# PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN: A MODEL CURRICULUM FOR MODEL SCHOOLS

As many of you know, the title of this article was also the title of an international philosophy for children symposium held at the Menger Hotel in downtown San Antonio on April 12-14, 1989. The symposium was the culminating event of a year-long project in which third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers from four area schools implemented the philosophy for children program in their schools. In addition to a brief history of this project and a summary of the symposium and related events, the paper concludes with reactions to this year long project from both teachers and students involved in the program.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

The idea for the project originated at the international conference "Philosophy for Children: The Second Decade" held in Fort Worth, Texas in late October of 1987, and sponsored by the Center for Analytic Teaching at Texas Wesleyan College. Due to the success of the conference (more than 50 scholars and teacher trainers joined 112 area teachers in attending the conference), members of the Texas Network of Teacher-Trainers in Philosophy for Children discussed the need to further advance this unique humanities program's ability to foster genuine educational excellence in our schools. All agreed that another conference was needed and that it should be connected with a specific implementation project to further and better demonstrate the power of philosophy for children in developing the critical thinking of children and adolescents. Since The University of Texas at San Antonio was already in the process of developing a model school project aimed at developing selected elementary schools into "centers of inquiry", it seemed logical to plan a philosophy for children symposium to highlight the implementation of this model humanities program in a model school setting.

From this point, plans proceeded on several fronts. Tentative dates and location of the symposium were established to coincide with the annual meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society. Philosophy for Children awareness sessions were held for the faculties of several elementary schools in order to gauge teachers' interest in the project. After obtaining a grant from The Texas Committee for the Humanities, along with matching funds provided by The University of Texas at San Antonio, our plans began to bear fruit.

Beginning in September, 1988, teachers interested in participating were identified, materials were ordered, and the project activities began.

A major responsibility of the project director was to train the teachers to implement the program. Beginning in late September 1988 and continuing through May 22, 1989, weekly seminars were held with these third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers, familiarizing them with both the philosophical content and pedagogical techniques of the Philosophy for Children program. Using the novels Pixie and Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery and their accompanying instructional manuals, these teachers experienced the program in much the same way they were expected to teach it in their own classrooms. After attending these weekly 2-1/2 hour seminars for roughly a month, the teachers began using the materials in their own classroom. Their progress was closely monitored and subsequent seminars was devoted to discussing and resolving problems that inevitably arise in the initial stages of implementation. Throughout the year, the project director visited each of the classrooms and both observed and critiqued the teachers as they struggled to convert their classrooms into communities of inquiry. On numerous occasions the project director modelled the process working with both teachers and students.

In addition, the project director conducted numerous awareness sessions for parents and other interested parties. In the fall, these sessions were held at each of the model

schools, with a final session taking place in the spring at UTSA as part of the activities preceding the Philosophy for Children symposium. In each of these sessions, the project director and teachers from the model school project demonstrated the curriculum by conducting a Philosophy for Children lesson with students participating in the program. In this way, parents and others learned the objectives of the program and obtained answers to their questions. More than 150 parents and other interested parties attended those awareness sessions.

THE SYMPOSIUM AND RELATED EVENTS

With the model school Philosophy for Children project underway, attention was shifted to the symposium and related events. Identifying the keynote speakers proved to be a relatively easy first step. In addition to Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp of the IAPC, Professor John McDermott of Texas A&M University agreed to participate in the symposium. With these established names as keynoters, an announcement of the symposium and a call for papers was widely distributed to the international philosophy for children community in late October of 1988. By early December approximately 75 proposals for symposium presentations had been received. The project director, along with Ron Reed and Paul Bitting of the Texas Network in Teacher Training in Philosophy for Children reviewed the proposals and developed the final program. Roughly 50 individuals from across the state, nation, and world presented at the symposium. Highlights included the keynote addresses by Lipman and Sharp, a dramatic, entertaining, and thought provoking performance by Professor John McDermott, and a multi-media presentation by teachers from the model school project. Ron Rembert of Texas Wesleyan College established an appropriate mood for the symposium with his fascinating dramatization of Socrates (a project funded in part by The Texas Committee for the Humanities). The symposium was well attended by scholars from around the world and locally by teachers, school administrators, and other interested parties.

