

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN: AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

The integrity of a practice requires critical self-reflection. Such critical self-reflection, it can be argued, requires for its objectivity the participation of reasonable individuals constituting a community whose members present their reasoned analyses for inter-subjective interpretation and assessment (Weinstein, "Reason and Critical Thinking," forthcoming Informal Logic). Philosophy for Children, therefore, must demand of its participants an on-going consideration of its theory and its practice. This paper is a call for such continued and reasonable critical self-reflection.

The structure of the paper is as follows: Central claims, the philosophy of philosophy for children, are written in bold type. These claims are immediately followed by a series of statements and questions that I believe are central for the analysis and assessment of the theory and practice of philosophy for children. The philosophy represented in bold print has been drawn from a variety of sources most particularly Philosophy in the Classroom by Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). I do not cite specific references since most of what I say is dispersed throughout this work and the other writings of Matthew Lipman and his colleagues. The only exception is to a number of new ideas in Lipman's Philosophy Goes to School (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). These are sufficiently novel that a citation is offered in the text. The test of the adequacy of my presentation and the cogency of my recommendations is the reasoned judgment of the members of the philosophy for children community. I await with pleasure their response to my ideas.

I divide the discussion into two sections, **components** of the program and the **dimensions** within which the program is embedded. For the former I distinguish as components: a commitment to the discipline of philosophy, a pedagogical theory and practice, a model of training and a practice of assessment. The dimensions within which the program exists is a theory of the child and an analysis of schooling and in particular teacher education.

COMPONENTS:

Philosophy

1. There is an essential commitment to philosophy as exemplified in children's novels that present philosophical issues, standard moves and a model of philosophical inquiry.

1.1 To what extent is the choice of issues and manner of presentation optimal for introducing pre-college children to philosophy? Can the experience of staff developers and teachers representing more than a decade of implementation be employed to strengthen the program's structure and use. In particular, can recommendations and options for organizing the manual materials be developed and made available, perhaps using computer storage and retrieval? Should efforts to construct additional children's novels be increased; should other sorts of philosophical vehicles be explored?

1.2 Philosophy is seen to be of significance to children, to their everyday lives and to all inquiry; reflection on practice through inquiry involves the philosophical aspects of subject domains. In addition it enables synthesis by exposing underlying similarities and other relationships between domains.

1.21 In what sense is the philosophical quest significant to children? How is the

significance of philosophical concerns to children to be shown? What aspects of the various disciplines are exposed through the various kinds of philosophical inquiry, and to what end? Further, to what extent are children at various ages and in particular school contexts capable of understanding and utilizing such philosophical insights? This is especially crucial, first to support positions that seem counter-intuitive given the theory and practice of many teachers and second, as a means to operationalize an orderly transfer from IAPC materials into the regular curriculum.

1.3 Philosophy contains logic, establishing the norms of reasoning. Logic within philosophy exists as a dialogical tool focusing on the crucial linguistic basis for reasoning inherent to children's discussions. Closely related to logic is the reasonable use of criteria. This to, is central in philosophical discussions, particularly in discussions of values.

1.31 How is a dialogical approach to logic (logic presented through argument and discovery) related to similar movements, particularly, argumentation theory, informal logic and critical thinking? How does the quasi-formal presentation in terms of rules (in Harry especially) square with these other approaches? In addition, how do empirical results that tend to show the irrelevance of formal logic to logical thinking affect our confidence in the role of logic within the program's methodology and in claims about the program's effectiveness? (See Weinstein, op. cit. for examples.) How does recent work on concept formation relate to the analytical exercises in the manuals? Are the seemingly traditional assumptions that appear to undergird the analysis of relations, definition and criteria implicit in the text, pedagogically adequate, psychologically effective and philosophically sound? If so, how can they be shown to be so in ways that represent the three aspects?

1.4 Philosophy is available to children since its roots are in wonder about experience, concepts and the world; and wonder is natural to children. This includes wonder about purpose and significance as well as existence and morality.

1.41 To what extent is the natural wonder of children reflected in philosophical wonder? What is the relation between philosophical questions and questions children ask, stories they write, etc.? Is there any way to study children's natural wonder in a systemic way, and can the use of philosophical materials be shown to increase this wonder in a desirable fashion?

Pedagogy

2. The pedagogy employed is grounded by the claim that the purpose of schooling is the development of reasonableness.

2.1 Reasonableness is a well-established educational objective, but there are open questions. The most important include: Are there stages of readiness to engage in reasonable behavior? To what extent does reasonable and cooperative learning require goal-directed activities other than classroom discussion? To what extent is an information base required to support reasonableness in particular contexts? How can the school curriculum be used to support the growth of reasonable behavior in respect of topical issues and how is this related to the philosophy curriculum?

