IMPRESSIONS OF TRAINING IN PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN

In August of 1987, I attended a three week Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. Held in a large house at St. Margarite's Retreat in Mendham, New Jersey. This yearly workshop is the first leg of the one year MAT program in Philosophy for Children. There were approximately thirty participants, made up of philosophy professors and visiting foreign students there for the workshop, along with those of us in the program.

This represented for many of us, our first prolonged experience with Philosophy for Children. The seclusion of the group and the ofttimes trying subtleties of the modeling sessions upon first experience, combined with the intensity and duration of the workshop activities (sessions run, with breaks, from 9 AM to 10 PM) to create a memorable and provocative educational experience.

What follows is a journal written during that experience. Throughout the journal, "Philosophy for Children" will be abbreviated "P4C." "Training" and "modeling" sessions refer to the actual group work with the materials and methodology. Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, Pixie, Suki and Kio and Gus are all titles of children's philosophical novels written by one Matthew Lipman. Harry, Lisa and Mrs. Olson are all characters in the first named novel often referred to as Harry. Isabel and Pixie are characters appearing in the novel Pixie. Finally, Mr. Newberry is a fictional teacher in the book Suki.

"Matt" is Matthew Lipman, director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC). "Ann" is the co-director Ann Sharp. "Phil" is Phil Guin, a professor working with the IAPC. Brian Lamb and Eugenio Echeverria are both former graduate students now working as teachers and P4C teacher-trainers.

The remainder of the mentioned names were various participants in the workshops.

Many professors, teachers and students participate each year in such P4C workshops. I hope that this journal will help to eliminate some common aspects of the experience.

SUNDAY EVENING, August 2, 1987

By now I feel that I am somewhat familiar with the methodology of both the P4C implementation and the teacher-training pedagogy. This makes sense, as the program is micro-macrocosmic; ie., what goes on in the classrooms we lead is what occurs in the training sessions in which we participate (as also occurs in model settings in the novels).

While I can grasp the logic and value of this system, I remain puzzled by the specifics of our participation. As model "students" in our community of inquiry, what type of responses from us are appropriate? Those in the group quickly became aware that pedagogical comments (meta-level comments, as it were), unless inextricably tied to matters of content, did not fit into the model dialogue. Rather, questions and comments directly pertaining to the content of the chapters were appropriate. Yet a difference lies between putting forth a genuine reaction, commenting as one thinks a child would, and issuing a statement and/or question purposely aimed at generating the dialogical process.

Today there were examples of all three. My particular question/reaction would fall under the third category. I asked, "What's so fascinating about discovering that certain sentences can be reversed?" I presumed that a discussion would ensue concerning the possibility that such intellectual discovery can bring joy, and whether or not such discovery needs to have an immediate application "in order" to bring joy. Such a discussion, more or less, did follow. Yet I felt that people presumed that I "actually" wondered at such a thing. I surely don't want to be

thought such a Philistine. It is difficult to tell when our responses are genuine, or rather formulated for a specific reason. At this point I suppose it's not important.

If I may digress, it seems to me that this particular issue (that of the joy of intellectual discovery) goes to the core of this entire program. Too many students (and, alas, adults) truly can see no enjoyment in inquiry. The fascination that Harry feels illustrates well one of the major goals of P4C.

Of additional interest was a discovery I made about the text of Harry. My older copy had been revised, and the change is a fascinating, if not troubling one. In the old edition, the illustration of Harry's new logical discovery had Mrs. Olson concluding that, because she talks about helping the poor, Mrs. Bates is a Communist. Harry sees the obvious flaw.

In the new addition, Mrs. Olson now concludes that since she sees Mrs. Bates enter the liquor store, she must be a problem drinker. Harry, in this far less convincing illustration, concludes that "all people who go to the liquor store are people who can't stop drinking" is bad reasoning. Now, while it is obviously (not to mention insidiously, and perhaps even dangerously) bad reasoning for Mrs. Olson to conclude that Mrs. Bates is a communist, it is far less obvious, though just as logically flawed, to conclude that someone who goes to the liquor store "every day" is a problem drinker.

I wondered at the reasons for this change. My conclusion was close to the explanation given to me by Matt and Ann. The change was initially made in Chile and Mexico. Now, I understand that, especially when trying to implement the program in a repressive political climate like that which exists in Chile, one wants to avoid any semblance of ideological content. Illustrating faulty reasoning with an example of Red-baiting has, I imagine, to a neo-Nazi, the aroma of progressive ideology. I understand why the change was made.

At the same time I become angry at this. For by steering clear of such an issue, the inference that faulty reasoning when it comes to communism is acceptable is, at least implicitly, affirmed. Perhaps nowhere is this misconception so tragic as in Latin America. I believe this warrants further discussion.

One other observation. In pondering the meaning of "community of inquiry," I come to some troubling insights about myself. Respect for others' statements, patience, the desire to build constructively upon another's ideas instead of trashing them, the very desire to listen..., I find myself deficient in all of these. I have too often looked upon discussion, both in and out of classrooms, as arenas for the spewing of my golden insights to the presumed applause of the spectators. When an idea has spawned in my head, I have anticipation of my chance to spout. I have haughtily ignored comments not obviously related to my train of thought. And, most negatively, I have taken a kind of angry joy in refuting, insulting even, someone's point of view.

All of these qualities are what this program seeks to transcend. They are all qualities that I must, therefore, overcome. But there is a problem with this. How to become such a paradigm of calm rationality without somehow diluting the strength of one's values? There are certain ethical stances (such as the primacy of the problem of economic injustice and inequality) which, because they are subject to such adversity, must be upheld with vehemence and strength.

Such are my thoughts on this first evening of the retreat.

MONDAY MORNING, August 3

Matt began the morning session with an encapsulization of some theory underlying P4C. He described how the curriculum builds on a logical progression of cognitive

skills, revolving around the specific basic skills of making distinctions, connections and comparisons. As applied especially to children under the age of 11 years, the curriculum distinctly ignore Piaget's states of cognitive development. Rather than basing a curriculum on the limitations of the child's thinking abilities, P4C seeks to challenge the student by assuming that cognitive skills can be developed at an early age. This positive, or optimistic approach, according to Matt, corrects the skill deficiencies resulting from a too-strict adherence to Piaget's stages.

The following two parts of this morning's session covered Chapter Two of Harry and Chapter One of Pixie. The session for each chapter seemed somewhat abbreviated, and may well illustrate the flexibility of a P4C lesson. (I might add that the doing of an entire chapter in one sessions seems unrealistic. It is one element which makes these modeling sessions seem more like entities unto themselves).