Related to the symposium and contributing to its success were events preceding it. On April 11, 1989, the day before the conference began, Professor Lipman gave The University of Texas at San Antonio's third annual Distinguished Lecture in Education. His topic, "Thinking and Aesthetic Experiences in the Classroom," was well received by the more than 200 in attendance. Prior to Lipman's presentation, Professor Ron Reed of Texas Wesleyan College delivered a thought provoking dinner address entitled "On the Craft and Art of Dialogue" to an audience of 65 people. Early that afternoon, the project director and teachers from the philosophy for children model school project conducted a Philosophy for Children awareness session for more than 50 area teachers. Including these pre-symposium events, more than 350 people attended one or more of the week's events. In addition the annual meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society was held in the same hotel immediately following the Philosophy for Children Symposium. As expected, the scheduling of the conferences back to back enabled participants in both groups to attend sessions of the other.

As described above, the week of April 11th, 1989 was an exciting one in San Antonio for those interested in philosophy, critical thinking, and education. Clearly the week's events resulted in an exciting climax for the year-long Philosophy for Children project. Nonetheless, the project continued for another month with the teachers meeting with the project director and continuing to convert their classrooms into communities of inquiry. While the evaluation of the project is not yet complete, the following papers by teachers and students of the model school project is sufficient testimony of its success.

"Pixie and the Essential Elements"
by Diane Moses, Carolynn Newman, Maria Salinas, Jean Vargo of Travis Elementary School, San Antonio Independent School District

The State of Texas, as a result of House bill 72, has mandated by law a set of minimum skills necessary for each grade level. Congruent with this mandate is the educational emphasis our school and school district places on raising the level of critical thinking skills of our students. Our school's mission statement is to provide a positive learning environment where children are nurtured to feel successful and be successful. Such an environment is essential for fostering critical thinking skills in the classroom.

There are three important elements necessary for establishing this atmosphere. The first is a spirit of inquiry, i.e., a classroom where asking questions is encouraged. The role of the teacher is to challenge students in all areas of the curriculum through questioning. The next important element deals with an emphasis of problem finding. The students are encouraged to find problems, to wonder, and to speculate. The teacher's role is to encourage students to ask, not to just answer, questions.

The third important element to establishing a positive environment is taking a more deliberate pace. Students need ample time to think about various possibilities, examine all the evidence, and come to a possible solution or conclusion. The role of the teacher is to encourage all students to participate in the inquiry.

The nature of the Pixie program ties in with the Essential Elements required by law for the children of Texas. Though Pixie can be cross-correlated with all the required curriculum, our focus is only on the Language and Reading Essential Elements.

The first Essential Element is Listening. In Pixie students develop skills in attending to, responding to, and analyzing oral communication. The students are able to identify sound devices (such as rhyme), understand the speaker's purpose (whether to inform, entertain, or persuade) and distinguish between fact and opinion.

The exercise "Secrets", a game played like "May I?", helps students develop skills in listening. In this exercise, the students must be able to understand the speaker's questions and they have to remember what to do when a certain response is given. For example, when the students' response is "always" they are supposed to take "three giant steps forward". All of these directions have been given before the game so the students' listening skills of attending to and responding to oral communications are constantly being reinforced.

In the area of speaking skills, students are expected to develop fluency in using oral language to communicate effectively. In Pixie, students are given the opportunity to improve their oral language skills when they contribute to the discussions at the conclusion of an episode. Through these discussions students learn are able to express their ideas and feelings. They also try to persuade their peers to their own way of thinking. Some use visual aids, such as their own drawings, in their oral presentations.

