacher used the students as a source for content, and when the teacher
put the name of each child beside his question on the board.

Asking the children to discuss ideas with their brothers, sisters and parents.

When the teacher asked Brenda, "Would you prefer to think some more about the question?" the child sat down with her integrity obviously intact.

When Marta said that sometimes she believes in superstitions.

3. Tolerance for dissenting opinion
It was obvious that, during the first several classes, children reacted physically with facial and bodily movements when other students offered dissenting opinions. They stopped risking for a while. But, after a while, dissenting opinions appeared to be seen as stepping stones to other ideas.

It was interesting today to notice that Karen's dissenting opinions seem to carry more weight with some learners than others' dissenting opinions, e.g., when she said that the size of cats had nothing to do with being feline or not.

4. Respect for Majority Opinion
This occurred almost every day and was made easier because of the good reasons that were given. Emily showed not only respect but control when the majority opinion was counter to hers. But, through discussion, their minds were changed.

5. Reaffirms opinion despite majority
This also occurred in 4 above.

This happened when Jose offered an answer and others would not permit him to give his good reasons for saying that all dogs are canines, even wolves and jackals. Once he showed the pictures which he brought from home, and demonstrated that all had the same essential characteristics, there was a new majority.

Kenia Guadalupé reaffirmed her opinion that the Bible was her source of authority for some of her beliefs regardless of what the majority in a group might think.

6. Openmindedness
Today someone said, "You have to like all of your brothers and sisters." Hendrick disagreed and explained his point of view. Sergio and Miguel joined the discussion even though they thought the idea was way out.

When Roberta said that she never thought before that the rain God of the Maya might make good sense to the Maya and maybe to others also.

Alberto's group agreed that some of our beliefs could sound just as silly to others as their beliefs sound to them. Thelma's group wants to discuss Joel's comment that his beliefs might be someone else's superstition and that what he thinks is a superstition might be someone else's belief.

7. Absence of intimidation
The students sit so they can see each other's eyes.

When they read the chapter, students decided whether they wanted to read or not. This kept the visiting teachers from really finding out who couldn't read.

When the teacher said, "If you'd rather think more about it, that's fine . . ."

Using children's names, using please and thank you.

8. Controversial issues
When the class worked with superstition.

When the class worked with newspaper advertisements.

When Karla asked about what is normal and if there really is a normal.

When the class discussed "so what" and tried to encounter those phrases used in Guatemala as, "que indio".

Do most Guatemalans have Indian blood?

9. Seeking consensus
When we worked with the bag of candy and we took five of which all were red. What can we conclude and why?
The teacher, "Don't talk to me, talk with Jon... talk with your companions... I'm not a funnel to explain your thoughts..."

We're always doing that in this class. The need to give good reasons sets this up.

When the groups discussed consensus vs. agreement, or going along with while not giving up my beliefs.

10. Mutual respect

When Jose spoke about Harry's rules as though he were the president of the Republic.

The teacher, "Please don't look at me, look at Olivia, you are speaking about what she had to say."

La Parra's group discussed the term, "Can I buy something from the poor?" This meant can I buy something from the Indigenous seller?

They discussed the meaning of "poor". Why do we call others by the name "poor"? What does that make me? What is rich really? The class planned to examine how the Indigenous are rich.

Today the teacher refused to comment on children's ideas. Other students made all of the comments. This set a climate in which the children sensed that their ideas were really important. Why is the teacher always the funnel?... the conduit?... the receiver and dispenser of information?

11. Formation of a community of inquiry

"In the class today, out of 44 children, three did not participate." "But, they did participate when the class broke into groups."

Today you made a special effort to state the child's name before you asked the question.

Good things were happening when the students named the person who was to read next or to make a comment.

The names on the board beside the specific child's idea is powerful, especially for that child's friends. They became more interested.

Today, during recess, I noticed three boys talking together who never had time for each other before.

12. Acceptance of cultural differences

When the class discussed invention and the term discovery and you asked about soap and the zero. The children "believed" the Maya had no soap but that the Spanish did. Several children took on the special assignment to investigate both soap and the zero.

What a surprise when Miguel reported that the Maya bathed generally twice a day and the Spanish twice a year! And that the Spanish thought frequent bathing meant the Maya had devils.

Jorge's group was thinking about the word "different". Why do we tend to dislike what is different? Are we fearful of that which is different? Were the Spanish really fearful of the Maya?