On the other hand, maybe they are accurate. Harry, of course, deals with formal logic skills. As such, we spent a lot of time going over logical standardization skills. I presume that this was a fairly accurate representation of a P4C session with children. Except for those previously trained, standardization of sentences is a tricky business, and it seems to be that adults will come up with objections and questions similar to young students. Many of these exercises are quite subtle, and I wasn't completely convinced of all of them myself.

The first chapter of Pixie centered mainly on personal identity and concepts of ownership. I should say, rather, that the discussion centered on these topics. The chapter could provide material for several other topics. After soliciting a number of items, Ann moved rather quickly (because of time constraints) to exercises in the manual. Would this be a good move in a class of children? Is it somewhat manipulative, in a way seizing the discussion agenda from the students? These questions may prove to be central in terms of the facilitator's role in the classroom.

MONDAY EVENING, August 3

We venture into Suki. As described by Ann, a rather different approach is used with this program. Besides eliciting comments and questions and injecting exercises from the manual when appropriate, the Suki program also emphasizes having the students write. An objective is to get them to write often and in different ways following different models or with varying motivations.

The text reading was done as script reading, which was an enjoyable change, adding as it did an element of drama to the readings. The discussion began with the "meaning of meaning," and of definition. This led into an elaboration of the fact/fiction dichotomy. This dichotomy, whose synthesis in a way represented the thesis of the novel, grew to include reason/logic vs. imagination/creativity. Or, put in a more textually relevant way, Harry vs. Lisa. When Lisa says, "You like the truth of things, I like the poetry of things," (as pointed out by Ann when the conversation was touching on this point) she sets up the dialectic of the novel.

This is an important issue for those who find writing difficult. Creativity for many an analytically-inclined person is extremely difficult (in the same way that auto mechanics can be an intimidating task to the creative genius). The story of Harry overcoming this dichotomy, I find, is very appropriate.

This session ended with a writing assignment. Having gone over a number of poems in the manual with the group, Ann then directed us to concoct a poem using one of the poems as a model. The results were quite impressive, as we all learned when the poems were read out loud to finish the session.

TUESDAY MORNING, August 4

We began reading Kio and Gus. The dialogue centered around the issues of knowing and understanding. From the question "is it possible to understand everything?", Phil directed us to an exercise on understanding. We discussed Kio's (or was it Gus'?) habit of taking on various identities. Must one be a bat to understand a bat? Can you ever come to a full understanding of something without "being" that thing? Do you understand something if you can take it apart and reassemble it?

In Larry's facilitation of Chapter 3 of Harry, the dialogue ran from dreaming and thinking to the interrelationship between thoughts and feelings. Which precedes, or causes, which? We spent a good amount of time on this, and were moving towards a discussion of how this relates to the mind/body problem, when time ran out.

TUESDAY EVENING, August 4

In an evening supposedly devoted to viewing teaching videos, a refreshing divergence took place. Several of the videos were shot in Guatamala, where, it was maintained, the P4C program was being implemented to help foster "democracy." Luckily, I wasn't the only one who had trouble with this. A discussion ensued concerning the political implications of the program. Someone said he was puzzled by what was meant by "democracy." One suggestion given was "a system encouraging and allowing maximum participation." Since the P4C program fosters and builds such an environment, it follows then that it facilitates such a goal.

I had deep problems with this, especially in how it relates to Latin America. What does it mean for the overwhelming majority of people in these countries to be allowed to "participate" in elections? Have the millions of campesinos any more control over their own lives, let alone government policy, simply because they have the right to choose between several representatives of the ruling classes? What does the P4C program have to do with democracy in such situations (with the military and/or CIA hovering over any election like huge and angry birds of prey)?

I ventured a different concept for "democracy," that of empowerment. This seems to be closer to the true meaning of rule by the people. To me, it seems that the thinking skills fostered by the P4C program can lead to such potential empowerment. The danger to authoritarian regimes, and to American hegemony based on oppression and ignorance seems obvious. Yet, here we're faced with a contradiction. For the program thrives in just such countries where it presents a danger. Why? This was touched on in the discussion, but not fully answered. Perhaps the potential of the program is too innocuous, too far off to be considered a "present danger."

The evening's session also did actually include a video viewing, and several important aspects of methodology were brought out. Ways of dealing with reasoning errors were discussed, such as asking the class what they think of the statement, or asking the student what assumptions he's making. The complex and rather vague methodology of questioning was also brought up.

In discussing the above political matters with another workshop participant, I came upon more relevant realizations about myself and the program. I am a person with a strongly held set of values and ideological dispositions. My habit has been to, at times, preach to my students, especially about matters that I believe are in their self-interest. I fully understand not only the ethical problems with this, but also its ineffectiveness. I am in accord with the position of the P4C program, and am going to have to alter my teaching substantially. Exactly how to muffle this classroom "will-to-didacticism" is something I'll need to think about.

In concluding this entry, I want to make clear that I do not believe this program to be value free. Economic injustice and exploitation are possible only in a society where clear and critical thinking and reasoning skills are at a minimum. The

worst impulses of a corrupt ruling elite using the tools of that democracy towards their own interest. To work on the skills for using these tools is to threaten the power structure, is to be political, is to have a value bias. I think Dewey (with some updating from Freire) would agree.

WEDNESDAY MORNING, August 5

Matt spoke at length today on various views of critical thinking, including his own. While I comprehend his description and explanation, I'm left with several problems. I'm confused on one hand by what the description seems to leave out, and on the other hand by what appears to be a definitional problem.

Above and beyond the skills Matt mentioned (self-correcting thinking, thinking sensitive to context, and thinking subject to criteria), I want to add what I've intuited about the phrase "critical thinking." It seems to me that the ability to arrive at conclusions independently, as opposed to having to accept the world acquiescently is an important element of critical thinking. This means the ability to not only be free of dependence on authority, but to actively question it until you have worked out valid reasons for accepting what authority has to say. This is where I think the elements spelled out by Matt come in.

I had a problem with the part of Matt's scheme called "thinking subject to criteria." I was curious as to what differentiated this type of thinking from others. I asked Matt to give an example of thinking without criteria, and he did not succeed in doing so. If, therefore, all thinking is thinking subject to criteria, are we getting nowhere? I believe that one person's criteria could be another's irrelevancy.

Afterwards, we went over Chapter 4 of Harry. Beginning with Harry's comment that, in thinking about thinking, we seem to understand ourselves better, the discussion moved to a more general comparison of thinking and understanding. This was formulated generally into the question of whether we could know something and not understand it--and vice versa. I became somewhat, if unjustifiably impatient, as it seemed to me that we could clarify the problem by classifying understanding as a type of knowing, eg., knowing how, knowing that, knowing about, etc. I kept this to myself, however, as one has to be fairly assertive in our "community of inquiry" in order to be heard (and I don't like to be assertive unless I'm quite confident about my contribution). A lesson to be derived from this, as far as running a discussion, is to be particularly sensitive to hands raised, and to balance the discussion time between these and the more extroverted blurtings.