2.2 Community of inquiry fosters dialogue that uncovers conceptual and experiential limitations and permits rational appraisal while developing dispositions towards community and skills in reasonable dialogue.

2.21 Community of inquiry is so central to philosophy for children that to question it, is to question the very basis of the program. But even if accepted in principle, a number of issues arise. First, is community of inquiry possible in particular school settings given actual class size and the social and political structure of schooling as it exists. Second, the characters in the novels respond to situations that are problematic in their lives. Can this occur in schools? What relation do real-world problems (or problems felt to be real) have to community of inquiry?

2.3 Socratic questioning is widely used; the teacher facilitates interaction among students and guides the discussion by using materials and strategies that operationalize philosophical and logical aspects of the novels and students' possible responses.

2.31 Socrates spoke to individuals in small groups whose members freely chose to participate. Ought we to try to reflect this in classroom practice; can we, if we should; and are there various ways to do so? Socrates was a gifted questioner who followed the lines of reasoning of his interlocutors. Use of the manuals mirrors this when exercises are at their best, but it also may inhibit free and student-centered exploration. How can the use of the manuals be more self-reflective so that teachers can begin to see the rationale behind the construction of exercises and discussion plans? Will this enable them to spontaneously move in appropriate philosophical fashion? Can philosophers assist this in various ways? Can philosophers make explicit the dialectical reasons that underlie the best of the IAPC manuals? Can such awareness be transferred to teachers in a pedagogically significant fashion?

2.4 The focus on verbal reasoning and dialogue utilizes children's natural abilities and grounds language and inquiry skills used throughout schooling.

2.41 There is an enormous amount of experiential support for this claim. How can the support be extended to connect with cognitive psychology? Where are the conflicts between particular naturalistic theories of child development and the claims of philosophy for children? How might our experiences with children doing philosophy be turned into credible evidence?

2.5 Pedagogy and materials are logically developmental, furnishing a coherent sequence of logical skills and applications; they support a "generative epistemology" that develops concepts and criteria through guided and reasonable inquiry, refining children's natural abilities to perceive and construct relationships.

2.51 Lipman has put forward elements of a theory of logic, and concept use that relies heavily on philosophical intuitions about priority and presupposition (Philosophy Goes to School, Chapter 11, for a recent example). This theory needs to be explicated and explored philosophically, psychologically and pedagogically. The task seems to me to require at least the following: an analysis of the philosophical arguments put forward and a dialogue begun about the philosophical warrants involved; an articulation of the theory of concept acquisition and use in relation to recent developments in cognitive psychology, including the area of applied psychology richly represented in curriculum and teaching theory; an exploration of the outcomes for pedagogy in terms of the long experience of the materials in use.

Training and Assessment

3. Training enables teachers to experience the materials and the practice of community of inquiry. Teacher training mirrors the language and practice of the classroom, rather than using standard methods of college teaching. Guided practice with a trained philosopher, including modeling and observation, directs teachers towards meaningful philosophical issues and appropriate pedagogical practice. The trainer does this with materials that offer philosophical structures thereby helping the teacher towards philosophical and pedagogical autonomy.

3.1 The training model is already implemented in various ways, ranging from full year programs with ongoing in-class participation by the trainer to three-day workshops with little or no follow-up. How does this variety affect the quality of training? Should methodology in the workshops reflect the different modes of training including: time available for training and implementation, likelihood of follow-up, makeup of the group participating and context of implementation? Can additional training models be designed that reflect teachers' need for philosophical guidance, curricular relevance and autonomous and creative pedagogy?

4. Assessment is, recently, through a reasoning test and includes correlations with desirable student outcomes (reading, math, creativity and appropriate classroom behaviors).

4.1 The model of assessment has been quite conservative, relying on paper and pencil tests in order to explore statistical significance in a variety of ways. The testing community in critical thinking has increasingly reflected a number of more radical approaches to assessment. In particular there is a focus on the assessment of performance in real contexts and an interest in training teachers for in-classroom assessment. This involves a paradigm of assessment that requires the explicit identification and application of complex criteria in real life tasks. Such innovation has an affinity to Lipman's work in critical thinking ("Critical Thinking: What Can It Be?" a resource publication of the Institute for Critical Thinking, Montclair State College, NJ). Should alternate methods of assessing philosophy for children be explored?