13. Responsible citizens

Listening to the thoughts of others respectfully. When Maria refused to continue speaking because some were not attentive.

Today the class discussed democracy and the consensus was that without responsible citizens, there can be no democracy.

The class examined, "Who is a citizen?" and "Who must be responsible?"

14. Contemporary events

The teacher brought into class an Esso ad announcing that we have the future today. The class listed the characteristics of "future" and the characteristics of "today" and discussed the truth of the ad.

Asking students about their visits to Mayan centers of culture.

Today several students brought ads into class to "examine the characteristics of the vocabulary used".

15. Habit formation

This is done almost every minute of the class: calling children by name, the teacher using please and thank you, the teacher listening without interrupting and demanding the same from the students, the
teacher requiring us to think about a question for 20 seconds before offering a response, having children look at the other children as they speak, having the teacher modulate his voice, having participation as individuals and as members of groups, using the home regularly as a source for ideas and possible explanations, demonstrating respectfulness constantly in the classroom, and making the other 14 items above habits.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROLOGUE

Eugenio Echeverria was quite surprised at the interest and ability demonstrated by the Guatemalan youngsters at the Fe y Alegria schools, El Camino and Loyola:

They do every bit as well as other children with whom I've worked. Anywhere. In fact the Guatemalan kids do better in several areas. They took to group work better than I'd experienced before. Many of the reasons which these students offered showed real understanding of the underlying logic. Too, I thought that working with 15 or 20 kids would be maximum. We worked with over 40 here and got good results. For a while I thought the kids had only a superficial knowledge, but when I worked with them I threw some pretty tough stuff at them and they handled it very well. The Democratization Observation Test is working out quite well with some of the teacher groups. It does guide perceptions. I found it to be very useful in my own lesson planning.

Echeverria left Guatemala before the post-tests were administered however, he was confident from his observations and from working directly with the children that pre- post-test differences would be clearly apparent. The data confirm his hunch. Certainly, more work needs to be done with the DOT. It is useful in gathering evidence for each of the fifteen items. It is also clear that the instrument is useful in providing direction and perspective to the planning, the teaching, and to the post-class evaluating. Many notes were received from parents sharing with us their observations of the P4C experience for their children. What could be added when a parent writes, "The philosophy course has given my child a love for thinking and learning"? There is no question that Guatemalan children have no difficulty becoming friends with Harry and Lisa. The novel offers no difficulties for these children with the exception of pronouncing "Stottlemeier". But this should be no problem for the two Guatemalan teachers who were selected to attend the intensive workshop in P4C to be held in August of 1987. This was also funded by Marquette University.

During the last several days of the project, the authors met with a Guatemalan group called ASIES, The Association for Research and the Social Sciences. This is a Guatemalan "think tank". It received a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy to work with the concept of democratization through education. Thompson submitted a proposal to the Endowment demonstrating how P4C can serve as a vehicle for promoting democracy in Guatemala without knowing anything about ASIES. The Endowment suggested that he contact ASIES to determine how P4C might enable ASIES to better achieve its goals. And, for one hour the authors explored P4C with the Board of Directors of ASIES. Echeverria left Guatemala shortly after that first meeting but Thompson attended several more. It was agreed that the new ASIES proposal which was then in preparation for the National Endowment for Democracy should include P4C as a major component of the ASIES education for democracy project. This recommendation included the reaction of thirty-five teachers who viewed a video tape of our P4C work in Guatemala. These teachers were unanimous in wanting to be among the first to join a new P4C program in Guatemala.

Our hope is that the P4C projects funded by Marquette University in 1986 and 1987 will prove to be but a prologue to a new three year program for which the following goals have been established:

1. Learning P4C content and method is accomplished primarily through in-class, on-the-job demonstration lessons taught by five teacher trainers (four of whom are Guatemalan) for a minimum of twenty hours.

2. Tested teaching materials are to be used which emphasize practicing the processes of thinking, participating, decision-making and becoming responsible citizens as teachers and as learners.

3. Pre- and post-testing for reasoning skills development and a test on selected democratic behavioral themes are to be administered to both teachers and learners.

4. Teachers with identified ability and skill are to be selected for this P4C program to maximize their effectiveness as model teachers and as future teachers who will join the team during this three-year project.

5. University courses in P4C are to be established to promote democratization in Guatemala for both experienced and pre-service education teachers.
teachers. This last objective will make P4C a self-sustaining enterprise for Guatemala.

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