We then went into a treatment of Chapter 2 of Pixie. Beginning with some curiosity about what it means for Pixie to like everything about Isabel, we moved through the various meanings of the word "like," and were directed to an exercise on liking certain things and the reasons why. An interesting offshoot followed in the form of arguing the validity or relevance of giving reasons for what one likes. This was most amusing, and handled adeptly by the facilitator, as he followed this line of inquiry and allowed it to run its course.

As we moved into Kio and Gus, Maria specified that our comments and questions were to approximate those of eight-year-old children. This was the first mention I'd heard of the ambiguity I wrote about several days ago as to our roles as discussion participants here at the workshop. This didn't seem, however, to make a difference in the discussion.

Most of this conversation revolved around concepts of beauty, but I'm unclear as to how we arrived there. A long time was spent on the argument over whether we can be sure from the text that Gus is blind. I don't know exactly why, but I found this annoying, and I believe I would have handled the discussion in a somewhat different manner.

manner.

THURSDAY MORNING, August 6

Matt began the session this morning with an elaboration of his theories of critical thinking. His explanation echoed and expanded upon what was said several days ago. Although he elaborated on what "thinking subject to criteria" is, I'm still not completely certain what this means. Let me see if I can work this out.

One aspect of critical thinking is that it is skilled thinking, as in a craft, ie., something that can be taught. To call something a skill implies criteria. Logical principles, then, are such criteria. This is understandable, but then why not have as the elements of critical thinking: a) self-correctiveness, b) sensitivity to context and c) employed according to logical principles?

As Matt went over various views of critical thinking, one dichotomy sparked my interest. He mentioned that there are those who see critical thinking as desirable because it leads to more firmly held beliefs, and those who see it as desirable because it leads to beliefs more tentatively held.

I have a problem with this second position, and it is a position which I assume is taken by Matt and P4C in general. If the "end" of critical thinking is more tentatively held beliefs, what is to prevent our contributing to something like the Hamlet syndrome? The ability and inclination to question things beyond the normal point of acceptance can lead to a set of beliefs and notions more intelligently arrived at, yet an unresolved tentativeness leaves no grounds for belief, nor action. Perhaps it's often dangerous to completely reify one's beliefs, especially in the area of moral judgement. But the freedom from commitment to conclusive belief is a luxury many cannot afford. I'm thinking especially of oppressed peoples for whom I believe critical thinking skills can be a catalyst to action. At some point, oppressed people cannot be tentative about what needs to be done to change their situation (and more North Americans, it seems to me, could be a lot less tentative in their appraisals of their own government's policy).

The discussion settled on what makes for an interesting class, and what makes for a good teacher. Do children know better how to run a school? Is it necessary for a class to be interesting? Can it always be? If we must invigorate subject matter by making it applicable to student lives and experience, how do we do this? How do we accurately comprehend the lives and experiences of people 15-35 years our younger? Especially in a culture that convolutes and changes so quickly. These are vital questions for us, questions I'm sure will come up as the year progresses.

We then went through more of Kio and Gus, Chapter 2. We discussed the different ways Kio and Gus perceive and/or describe the peach, and talked about the reasons. We then turned to some analogical reasoning exercises, presumably based on the describing to Gus of visual phenomena with examples from other sensory experience.

The morning concluded with Julio's presentation of Pixie, Chapter 2. The facilitation process was hindered somewhat by the translation necessity.

Though many topics were possibly derived from this section, most of the discussion explicated concepts of revenge and justice from Pixie's bathroom complaints. I found these concepts, from this particular selection, somewhat strained, and wonder what I would have done in a similar situation should I have been leading the group. Would I direct the discussion along other avenues? What if most suggestions for discussion seem fairly irrelevant? Could it be me?

THURSDAY EVENING, August 6

There are several points of procedure which Christina used in her presentation tonight. In addition to writing the name of each person after their interest

somewhat more insistent in requesting clarifications.

Another important bit of methodology she displayed occurred during one particular semi-coherent rambling. At a pause, she asked the group, "Is everyone keeping up with _____?" This is the first time I noticed anyone doing this, and it was effective. This is a difficult thing to do, though, with a group like this. But when successful, it enabled others to come in and either ask for clarification, or change the direction of the discourse into something more intelligible. While I realize that respect need be accorded to all participants in the "community," a facilitator needs tactful ways of redirecting those who tend to ramble.

The subject tonight (from Suki) vacillated between the connection between something's identity and what that thing does, and imagination. Much time was spent on the first subject, with Christina at one point making a fine connection between two chronologically separate statements: "Is there a connection between 'shining is the sun,' and 'things being what they do'?" This promising area was abandoned, however, as we skipped into a re-reading of the Hopkins poem, and onto some exercises on the imagination/perception relationship. There was some confusion here, but she came out of it well by asking for, and getting a good interpretation of the poem.

I think it would have been fruitful to, in summary, elicit the connection between imagination and the perceiving of things in active, rather than static terms (with examples abounding in the chapter). This would have especially made the transition to the writing assignment more smooth and connected than it was. As things turned out, I think it was a rather unconnected move, as was Ann's, actually, the other evening. I have serious questions about this Suki "methodology," perhaps the most insisted upon in the program. I wonder if I'll do any better with this difficult transition from discussion to poetry samples to the writing.

FRIDAY MORNING, August 7

I'm hoping that when I'm facilitating dialogue with students, such dialogue won't be as difficult to guide as that taking place here. As a group of individuals steeped in philosophy, our "community" tends to quickly open up vast expanses of inquiry. This occurs to such an extent that I often lose tract of a general direction of discourse. Perhaps this is the inexperience of the facilitation, but I tend to think otherwise. I think that this problem is intrinsic to a group like this. It seems almost rude for a facilitator to ask a participant to succinctly clarify his or her point, to give good reason for his/her point, and most importantly, to make clear how his/her statement relates to previous statements and questions.

If I'm not mistaken, in a classroom philosophical discussion, the focus should have a fairly clear line of progress. Things spin wildly out of control very easily with a large group. Such free form inquiry may be fruitful in some instances, but I personally get annoyed with it (and it certainly works against the goal of reasoning towards some purpose).

As a participant, I feel that I want more structure. I want a facilitator who is not so mannered as to be sheepish in "guiding" stray bits of inquiry. Perhaps my judgement is flawed, but it seems to be the case that there has not been sufficient questioning such as: a) Could you clarify what you just said? b) How does your point tie in with what was said before? c) Does everyone understand what X is trying to say? d) Can somebody summarize our progress so far? etc, etc. Again, this may be due to the specific circumstances at hand.

