PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN LATIN AMERICA: A DEMOCRATIZATION INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

I am now sitting in La Antigua, Guatemala. It's 6:00 a.m. Ancient church bells compete with their clanging. Some with a clear ringing, others of dead metal. For centuries this tiny town of some 20 square blocks was the very center of Christianity in the "new" world. Its philosophy was brought to this place, lock, stock, and barrel. And, from here it was funneled south to Peru and north to Mexico. Not a philosophy of "liberation." Just ask the Maya who remain.

I am sitting here in La Antigua, Guatemala, retired form the university but anxious about the future of Philosophy for Children in what was once the Kingdom of Guatemala extending north into Mexico and south to Columbia. In 1989 Philosophy for Children is alive in Mexico where we started the first project in '79. Philosophy for Children seeds were planted in Guatemala in 1986-87 and fertilized in 1988. And, it is about that fertilization process which I wish to share with the San Antonio Philosophy for Children Conference.

At the Philosophy for Children Second Decade Conference held at Texas Wesleyan in 1987, we reported on the Philosophy for Children initiation projects completed in Guatemala which demonstrated that Philosophy for Children can be an effective vehicle for promoting democracy in Guatemala. It was reported that the Democratization Observation Test does guide the perceptions of program observers when determining the extent to which teacher and learner behavior exemplify selected democratization themes. It was also demonstrated tat both teachers and children do significantly better on post-tests of the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills after only 12-15 hours of instruction with Philosophy for Children.

Preliminary to the 1987 Guatemala project, we had contacted the National Endowment for Democracy to explore the possibility of funding. The NED suggested that we contact The Association for Research and the Social Sciences, a Guatemalan "think tank," which was being funded to promote democracy in Guatemala. Contacts were made. The ASIES group was very enthusiastic about the purposes and goals of Philosophy for Children. After many meetings with representatives of ASIES, viewing video demonstration classes, and conferences with teachers, ASIES asked that Philosophy for Children become a part of their effort.

Upon returning to Marquette University and preparing a report of the Guatemala experiment, and I found that funding through the NED was not possible.

Richard Nuccio, a consultant with the Roosevelt Center (Washington, D.C.), and a professor of political science at Georgetown University became very important to the progress of the project. He had been working with the ASIES group in Guatemala and had heard about the Philosophy for Children project. He asked to review the materials and to explore the project proposal. He suggested that I contact Roma Knee and Norma Parker of US-AID in Washington. Took he strongly suggested that I return to Guatemala and present the proposal to the education officers at the AID office there.

US-AID

I spoke with Roma Knee. She immediately grasped the function and purpose of Philosophy for Children as a vehicle for democratization as did Richard Nuccio. This fact surprised me because so frequently university professors smiled patronizingly when I'd say the words, "philosophy for children." I was hit with this attitude when I had applied for funding from the Bradley Institute for Democracy at Marquette University. Some reader critiques included such comments as, "Why waste time in the elementary school. Work with high school kids." Of course the proposal made clear that the majority

of the population of Guatemala does not attend high school. (At that point in time I wondered out loud how Matt Lipman ever endured.)

I sent Philosophy for Children materials to Ms. Knee with an old NED project proposal with only the cover sheet changed to include the statement, "Presented to AID". During a second conversation Ms. Knee, too, suggested strongly that I make another trip to Guatemala to discuss the project with that AID office.

I did return to Guatemala in July of 1988 with financial assistance from Marquette University. I did meet with AID officers there as well as with members of an indigenous justice committee. Also, I received the endorsement for the project from the Ministery of Education. Such endorsements do not come easily. One of my former students is now the chief public relations officer for the Ministery!

Many months went by. My impatient nature told me I'd be working in a little school on the outskirts of Antigua with Philosophy for Children when Roma Knee telephoned and told me the project had been selected as one to be presented to Congress for funding and that it might be enlarged to include countries other than Guatemala. The child in me was convulsive with delight. We talked for an hour. Again I was impressed with Ms. Knees' complete grasp of the project. (It was clear during other project conferences that the supposed interested parties had not read a word). "Will you be able to come to Washington to discuss the concept?" Roma Knee asked. Will I be able to come to Washington to discuss the concept? I remembered the comment of an primary teacher seeing that she had a flat tire. "Oh, Oh! My, my! Damn, damn!"

THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

The conference was held in late September of 1988 in Washington. The objective for the overall AID project is the strengthening of democratic institutions through regional leadership development in Latin America. The purpose of the project is to increase significantly, in both the public and private sectors, the numbers and the political skills of leaders who are committed to democratic ideals and practices. The project will have four components, Philosophy for Children being one.