For example, they draw a picture of what they think Pixie looks like. After they draw the picture, each student shows it to the rest of the class and describes what they drew. One student may think Pixie has long black hair, and another may think she looks like Pipi Longstockings.

In the exercise "Empathy," the students are to tell what a person is thinking or feeling in certain situations. For example: (1) yesterday you were scolded for something that you didn't do. You cry. Today you saw Jimmy being scolded for something he didn't do. How do you think he feels?

> Student responses could be that he feels sad, unhappy or angry because he is punished for something he didn't do, or that maybe someone should have asked him if he did it or not.

(2) Last week you got an F on your math test. You feel very badly, but you didn't study. This morning, Irene got an F on her spelling test. She told you at recess that she didn't

study. How do you think she feels?

> Student responses may be that she feels sad and afraid that her parents will find out about her grade, or mad at herself since it's her fault she got an F since she didn't study.

(3) Today at gym practice you managed to get five baskets. You felt very proud. Carol got six baskets. How do you think she felt?

> Student responses may include that she felt proud or good because she didn't lose, happy because she won, or glad since she may have never made baskets before and made them this time.

(4) On your way home from school you meet your older brother. He looks like he has been crying. You say, "What's the matter?" He tells you that someone stole his bike. How do you think he feels?

> Student's response may include unhappy, angry, upset, awful, terrible or scared. Some students may feel that he will be afraid that his parents will scold him because he was careless. One student actually said, "My brother wouldn't be crying--he would be thinking that he is going to find out who stole his bike and get even with that person!"

When we started doing the Pixie program our students would give one or two word answers and very few would contribute to the discussions. Now more and more students are participating in class. When they say that someone is happy, sad or upset, they are also able to tell the class why they think as they do. We believe that the students' participation in the discussions and numerous exercises in Pixie has increased their self confidence, and in turn, their ability to use oral language effectively.

The next Essential Element is Reading. The student is expected to use word attack skills to decode written language, develop vocabulary to understand written material, use comprehension skills to gain meaning, and apply these skills to a variety of practical situations. Pixie reinforces these skills in great detail.

Chapter 2 in Pixie focuses on same and different. Pixie says she is like Isabel in all the things she likes about herself, and that she's different from Isabel in all the things she doesn't like about herself. From this concept, the exercise, "Same and Different" develops. "Same and Different" relates to the Essential Element of using context clues for word identification. In the "Same and Different" exercise children read pairs of sentences and decide what word is the same in both sentences. They must decide if the word has the same or different meaning in both sentences. Some examples from this exercise are:

(1) While driving, we found ourselves in a jam.
    We looked through the groceries, and found the jam.
(2) The umpire gave a ball to the catcher.
    The king and queen gave a ball in the palace.
(3) The boy caught the ball.
    The boy caught measles.
(4) The girl drew money out of the bank.
    The horse drew the carriage.
(5) The artist drew the picture carefully.
    In order to decide who would go first, they drew straws.

From this exercise, one can observe how the children's thought processes are being challenged. They cannot just give the answer; they must justify their answer. Other exercises found in Pixie address many of the other Reading Essential Elements. Pixie constantly focuses on main idea, facts and details, fact and non-fact, predicting outcomes, and drawing conclusions. With continued use of the Pixie program, we should observe the child's thinking skills improving and transferring into other areas.

The final Essential Element formulated by the State of Texas in the field of Language Arts is Writing. Since Pixie is a story about the writing of a story, its very nature concerns these objectives. The nature of writing a story is concentrated upon at the very beginning of Chapter 1. In the first exercise, students discuss whether a story must have a beginning . . . a midle? . . . an end. Could a story have an end and a middle, but not have a beginning? Could a story have a beginning and an end, but not have a middle? Are all stories true, or are some true and some make-believe? Are some stories good and some not so good? Although story completion exercises are probably part of every elementary classroom curriculum, students are rarely given the motivation or opportunity to consider such philosophical questions.