One other important facet of methodology which has been uncommon has been a sense of closure. While some have effectively done this, many have not. For a philosophical discussion not to appear like a free form (albeit high level and

philosophical discussion not to appear like a free form (albeit high level and intelligent) rap session, a quick review and approximation of conclusion seems necessary.

These are general thoughts, which replace a specific recounting of this morning's session.

FRIDAY EVENING, August 7

In conversations with several participants tonight, I found that the concerns I expressed above are shared. People desire more clarification, feel that the discussions have been somewhat anarchic, and would like to hear (and give) feed back from others as to their facilitation after each session. Due perhaps to this sense of discomfort with the modeling process so far, tonight's session opened up somewhat to the expressed need for clarification and contextual relevance.

One thing that Bill did which I found useful was to limit the comments to just three sections of this huge chapter. Such an approach started us off with a more focused agenda. Yet the discussion quickly fell into a trap which has been happening consistently. Evaluation and analysis of the comments going up on the board began in earnest "as they were going up." This eats into time, limits other concerns, and establishing a list fairly quickly, "then" going back and discerning what may be of most interest and pursuing that issue, the facilitator became bogged down with each comment. The first comment, a question, went up on the board, this after some rather agonized work on clarification. Then, rather than soliciting other issues, the question to the group was "OK, do you want to say what you think he means by . . ."

The discussion became concerned with the different poetic categories of existence which Mr. Newberry in Suki covers. Two good questions resulting from this were "What is the existence of things?" and "What is the being of things?" The facilitator asked the group the first question, and began directing it around the room. But a problem ensued. One of the first respondents "answered" by asking "What is the relationship between meaning and being in a poem?" A good question, but one which should have been put on the board and returned to "after" the preceding issues had been addressed (for we need to clarify those questions as criteria in answering the third).

Yet what happened was that the facilitator threw this question out to the class, and confusion followed in many of us. There was a jump in the discourse here, and a sense of continuity was lost.

SATURDAY MORNING, August 8

To begin the session, we went over some methodology in relation to Suki. The program in general tends to steer clear of concrete methodology, so I assume that the particular points enumerated are important.

I'm discovering that I'm by no means alone in many of the concerns I've had about how the sessions are progressing. Many are somewhat frustrated by subtleties of method, and by the lack of focus in the discussions. I have a hypothesis. I believe that our trainers have been deliberately refraining from interfering in the process. This way, we as participants tend to search and to locate problems (and ponder their possible solutions) out of sheer frustration.

It was obvious that Frank had been pondering these problems. His facilitation was noticeably more forceful in maintaining cohesiveness of direction. He also began with more structure, limiting comments and questions to specific sections.

At a separate moment, he asked a question on methodology. It seems he was disturbed by the "dictatorial" insistence on a student-centered approach. The tension between this particular goal (student-centered dialogue) and the frustration

would hope) recognize the importance of students feeling intellectually empowered. This program seeks to do just that, by allowing students the major say in the direction of inquiry. Yet many of us have experienced the frustration of either teaching in anarchic classroom situations, or participating in discussions with limited structure. Both can be maddening. The point of interference, which is as inconspicuous as possible while maintaining reasoning continuity, would be the ideal of the facilitator.

In Kio and Gus Chapter 3, the facilitator began with a twist, harkening back to topics left over from other sessions. A little realism is a good thing.

The discussion was very animated. Ethical issues arose (ie., animal rights). Since consensus is rare in such issues, the questions and comments were more authentic, less as if following a sense of modeling. The session, because of this, became less like a model (at least to my perception).

Also this morning, Ann gave a presentation of Chapter 2 of Lisa. She altered the methodology substantially, sending questions directly to the group instead of soliciting them. Again, this more structured model of presentation came at an ideal time, and it was refreshing to realize that such a method can be viable with the program.

PART TWO

SUNDAY EVENING, August 9

A more noteworthy discussion on methodology took place. It was a useful session, clarifying as it did some areas of ambiguity. An important point was the level of creative freedom the program lends itself to. The consistent modeling pattern we've been working with might suggest that the method is iron-clad. But Brian Lamb (as well as the others who have used the program) mentioned many examples of divergent tactics. The materials may be employed in different ways, as long as certain things are kept in mind, ie., the fostering of reasoning skills (and awareness building of them) and respect for the intellectual autonomy of the student.

MONDAY MORNING, August 10

Insufficient sleep leaves me semi-comatose, but I'll struggle through this anyway. Matt began the session with a purely practical explanation of funding sources.

We then discussed the problem of moral education, for which has been neatly substituted the term ethical inquiry. This in particular is what draws me to P4C, for I want to believe that well developed thinking skills and respect for good argument (respect for the rules of discourse and the views of others) can succeed where political moralizing has failed (in particular concerning the issues of racism, imperialism, economic injustice and insensitivity to poverty, etc.). Not that I see this as a means of transmitting my values to the students. I'm clearly aware of the implications of that in this program (and with the ethical considerations, in general, in the classroom). Rather, I believe that hightened reasoning skills and enjoyment of inquiry (and the confidence to be involved that these things promote) can't help but bring people to a clearer awareness of these issues. At least I hope this is so.

There is something that Matt mentioned with which I disagree, though. This concerns the ability to think logically and the problem of racism. Matt asserted that if one is aware of the logical flaw in projecting the characteristics of one person on an entire group, that one's stance may be altered. This would be nice, but it seems like racism, and I'm not sure that illuminating faulty reasoning has an

it seems like racism, and I'm not sure that illuminating faulty reasoning has an effect sufficient to change someone's judgements. Perhaps he could mean that a respect for logically consistent thinking can effect a racist (and more important, creating a racially integrated community of inquiry, I believe, can have great effects).

Harry, Chapter 8; Pixie, Chapter 5; and Kio and Gus, Chapter 4

These three presentations flew by, and I can recall nothing specific about them. I know that I'm enjoying the discourse more now, and I believe this is due to a higher awareness on the part of the facilitators in keeping the discussion coherent. It also may have to do with people knowing each other better, and not being afraid to be more assertive.

MONDAY EVENING, August 10

We went over a review of the logic in the program. As simple as this material is, it always seems like rediscovery upon review. The importance of logic in the program is quite obvious, as is the need to diverge from a student-centered approach in this area. I continue to disagree with Matt, though, on the efficacy of logic alone in correcting faulty thinking such as prejudice.