The following issue statement was critical to the selection of Philosophy for Children as a possible component to help US-AID meet the major goals of its "Democratization Initiative":

> Only when the majority population of any country can freely take advantage of the promises made in the name of democracy will democratization have a chance of being realized. Since the majority population of Guatemala attends only the elementary school, developing reflective and reasonable citizens through formal education must occur in the elementary school, if ever. (This is true also of most Carribbean basin countries.) That majority population, the elementary children of Guatemala, ought to be nurtured by a carefully designed curriculum which promises long term, leadership commitment and effective longitudinal evaluation. Such a curriculum can enable the teachers (who can be community leaders) and children of Guatemala (who will be future leaders) not only to function effectively within a democracy, but more importantly, to sustain that democracy.

Our proposal statement included the following:

> Philosophy for Children is curriculum which develops reflective and reasonable citizens with the ability to infer meaning from what they hear and read, and to import meaning to what they say and write. Responsible consent and responsible dissent require adequate reasoning

> competencies and adequate inquiry skills. It is the function of the Philosophy for Children curriculum to develop in teachers and children those competencies which form the foundation upon which democratic values and processes, as well as a sense of justice are built.

For the purposes of this project, we used the following definition of Philosophy for Children:

> Philosophy for Children is a curriculum for teachers and students, K-12, developed to promote *that kind* of critical thinking which encourages the making of reasoned judgements without promoting a specific philosophy.
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> Philosophy for Children is a curriculum which uses short novels specifically written to promote *that kind* of critical thinking which uses the socratic method among others. *This kind* of critical thinking is thinking that devotes itself to the improvement of thinking and behaving in a *reality context.*
>
> Philosophy for Children is a curriculum which demands that reasons be offered to support and justify points of view, proposed answers and solutions, and behavior. *This kind* of critical thinking is thinking that devotes itself to the improvement of thinking as well as overt behavior in a *reality context.*

I was well satisfied with the Washington conference. The officers from AID, the consultants from Development Associates, an the representatives of the other three project components were very encouraging.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT BEGIN?

Because a network of significant contacts are now in place in Guatemala, this Philosophy for Children project can be initiated with no more than two weeks of "lead time." This is true to one degree or another for other Latin American countries which might be selected for the project with Guatemala.

Private schools for poor children such as schools in the Fe y Alegria network as well as public schools are to be identified. Each country will have a cadre of five "teacher-trainers". Each trainer works in one classroom in two different schools with a group of "teacher-observers". (This group will include the classroom teacher). Pre-tests using the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills are to be given to the all teacher-observers and to the students who will be in the 20 training classes. Also, a two hour pre-program observation is made in each classroom by the trainer using the Democratization Observation Test. Following the establishment of these statistical baselines twenty one-hour demonstration teaching sessions are presented in each classroom teacher. During each year a trainer completes three training sessions of twenty hours each:

a. teacher-trainers provide demonstration lessons in each of two classrooms two or three times per week.
b. each classroom consists of 55 students and 6-7 "teacher-observers" including the classroom teacher.
c. teacher-observers participate in 20 class sessions, pre- and post-class conference with the trainer, and a series of Saturday seminars. The "classroom teacher" or another teacher-observer must teach at least 10 of the 20 lessons under the direct supervision of the

trainer.

d. teacher-observers maintain a factual record of democratic behaviors observed within the demonstration classes using the "Democratization Observation Test". This daily record becomes substance for conferences, seminars, evaluating, and planning. These data and post-test data from the NJTRS serve as substantial information for post-project analyses.
e. exceptional teacher observers will be identified to assist the trainer during the following session of twenty demonstration lessons. The exceptional teacher is then expected to train at least two other teachers for twenty hours each in a different geographic location. The exceptional teacher then returns to her/his home school as a Philosophy for Children leader-trainer.
f. a consultant from IAPC (Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children) will visit various projects each year to provide further training for identified exceptional teachers.
g. from the group of exceptional teachers, five will attend IAPC for further training each year to extend leadership.
h. regional conferences will be held at various universities during the 3-5 years projected for this project.

In addition to the demographic information presented above, the following adds to the projected impact of this proposal. During the life of the project representatives of business, industry, law, medicine, engineering, Zonta, Lions, Chambers of Commerce, university professors, etc. will be invited to visit Philosophy for Children classrooms. This planned "outreach" effort has several purposes:

a. to broaden the project impact into the greater community
b. to encourage those involved in the "outreach" effort to become promoters of Philosophy for Children in Guatemala and in the other project countries in whatever ways possible
c. to acquaint those involved in the "outreach" effort with those exceptional students and teachers discovered through the Philosophy for Children enables the identification of extraordinary talents and abilities. And, that those talents and abilities ought not be wasted by any country. The future of such countries as Guatemala demands no less from its "educated" adult community.