Students practice oral story completion during the exercises in Chapter 1. At the end of Chapter 3, they are given the opportunity to write the beginning of a story. Then, while reading Chapter 4, they are given the middle of a story and must write both the beginning and the end.

As teachers, we constantly try to relate new learnings to the students' own experiences and past learning. During one exercise, students are asked to write a one-page imaginative story based on one of five suggested subjects. Once they have completed their stories, the students are asked whether they drew upon any first-hand experiences while writing. Reflecting back on their writing process, they are asked if they can write without drawing on their experiences.

A large part of the Pixie program concerns relationships as expressed in language, and using language precisely for effective communication. Whether Pixie is considering what happens when her leg falls asleep or the meaning of time or space, she is constantly comparing one thing with another, searching for relationships, clarity and preciseness in language. This is emphasized by the exercises which investigate types of sentences, relationships implied between parts of speech, and relationships either explicitly or implicitly suggested by the actual relationship between the parts of speech in a sentence. Clarifying these relationships through the discussions and exercises provides the students with a reason for learning and using correct grammar.

In an effort to quantify the learning of Texas students, tests have been designed to measure progress in areas designated as essential skills, including writing. Currently the third grade tests include a sample of the student's ability to express himself in either narrative, descriptive or "how-to" writing. Therefore, as educators we are instructed how to teach them to perform these skills or tasks. But are we helping them learn to write?

Matthew Lipman presented the third annual Distinguished Lecture in Education at the University of Texas at San Antonio on April 11, 1989. His topic was "Thinking and Aesthetic Experiences in the Classroom." In his lecture Dr. Lipman stated:

> You can't just assume that children are motivated to write. All you need to do is shove a piece of paper under their noses and they'll write. You can't just assume that children will write. You can't just assume that children will write because you give them a writing assignment or to impress . . .. Write on topic so and so. The writing has to come out of their feelings. It has to come out of their motivation and you have to create an environment where they have those feelings and they have this thirst for meaning so they want to write.

Students frequently groan and moan at writing time. Also, few of our students have been able to combine technical skills needed for descriptive and narrative writing. They have the skills to describe a picture, but not a character or setting. They can sequentially write a short story, but these stories are flat and boring, without descriptive details. In other words, some stories are good and some are not so good, and these stories fall in the latter group. The Pixie program creates an openness and excitement in the classroom which is generated by the non-judgmental discussion, and is an excellent vehicle to motivate students beyond the "elementary" or "essential" skills needed for writing.

Working with Pixie allows the child to relate to Pixie by seeing that they share a common curiosity about the world around them. Pixie establishes continuity between reading and conversation on one hand, and conversation and writing on the other hand. The materials are presented at the child's own level, and stress meaning rather than form. The program, besides fitting well with the State of Texas' Essential Elements, stimulates thinking and helps the child made better use of oral and written language.

"Values and Critical Thinking within Pixie"
by Mary Alice Villarreal, Susie Gonzalez, Stacy Avery of Gardendale Elementary, Edgewood Independent School District

Too many times as teachers we ask our students "why" and a sea of blank faces look up at us. Pixie is a way for students to understand what why is, and only then can they themselves start to ask the question why. Pixie helps students think in two main ways. First, it fosters critical thinking skills, and second, it indirectly develops values. We have included samples of students' writings, which we have incorporated into our language arts curriculum based on the skills developed in Pixie.

ASSOCIATIONS

One example of critical thinking is associations. According to Lipman, when students deal with associations, they must offer one thought as justification for another thought. At this age, since students do not have enough information to develop precise associations, they must make free associations. One way to develop associations is to play the association game. This game is explained on page ten of the Pixie manual. The object of the game is to say what comes to mind in response to a comment made by the person before you. Initially our students had difficulty in making associations, but they enjoyed the game and improved with practice. The game can be made increasingly difficult by adding additional limitations such as requiring students to explain or give a reason for the association that they made. In this way students' critical thinking skills are fostered.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Another important critical thinking skill is problem solving. This occurs when students think beyond the problem and develop many solutions to that problem. One way to show that students are developing this skill is to ask them to write a mystery story. Here students must describe a problem and then find alternate solutions. What follows is a mystery by a third grade student at Gardendale Elementary School.