TUESDAY MORNING, August 11

Later this evening, I will be doing my first session, and of course I am unclear about certain things. In using Suki, more ground seems to have to be covered in our model presentations, and, it seems, more structure is necessary with this program. In talking with Ann, I received fairly exact suggestions as to how the session should proceed, leaving little room for the discourse to grow in its own way. Perhaps this is the nature of this particular program, though, as the main idea is to lead towards an application of the ideas expressed into writing.

This morning's sessions went as per usual. In the first session the facilitator concentrated on a synthesis of the various comments on the board. This was the focus of the entire discussion. While I can see a value in this grouping exercise, I think that it can be easily overused. It brings ideas together, and is a good exercise in comparison and finding similarities, yet no single item is really taken up. If this were habitually done by a P4C teacher in a class, I think it possible that the students would grow less apt to give initial responses, as the discussion would never quite get around to taking up these issues.

In the second presentation, Helena varied the process by having us write down a question or comment on a piece of paper, then hanging selected ones on the board. This was a refreshing change of pace, but also very, very time consuming. While these fun touches may be useful in engaging the interest of students, one pays the price of taking time away from the actual inquiry.

WEDNESDAY MORNING, August 12

I will first describe my thoughts about my presentation last night. In general, while I was extremely uncomfortable and not very happy with my performance (if one can call it that) the feedback I received was very positive. Several people, including Phil, said that I give the appearance of being under control and knowing what I'm doing. I had no idea I was such a good actor. He also noted that I had a reassuring, calming effect on people. Again, this was a surprise, considering the intensity of emotions which were the norm when in front of my high school classes. Now I could be skeptical, and assume that people are being so complimentary in a humane attempt to keep me from crumbling into neurotic inertia. But no, I'll accept

The ongoing ambiguity of the program manifested itself in my presentation (as well as in this morning's incident, which I'll describe later). As I mentioned before, Ann had suggested a fairly set agenda for my session, and was followed by Phil, who not only reinforced the suggestions, but added that I might want to divide up my time beforehand. All this I did. In fact, I wrote up and adhered rather strictly to a plain old static lesson plan. What is going on here? And to top it all off, one minor criticism I did receive concerned an area (perhaps the only one) where I didn't adhere strictly to suggestion (we used two model poems, rather than three). All this in a program that eschews lesson plans? I surmise that in our first sessions, especially those using Suki, it is better to work within a defined structure, and to relax when once the "soul" of P4C, as it were, is internalized. Ambiguity, though, permeates.

Dealing with the content of the session proved to be much more difficult than expected. I had some fine material to work with, revolving around the concepts of freedom and restraint. This is an area of great interest to me, yet I found myself going blank in the midst of the discussion. With the avoidance of didacticism, one relinquishes the power to direct the flow of inquiry, thus being cut off from known resources. The discussion quickly runs into uncharted terrain, and one can easily get lost in the moment. This seemed to happen to me several times, and make for what I was sure were clumsy transitions.

I felt that my transition from the discourse on freedom/constraint to aesthetic criteria was especially forced, and I know I wasn't the only one who lost the thread. I attempted to make the change, after going over a "poem of liberation," by asking if people liked the poem, and why. This was an obvious attempt to elicit criteria, which would lead to the exercise. Sadly, nobody was biting. From there, I went into the exercise anyway, and it was a while before the discussion regained stride.

As Phil suggested, the thing to do would have been to continue questioning as to why people like certain poems, why they like certain works of art, or anything. Eventually, the concept of criteria for aesthetic preferences would have arisen.

A word about why I chose not to go through a batch of poems before the writing exercise. It seems to me that merely flashing through a series of poems is not particularly effective in eliciting the writing of a poem. Each poem necessitates some time to digest, and each must be digested properly before it becomes an effective model. Perhaps I don't fully understand the theory behind this methodology.

A note concerning this afternoon's fiasco. During the session, the facilitator was interrupted by Matt with some methodology critique. In most teacher "classes," this certainly would be no cause for comment. But here it fell with a thud. It was the first overt methodology criticism occurring during a session, and broke into the surrealism of the model "community of inquiry." While I feel that Matt's comment was warranted, and could be construed as constructive (ironically, it concerned the time loss of another response taking gimmick), I agree with _____; this was quite heavy handed. The student was obviously thrown off balance, and it was painful to watch the good natured soul struggle to regain his bearings.

I attribute this incident to the ambiguity running throughout the program, as described many times herein.

THURSDAY MORNING, August 13

What exactly are we referring to when we use the term "thinking skills", and how are they related to P4C? Such are the questions Matt went over this morning. Thinking skills were broken down into five categories, and philosophy's link to each was explained. Especially important is the skill of "concept formation," which Matt

assumes to be particularly embedded in the doing of philosophy. Grouping together, comparing, classifying thoughts, questioning these classifications--all these tasks reside in philosophical inquiry. Since these skills are important across the curriculum, we have an especially good argument for the inclusion of philosophy in the classroom.

Then need for an atmosphere of mutual intellectual respect (and, in general, all those interpersonal aspects stressed in community of inquiry descriptions) were also mentioned. To look at our own thoughts, or "mental life," and to have the confidence to do this when our "critical dispositions" are encouraged are two other skills falling under the effective umbrella of P4C. This last point I find to be important to my situation in Brooklyn. The students there have been stifled and clamped down upon since early childhood, and thus have had their "critical dispositions" thwarted. They have also been treated with intellectual disdain by their teachers, and thus haven't the confidence to express themselves in classes. Since their lives are in many ways stuck in the present (due to the intensity of experience, eg., noise, hostility, etc.) they have little to no time to reflect upon their thinking processes. The community of inquiry may provide these students with the environment they've been missing (although I hope it's not completely too late by high school age. By 13-14, many inner city students know that asking questions can get you hurt, either by another family member, a teacher, or a cop. Inquiry, for these students, is a somewhat dangerous game to play, and must be done with a degree of bravado.)

The three sessions all went quickly this morning, and somewhat methodically. Read--pull out concepts--discuss--do exercise, etc. Some moves into exercises are more smooth than others, some less. Most of us are still struggling with the art of follow up questions.

THURSDAY EVENING, August 14

Mary facilitated a discussion of Chapter 7 of Suki. Her approach seemed to be more fluid than mine, but at the same time she too seemed rushed. The need to fit in all the proscribed "steps" in a Suki session causes this to happen.

We centered on the concepts of sincerity and insincerity in poetry (and art in general). This concept begged to be linked with experience/inexperience of the writer (Harry's big problem), and Mary tried with questioning to establish this link. No one bit at this bait, though, until the sum up part of the discussion.

We analyzed a Joyce Carol Oates poem, and from this arose the controversy of whether one can legitimately have criteria for poetry. The idea seems to frighten people, as though criteria for analyzing the arts somehow will take away from the magic of poetry. Perhaps more time could have been spent on this problem. Questioning could have led to an isolation of the reasons behind this fear of criteria.