WHAT INDICATORS WILL BE USED TO DETERMINE PROJECT SUCCESS?

Indicators for determining project success include empirical and subjective evidence:

a. The New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills, a standardized test, to be used as a pre and post-test, will provide data for analysis to determine intellectual differences for both teachers and students in the project.

   The Democratization Observation Test, designed by an interdisciplinary group of Marquette University professors, the IAPC, and Guatemalan professors and teachers, is used to establish a base line within a classroom before training begins.

   All teacher-observers and trainers use the DOT during each

training class to identify specific concrete in-class situations in which selected democratic behaviors occur for both teachers and students. This recorded evidence is used to determine relationships with NJTRS data and to contrast with pre-training observations. These data are used for pre- and post-class conferences, Saturday seminars, evaluating lessons, and planning lessons.

b. Other indicators of success will flow from the "outreach" discussion presented above. As Philosophy for Children becomes a course for study in a university's teacher preparation program; as a workers union sees Philosophy for Children as a place for the identification of and the development of exceptional talent; as a business executive becomes responsible for the continued education of the exceptional Philosophy for Children student/teacher, . . . these will be further indicators of the Philosophy for Children project success.

WHAT ARE THE EXPRESSED NEEDS AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS PROJECT?

This Philosophy for Children curriculum project meets the need expressed by US-AID's stated purpose: to increase significantly commitment to democratic ideals and practices by implementing selected democratization projects with a demonstrated potential for success. By success is meant projects which can bring about changes in non-democratic behavior patterns including decision-making processes and habit formation. This Philosophy for Children curriculum meets the US-AID need by building assessing teacher's and learner's ability with:

- accepting consequences for personal behavior
- personal integrity
- tolerating differing opinion
- respecting majority opinion
- reaffirming one's own opinion when different from the majority
- showing flexability and receptivity for new ideas
- being non-intimidating in behavior toward others
- dealing with controversial issues
- searching for consensus
- demonstrating mutual respect
- participating in a community of inquiry
- accepting cultural differences
- being responsible as citizens
- relating current events with classroom learning
- formation of desirable habits.

REACTION FROM THE FIELD

I contacted Philosophy for Children representatives from each of the Latin American countries with Philosophy for Children programs and those with a professed interest in establishing one. I spoke personally with persons from Chile, Brazil, Costa Rica, and Ecuador as well as Guatemala. One or more persons from these countries have been trained at the IAPC. And most have had a Philosophy for Children program in their country. We do not now know which countries will be selected for this Philosophy for Children project. Some to be selected may have had no contact with Philosophy for Children. Whatever, the message from those with whom I spoke is clear, "We have been waiting a long time for this day!"

The quote below, from a letter which I received in early December of 1988, generally reflects the reservation yet the hopeful anticipation of those Philosophy for

Children leaders in Guatemala and in other Latin American countries:

> Upon first learning about the "Democratization Program" I was both thrilled and wary. My immersion in Philosophy for Children for the past year and a half, and my strong theoretical belief in the program led me to have great admiration for what you have been doing. Since first learning of Philosophy for Children years ago, I have perceived the firm connection between it and education for democracy . . . .
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> At the same time, whenever I have heard the word 'democratization' applied to Latin American countries, I've become uncomfortable. Especially in connection with US-AID and its predecessor, such a term has been used to mask incessant repression and social retardation. I hope you can understand my initial discomfort with the term.
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> However, upon reading the description of the project, my doubts were dispelled. It is indeed an education for me to see that governments such as Guatemala's would endorse, indeed support, such a program as Philosophy for Children. As usual there's more to any picture that which meets the eye. I am especially impressed with those elements of the project emphasizing involvement with the poor and/or indigenous elements of he population. It is this educational potential of Philosophy for Children that has interested and excited me most.

Obviously, this Philosophy for Children democratic initiative is affecting perceptions even before implementation.

And so, this is where we are now with a Philosophy for Children project which began some ten years ago at the Hispanic Bruce-Guadalupe Community School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The very first bilingual and first Philosophy for Children project in Spanish. From there to Mexico where the seeds for Philosophy for Children were planted in 1979. As we begin a new year a decade later I must ask, "What will be with Philosophy for Children ten years from now in Latin America at the dawning of the 21st century?"

It's now 6:00 p.m. in La Antigua. The sun is setting between the volcanos Agua and Fuego. Again, the ancient church bells compete with their clanging. Still some with a clear ring, others of dead metal. The dame bells were heard by the conquistador, Alvarado. And heard by Bernal Diaz de Castillo, the great historian. We have retired here to this place for a variety of reasons among which one is to continue our work with Philosophy for Children.

A.G. THOMPSON