> One day I was going to play under a tree and a fly got on my nose. So I hit it. It fell to the ground. Then it grew bigger than an elephant. It had three antennas on each side. It said, "Get on my back and I'll take you on a great adventure." I didn't think--I jumped on its wing and held onto its neck. It went okay until I remembered I had not told my mom. I begged the fly to take me back but it would not. I begged and begged until it turned around fast and flipped me right over my house. I jumped suddenly and heard my mom calling me. I awoke fast

> and thought, "What a nightmare!" Boy, I better think twice when I do things like that? But do I have a mystery creature now! **by Manuel Romero**

These are two of the many critical thinking skills that Pixie develops. Other skills include ambiguities, metaphors, idioms, analogies, myth, mysteries, contrasts, comparisons, and inductive and deductive reasoning. Pixie can be implemented to develop critical thinking skills in all areas of the curriculum.

## VALUES

Pixie allows the teachers and students to examine values and the conflicts that may arise from them. Students begin to recognize that they are responsible for their actions and they can develop alternatives and make decisions based on their values.

One value that Pixie relies heavily on is friendship. Exercises in the manual deal with secrets, friendship, and sharing. The questions in the exercises ask who and what is a friend. It makes the students question themselves about their friends. What follows is an essay about Pixie and friendship from a third grade student at Gardendale Elementary School.

> In my opinion, Pixie is a great person to know. You want to know why? Because she can cross her legs and walk on her knees. She is so smart because she asks a lot of questions and she gets a lot of answers. Pixie helped me find out about secrets. I didn't understand, but, I do now. She helped me understand about friends too. I think she could be a great friend. I'm learning the do's and don'ts about real friendship from Pixie. **by Lorraine Vasquez**

Another way in which Pixie deals with values is the theme of truth and honesty. Truth is an ongoing these that underlies Pixie. Pixie tries to be truthful, but at times she isn't. Pixie also questions that if things are truthful, must they always be believable. Below is a third grade student at Gardendale's attempt to deal with such concepts as truth, honesty, and belief.

> In Pixie we learn about honesty and dishonesty. An example of dishonesty is when she told Tommy about the unicorn. I bet she would feel sad when Tommy finds out and gets made at her. I would if she'd done that to me. I wouldn't like it at all. When we read about Miranda and Pixie fighting abut a party invitation, Pixie did not have all the facts. I didn't know who to believe. It was hard to tell who was telling the truth. Their mother was having trouble understanding the two sisters. The truth will settle the matter. **by Suzanne Guevara**

## CONCLUSION

These are not all of the values, but rather 3 important ones. Other values that are developed in Pixie are: respect, attitudes, courage, consideration, generosity, confidence and responsibility.

Once acceptable values are learned, the children have more of a basis for forming their own opinions. Below is one student's opinion of Pixie.

> In my opinion Pixie is a great story. At the beginning I thought Pixie was a boy, and I really wanted to know but in Chapter 2 it said she was a girl. She does strange thinks like when she runs down the hall an shouts that her tooth is loose. She is really funny. Pixie doesn't know or understand many things. She says things like vinegar is ice cream. But she does know how to ask questions! Sometimes I get so confused, but when we go on learning about Pixie I begin to

understand more. Pixie is the best story I have ever read. by Anna Garza

Techniques for Teaching Pixie
written by Cynthia Sequoia and Donna Spears of Lamar Elementary School, San Antonio Independent School District

As teachers at San Antonio Independent School District's Model School, we became interested in this program when Dr. Tony Johnson, an education philosophy professor at The University of Texas at San Antonio, visited our school and demonstrated the Pixie program with some of our children. Since higher level thinking skills are necessary for today's school children to function productively in today's society, we decided to become involved by participating in Dr. Johnson's class, "Philosophy for Children." We believed that our involvement would greatly benefit our students.