For example, the person who expressed the most obvious dislike of criteria noted that the Oates poem could possibly elicit the opposite feelings than were intended (ie., young readers might relate to the commercialization of the countryside in a positive, rather than negative way). Now, is this not a sign that the poem has a weakness, if this is true? We had to move on to another topic at that juncture, and the point was left dangling.

Finally, just before the writing period of the session, connections between several of the topics were begging to be made. I thought we would move past them, but Mary asked for a summary of points. This was a good move, and allowed several people to clarify various relations between the points made.

FRIDAY MORNING, August 14

I awoke quite ill today, another victim of the mysterious Mendham virus. So this entry may be short.

Matt lectured on the relationship of traditional philosophy to P4C. He described the curriculum as a series of novels bristling with idea kernels, to be planted in hopes of future deja vu's, when the student runs across the concept in a more formal manner later in life. Such kernels provide the interest, or experience link for a student towards the concept when later encountered. This is of course steeped in Dewey's notion that a student needs to experience the raw data of the formation of a concept, to actually participate in the same discovery that the philosopher/scientist/historian/etc. did before constructing his/her system.

This profound point is problematic for many of us, though. When one finds oneself in a traditional classroom, one quickly discovers that students have never been treated in the above manner. They have ingested reified information all their lives, and are completely accustomed to an approach quite the inverse of Dewey's. Especially for my students in Brooklyn, for whom structure is all important, this is a problem. To be "pedagogically strong" in my situation is to "constantly" endanger one's content, or philosophical weakness. Many ideas are running through my head as to implementation, but questions rule the roost.

This afternoon, while attempting to sleep off this virus, I dreamed I was in front of a class in Brooklyn. Happily, they were a fairly controlled class, approximating a community of inquiry. I was enjoying myself with this group, and particularly enjoying their faces as they struggled with the questions. I hope this is a good omen.

FRIDAY EVENING, August 14

In watching videos, we saw various examples of what to stay away from, such as a teacher-centered, question firing technique. It seems extremely difficult to get the students to talk and listen to each other. If this doesn't happen, we have what was referred to as a "barrage of questions," the students fielding them like so many baseballs in a game of pepper, but no meaningful diaglogue--and certainly very little inquiry. This may very well be the most difficult aspect of applying this program.

SATURDAY MORNING, August 15

Entitled, "Philosophy in the Classroom," or "The Avoidance of Dogma in the Classroom." Matt began this talk ostensibly dealing with standard philosophy and its value in the classroom. But the dialogue quickly settled into an investigation of the teacher's role as to the inculcation of ideas versus the eliciting of ideas. Especially in the area of values, Matt emphasized the importance of the teacher "not" pushing her own value agenda. He had a good foil in _____, who kept insisting on the importance of stressing certain values, which, he kept declaring, he held dogmatically.

At first, I felt inclined to join with others in a type of attack on this. I wanted to argue for the value of inquiry "about" values, the importance of skepticism, and the danger of beliefs arrived at and held in an unexamined manner. In general, the P4C stance as to tentatively held beliefs was coming into focus on the shoulders of _____'s innocent insistence on absolute values and the importance of inculcating them.

Yet, before long, I felt compelled to join _____ in this insistence. Not that I don't understand the importance of avoiding indoctrination and allowing students to reach value stages autonomously. But I fear the possible results of this stance. First of all, we have the problem of giving a basis for moral action if beliefs are held too tentatively. The other problem is an age old philosophical one.

Without an absolute, upon what do we ground our value structure? Doesn't sufficient tentativeness lead to despair, ennui, and finally, in overcompensation reaction, violent adherence to some dangerous dogma (such as Nazism)? While I'm not at all convinced that "if God is dead, everything is legal," I'm not sure of the strength of reason and community of inquiry to avoid the abovementioned malaise.

It's interesting: _____ and I, Christian young Republican and cynical Leftist both with convergent concerns on this point.

On the two facilitators, I have only a few comments. Different methodologies are being tried, such as _____ having us write a piece around a word to begin the session. She then proceeded to elicit from us the question of whether one can write a story not based in some way on experience, ie., constructed entirely by reason. Whether or not it was effective I'm not sure, for we were lead into the experience/reason dichotomy in a sure way. This was a distinct agenda. Would this be considered student centered?

Anyway, it's difficult to assess the success of such techniques with our group. Perhaps this would be more easily ascertained with young students.

SUNDAY EVENING, August 16

. . . Begining a discussion on methodology--Eugenio, at one point, described certain teacher behavior as "manipulative." While I could see what he meant, this brought up the question of ambiguity as to the place of the teacher as discussion facilitator once again. Could we not say that the obvious agenda displayed in the last several sessions, including my own, have been "manipulative"? Where does "leading towards a significant discovery of philosophical questions" become manipulation? I brought the question up, aroused an active explanation from Matt, but left the discussion without resolving the question for myself.

The basic explanation isn't hard to duplicate. As facilitator in philosophical discourse, our place is to be strong leaders as far as procedure. . . It is our place to point our problems in reasoning and logical inconsistencies. We needn't be subdued in asking for clarification, or in suggesting possible inferences. And we need be strong in insisting that the rules of community of inquiry be maintained; such as mutual respect, listening to each other, etc.

Where we want to be nondirective is in the area of subject content. We want to avoid pointing out conclusions, directing towards answers. We do not want to force the dialogue in the direction we want to go. This takes away the students' sense of control, and sense of active, creative participation. O.K.

O.K., yet, is this what many of us have been doing in the sessions we've been facilitating? We're given ideas as to what tack to take in our coaching sessions, and we go with it. Are we to assume that we will carry less planning into our actual classrooms? For the answer to this and other important questions, consult your local dialectician.

MONDAY EVENING, August 17

Another chapter of Suki. Thomas veered away from the methodology, with some very refreshing results. Instead of having to abruptly steer away from certain points of dialogue in order to fit in certain exercises, Tom allowed the discussion to build into a true leveling point. He then went without models, when moving into the poetry writing phase.

The group is rather easy to lead at this point. People know each other and are loose. The dialogue carries itself, for the most part. Facilitation is almost a matter of pointing at the next speaker. Interestingly, perhaps we move further and

further away from an accurate model of P4C classroom.

TUESDAY MORNING, August 18

I facilitated a session of Kio and Gus this morning and found it to be unacceptable. My mind blanked out several times, and I found the session to be rather formless. In an effort to overcome this, I "led" the session perhaps more than I would have liked. It seems that I repeated summaries quite often in the session, and thus did a lot of talking that wasn't questioning. I realize that I did this in order to keep clear in my own mind the direction the discussion was taking. Perhaps if I could keep this "thought organizing" to myself, and vocalize only the questions, I would be more successful.