DIMENSIONS:

Theory of the child

5. The child is seen as essentially reasonable and autonomous. Developmental stage theory is rejected, there is, however, a natural progression to the exhibiting of aspects of reasonable behavior. In addition, children can engage in creative philosophical behavior and have a natural affinity to do so. Children are seen as curious, conceptually and verbally able.

5.1 There is ample experiential evidence of children behaving rationally and autonomously, but this, as Lipman points out, does not require that such evidence be taken as sufficient for seeing the child as rational and autonomous. Lipman opts for an ascriptive theory of the person as rational and autonomous (Philosophy Goes to School, pps. 197ff). Rationality and other aspects of full-personhood are ascribed by a, presumably, competent judge to a child on the basis of performance, including thinking, that is sufficiently analagous to that upon which similar ascriptions would be made in respect of an adult. The logic of ascription is unclear (as is that of related notions like presupposition) and requires a philosophical engagement. Siegel's recent book Educating Reason (New York: Routledge Inc., 1988) argues for reasonableness as an educational

ideal, but takes a stance far weaker than Lipman's. He argues that developmentalism and habituation are consistent with rational autonomy although both see some aspects of children's cognitive functioning as pre-rational. This is a rich field for philosophical speculation, crucial for moral education and issues of children's rights.

Similar issues arise from Lipman's discussion of creativity (op. cit. Chapter 14). Although there is ample evidence of novel and inventive behavior in children, analyses of creativity often include a normative component embedded in ongoing artistic practice and conceptually related to the production of works of excellence. Lipman has begun the discussion of such issues, connecting creativity to natural curiosity, playfulness and conceptual and verbal inventiveness. But it would appear, that like rationality, there is more to ascribing creativity than behavior. The problem is an open one and involves central issues in, among other things, the theory of persons and the relations of individual achievement to practices. Both MacIntyre and Williams have put forward ideas and constructs that are relevant to such issues and, thus, an analysis of Lipman's claims can be seen as relevant to philosophy of mind, the theory of the person and to ethics.

Theory of the context

6. Schools are seen as alienating with disconnected curriculum and with inappropriate teaching and learning practices. At the core of the problem is schooling conceived as the transmission of knowledge. Although known to be in crisis, schools are necessary to satisfy society's positive needs and to remediate social and political disabilities.

6.1 Although Lipman's claims speak to deep intuitions evidenced by a plethora of reports on education in recent years, schooling is a complex phenomena. The questions are empirical to a great extent: Are schools completely abysmal? Are there opportunities for interaction overlooked through the adoption of a negative stereotype and one-way interactions? Lipman sees openings (op. cit., Chapters 11 and 12), but philosophy comes to the schools with a program already in place. Are there available insights and practices that should qualify how the program is implemented (or developed) that can be drawn from the schools we serve and the theoreticians of education that define the schools' practice?

Through its opposition to current practice, philosophers for children may become so isolated from other practitioners that possible modes of interaction are blocked. The critique may be warranted and isolation necessary; but are there, perhaps, riches in the standard practice that could be turned to the benefit of philosophy for children? Are there teachers who might serve more central roles in developing materials, designing pedagogical strategies and implementing in-service training? What roles are there for philosophers in the schools and, given philosophy for children's own philosophy of education, how can they best enter with their school-based colleagues into communities of inquiry where all participants' insights and experience are seen as valuable in defining and achieving educational goals?

To reinforce this last point: Shouldn't we give the teachers (and graduate students) we teach, the same benefit of the doubt that we require them to give their children? Should we not treat them as equal members of the community entitled to present their own opinions and respected as potentially creative and philosophically astute? Shouldn't they be so treated when issues of the appropriateness of philosophy for children in the schools and possibilities for change and growth are concerned? And on our campuses, shouldn't we strive to achieve a community of purpose with our colleagues in relevant disciplines?

Shouldn't philosophy for children and the philosophy of children that it represents engage fully in academic dialogue with other philosophers, with psychologists, with experts in children's literature and in reading, with specialists in cognitive development and in education?

7. Teacher education reinforces inappropriate methods; it presumes to methodological generality, but is inadequate to many subject domains, in particular philosophy and those aspects of standard school subjects that require dialogical inquiry.

7.1 As in the discussion above, the negative appraisal of current practice may blind philosophers for children to allies in the the teacher educational community and keep us from benefiting from insights based on teacher education research. We should explore the literature on teaching and learning, on curriculum and on school change for valuable insights. Insights include both positive recommendations for practice and potential criticism of the theory of curriculum, pedagogy and training that is espoused by the program.

Mark Weinstein