As you read this article, keep in mind that the techniques we mention are only ones that we have found to be useful and not so useful with our children. Different classroom situations may require different techniques for you and your children.

The Do's and Don'ts for Teaching Pixie

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 1. Find a comfortable environment to discuss Pixie. | 1. Don't work with the class at their desks. |

We found that by taking the students from the traditional desk setting and placing them in a more lax and comfortable environment resulted in greater group participation and enriched our discussions. Our students also began each lesson with a hand clapping chant, (P-i-x-clap-clap-i-e), repeating it until all students were seated in the special Pixie corner with their books. The Pixie corner consisted of carpeting and their individual drawings of what they envisioned Pixie to look like.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 2. Read through the entire lesson then discuss (The entire lesson does not necessarily mean the entire chapter.) | 2. Don't read, stop, discuss. read, stop, discuss |

When reading Pixie out loud, we do not read round-robin. Instead reading turns are selected randomly. By doing this, the students tend to pay closer attention to what is being read.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 3. Let students find sections that are of interest to them and write them on the board. | 3. Don't point out important sections that you want to discuss. |

Once we have read the entire lesson out loud and before we begin our discussions, we ask the students if they have any questions or comments pertaining to the selection. If you try to point out the questions that you want the children to discuss, you will find that it does not stimulate as much oral discussion as when you allow the students to come

up with their own question. As the students tell us their questions, we write each of them on the chalkboard. This gives the students a greater feeling of contribution. Also, when we write their question on the board, we write it as a direct quotation, using quotation marks since this is a skill that they are learning in fourth grade. Example, Adam questioned, "Why does Pixie . . . ?"

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 4. Try to call on all children wanting to talk. | 4. Don't pick just a few students to discuss the subject. |

As teachers we make it a point to give all students wanting to talk the opportunity to voice their opinions. We want them to realize that all opinions count, especially their own.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 5. Let students express themselves knowing that their opinions count. | 5. Don't try to get the students to think in a uniform manner. |

Not only through the Pixie program do they learn that their opinions count, but they learn to believe in themselves and back up their beliefs with valid reasons. They learn that not all questions need to have a uniform or right or wrong answer and they learn not to let their classmates influence their decisions just because they may disagree.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 6. Discuss material that pertains to the reading and take time to allow everyone to contribute. | 6. Don't take a few opinions in order to cover a lot of material. Too many exercises can be confusing. |

Not only does the Pixie program teach the value of having their own opinions, but it also teaches respect for these opinions. Although their peers may not agree with their opinions about certain topics, the students learn that everyone is entitled to their own beliefs and that we must respect each of them.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 7. Keep students on task. | 7. Don't let students bring in personal events that would get them off the subject. |

Through the discussions, you will notice that it is easy for students to get off task. It is important to keep the students on task, or you may find the discussion leading into personal stories of what once happened to them when . . . .

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| 8. Let students converse with each other. | 8. Don't be the director of the discussion. |

As the students become more involved in their discussions, you will notice that the discussions eventually change from being teacher centered to increasingly student centered.

In closing, we hope that you find the suggestions we have provided very helpful teaching the Pixie program. We also hope that they lead you to acquire a positive outlook and a comfortable feeling when using this instrument.

As for ourselves, we have found Pixie to be both enjoyable for us and our students, and very beneficial in promoting and reinforcing essential developmental and thinking skills in our students. Finally we would like to thank our professor, Dr. Tony Johnson, for bringing us into this new world of thinking. This class has turned our classrooms into places for the sharing of many enlightening experiences among ourselves and our students.

Tony W. Johnson