One trap in which I found myself was in trying to tie the discourse to an exercise. While there were exercises on "appeal to force" and "might makes right," I found that they were not smoothly applicable to the direction of the discussion. Therefore, I tried to "steer" the discussion that way (and this was not very successful).

I'm finding the actual facilitating extremely difficult in relation to how it looks from the perspective of a participant. I worry. Will I blank out like this in front of my class? Will I slip into "direction" even more easily than here? Perhaps more study of questioning will be of help.

Earlier, there was a treatment of logic in Harry. A move was quickly made to the exercises, which centered on the importance of word location (the middle term dropping out) in syllogisms. I thought, while this was going on, that a graphic representation would be helpful. Lo and behold, Neil resorted to diagrams. But he began with Euler diagrams, and switched to Venn. To show the reason why word placement makes such a difference, I would have stuck to one or the other type of diagram.

TUESDAY EVENING, August 18

Perhaps we are something approaching a "community of inquiry" now. People seem to truly listen to each other, building upon each other's ideas. People trust each other, and are courteous. There's alot of good humor and insight.

This occurred to me as we went through the evening's treatment of Suki. The facilitator had to merely initiate the proceedings and more or less sit back. requests for clarification, questioning of logic, etc., all seem to occur autonomously within the group.

_____, I feel, is the best facilitator of the group. I would not have thought this upon first meeting her, but it's true. She carries herself with a type of unfeigned innocence, and this quality is perfect for P4C. It is naturally "philosophically self-effacing," while not being pedagogically weak. It's difficult for me to assume the same stance. When dealing with philosophy, I feel hostile to the child-like, open side of myself. It's as though many of the insights I've gained in philosophy have led me to sneer at child-ish-ness. This is something I obviously need to get over. One has to go through raw philosophical process over and over, maintaining that sense of wonder and curiosity time and time again to be effective as a P4C facilitator.

One small point of procedure. Ann led the second half of the chapter, and began her part by asking for a synopsis, as it were, of that section. This is the first time such a thing has been done in these modeling sessions, and, I imagine, is a useful introduction to sessions which occur days after sections have been read.

WEDNESDAY MORNING, August 19

Matt went through a quick overview of the theoretical basis of the program. I found it quite interesting to recognize these concepts from an experience-to-theory context. That is, after ingesting the program for several weeks, the theoretical background plugged into experience. I suppose there's no irony here.

_____ led a section of Harry, and again I felt the session was well done. She was very non-assertive, but always there, and her implementation of the exercise was seamless.

The Pixie section, led by _____, proved my hypothesis that the group can function unaided.

One other note. _____ went through the process of first classifying the many questions/topics she wrote on the board, then having a vote to determine the starting point. Such a process is extremely time consuming, and I wonder about its value. The exercise of grouping the concepts does seem to have intrinsic value, since comparing and contrasting and classifying are important activities. But I wonder if one gets too far adrift with this activity.

THURSDAY MORNING, August 20

Late coming in this morning, I had to launch right into my session of Harry. The chapter was pregnant with the hypothetical syllogism, which was a topic requiring attention. So even though several other topics were nominated, I had to push the session towards the logic.

Now, in a regular classroom, I would wait on this. I understand how the students would lose faith if you solicited questions and proceeded to ignore them. But here things are different.

I presented the hypothetical syllogism from what I thought was the ground up. We used Tony's mother's warning as our example. I then went over Tony's experiences to illustrate the four possibilities. I purposely avoided terminology such as "affirming/denying antecedent," as I would in this introductory phase in the classroom. As we arrived at each example (eg., affirming consequent, etc.), I asked for the reason "why" this worked, or led to a valid deduction.

It seemed to me that seeing the organic reason why these rules worked would help, not only in understanding them, but in being able to implement them. (For example, a hypothetical statement pertains only to a limited case. Affirming the consequent still leaves open possibilities outside the case. This is why it is inconclusive).

This did, however, seem to lead to some confusion.

Afterward, Matt advised that when teaching hypothetical syllogisms, one should stick to the rules. It should be sufficient to say that X follows due to the fact that the antecedent is affirmed, period. Asking for further reasons, he maintained, clouds the issue and is confusing.

Some notable aspects of the other presentations this morning--

Bob used the board more often than others. This standard technique has been curiously under utilized these few weeks. I should think that the consistent use of the blackboard in P4C classes would be particularly helpful, since the level of abstraction is often rather high.

Walter's session was memorable in that he stayed fairly close to the text. He kept referring back to the novel, not allowing the discussion to stretch too far from its origin. On the positive side, this gives a natural structure and base for the inquiry. On the negative side, if adhered to too strictly, this may lead the facilitator to cut off potentially valuable avenues of discussion.

THURSDAY EVENING, August 20

Matt led the last chapter of Suki. Let me see if I can highlight the positive aspects of this model. Matt seemed genuinely interested in each comment made. There seemed to be nothing artificial in his manner as regards this. Also, it was clear (should it not be?) that he had a good idea of the contents of the manual. He was able to steer in and out of the exercises, the "thinking abouts" and the poems very easily.

CONCLUSIONS

I could go on for many pages, but I'll try to keep this short. I've come to have what I believe to be a clear idea of the theories behind the program. They synthesize for me many strands that I've been in agreement with for a long time. I like to think that the program would be particularly valuable for working class children, both in the US and elsewhere, who have traditionally been denied the joys of intellectual discovery and philosophical discourse. I look forward to trying this in Brooklyn.

I still feel a gap between my understanding of the theories and methodology of the program, and of my ability to implement it. I'm hoping this will come with practice. The ambiguity I've described often in this journal, that which exists between lesson structure and community of inquiry goals, or that optimum place described in the phrase "pedagogically strong and philosophically self-effacing" I'm still not completely clear about.

I believe this ambiguity is implicit in progressive education methodology in general, and is the main reason for its having been either ignored or misused all these years.

I plan, however, to continue working towards a resolution of all this. For education, such a resolution is imperative.

YEAR END COMMENTS

A year ago, ambiguity was the word of the day when it came to most of the practical aspects of Philosophy for Children. While the theoretical basis of the program seemed clear and enticing, how exactly the program would manifest itself in the classroom was anything but certain. The big question, as with any educational approach, concerned the teacher's role. In traditional programs, this role is well defined; one can look to a manual and attempt to follow distinct steps in the classroom. P4C defies such explicit direction. Any methodology descriptions effect the student of P4C more like Zen koans than how-to instructions. While this is wonderfully consistent with the general tenor of the program, it can be maddening for the novice ready to enter classrooms full of expectant faces.

Such a light hand in terms of methodological direction had its effect at the August Mendham workshop. Participants tend to react with curious amusement at first, then fall at various rates into confusion, frustration, and other forms of malaise. People demand "structure," and when Matt, Ann or anyone else actually lectures, people react as though tossed bits of food after prolonged starvation.

This malaise was not limited to Mendham. Throughout the year of study and application, many in our group struggled with this lack of definition. Especially when working in actual classrooms, people suffered through lack of direction, never really knowing how successful were their efforts. One does not test knowledge implanted from P4C in a classroom. One cannot throw questions out and have answers fired back--one tried and true road to teacher satisfaction. No, all we really had to go on was how much the classes seems to have internalized community of inquiry

standards.

Such standards are extremely difficult to judge. Loud, apparently unruly classrooms are often arenas of student debate, with students listening, responding and demanding good reasons. Quiet, controlled classrooms, on the other hand, are often the opposite. It is common to lead a session in a classroom and come away feeling triumphant. The students were actively listening and participating. Gem after gem of insight flew from their mouths. Yet upon reflection, one realizes that this was not a model P4C session at all. Students directed everything at and through you, the teacher. Student comments, though insightful, were discrete and didn't build upon each other. By normal standards, a teacher could feel proud of this class, for the role of the center of attention is the given in pedagogical practice. Not here. One has to be invisible (literally sitting down amongst the children, as it took me a while to learn), while at the same time a leader of a sort. Children look to you not only for content, but even more strongly, they look to you for process leadership. Content and process are traditionally (and, I think, intuitively) intertwined. Thus, the proscription to be pedagogically strong and content-wise weak makes strong demands on the teacher.

This is a problem not only those of us in the graduate program, but any newly trained P4C teacher must face. If one leans towards the "weak" side, one can face anarchy or apathy. Except for the slothful educator, one feels compelled then to alter the approach. Plans are tightened, the teacher assumes more presence in the discussion. Various gimmicks are tried. Soon, we have many interesting classroom goings on, but not exactly philosophical discourse.

Getting off the didactic pedestal is a serious challenge for any teacher. For the novice educator, it can be devastatingly confusing. The student teaching experience was therefore a trial for many. Yet, in reviewing the experience, one thing is clear. The training process can be no more didactic than it is. That is, it can be no more didactic than the actual teacher's actual role in his or her classroom. Perhaps far more discussion as to classroom experience would have been a good thing. This is the one suggestion for change in the graduate program that I can confidently put forth. We meet in endless modeling sessions, but discussion of actual application is rare. In training programs in general, one out of every three or four meetings should be such interactions.

I mentioned the modeling sessions. By the end of the Mendham workshop, it seemed as though these sessions had improved greatly. For various reasons, such improvement cannot completely be assigned to our year long group. While I enjoyed the sessions, for other members of the group the sessions were a trial. Why could this be? First and foremost, I believe that any group has a chemistry. Cognitive styles mesh or clash, according to specific personality make-ups of the group. This was one of the problems.

In addition, a problem for many, though not for me, was the place of Matt, Ann and Phil in the discussion. Often, the discussion would run away, with one of these three holding the ball. While I in fact enjoyed this, for the person leading the group it produced a difficult task. How to spread the discourse around, how to create a community of inquiry, when in order to do this one had to keep our three mentors at bay? The problem was never quite resolved.

I imagine that this may not be a rare phenomenon in teacher training groups. A lesson to be learned is that when in the position of teacher training, one must control one's quite justifiable philosophical excitement. It may be in fact more important to be philosophically self-effacing (as a participant) in a training model session than in the actual classroom.

Ironically, or perhaps in spite of ourselves, our group indeed grew in

and were quite adept at follow up questions, at listening (at least more so than at the beginning) and at building on other's statements.

This was apparent in several places. At Mendham in May, these qualities were quite manifest. When a professor who had attended both workshops commented as such, I could see what he meant. Growth in these qualities is difficult to perceive when you are together as a group over a time. It is with feedback from outside that comes a more objective view. After his comment, I began to observe, and was impressed by what I saw. Despite the fact that our wildly varying personalities were far from concordant, we had indeed come far as a group. Ironically, I noticed, several of those who had complained the most throughout the year were the most active and obvious in philosophical procedure during the Mendham sessions.

Philosophy for Children does produce changes in one who is immersed in it for such a period. I have noticed how much more sensitive I've become to philosophical questions which arise in general. One becomes sensitized to this in general interaction with people and with media. In fact, normal social discussions become philosophical ones without conscious effort. Such a phenomenon, I believe, is not the normal product of traditional philosophical study. It is participation in P4C style philosophical discourse, over a period of time, which causes this. We have here one of the most curious and positive by products of training in P4C.

In the beginning, one of my main questions concerned the notion (and goal) of tentatively held beliefs. I feared the effects of such tentativeness not only on the overall value structure of the student, but on his or her ability to make ethical decisions. Over the year, I've come to get over this fear, for several reasons. In the first place, tentatively held beliefs do not preclude the formation of strongly held beliefs when the occasion calls for them. Having experienced an educational setting where beliefs are not given but always up for discussion, a student is bound to be more intellectually frisky, more likely to care about these issues. Moral education without ethical inquiry may produce firmly held beliefs, but certainly not beliefs subject to revision in novel circumstances. A student so inclined is more likely to be frozen into moral inaction when facing a conflicting situation.

In inquiry, the dust of our beliefs is raised, and we are challenged to subject these beliefs to proper intellectual scrutiny. At a young age, this is far more likely to happen without resistance than at the adult stage. If we wait until college age to subject students to ethical inquiry (at an age when they supposedly can handle it) we lose a great opportunity. For these reasons, I believe ethical inquiry leading to tentatively held beliefs from the early grades is a healthy and necessary thing in democratic education.

In my fall Mendham journal, I wrote of a dream I had, working with young students and experiencing the joy one has when watching the faces of children involved in inquiry. I'm happy to say that became reality on several occasions during my work in Newark, New Jersey. During these days, I would observe disagreements, and questions. They would smile, be quizzical, or sometimes downright angry if challenged by another student. Overall, I remember their smiles, smiles registering their pleasure in adding their own mental product to the discourse. Smiles reflecting a sense of pride in perceiving their importance in the class. Most of all, I remember their smiles upon recognition that they were being intellectually creative, that their creations were on par with inquiry anywhere. All this in the faces of ten-year-olds living in the poorest city in the US, whose lives were surrounded by oppression, ugliness and fear.

Those smiling faces are my motivation to work with Philosophy for Children. Although this may be among the most difficult teaching approaches to truly master,

those smiles tell us all that the struggle is worth it.

Tom Lardner