REFLECTIONS ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

A. INTRODUCTION

This essay is an attempt to share the experience of staff developers in Philosophy for Children within the Pacific Northwest. I write as the Director of Philosophy for Children, Northwest, located on the campus of Western Oregon State College in Monmouth, Oregon, in which capacity I have been coordinating staff development in Philosophy for Children within the Pacific Northwest since 1981. Currently, both Liz Lyell of Seattle, Washington, and John Thomas of Portland, Oregon, work with me in staff development. All three of us are employed virtually full-time in college teaching (4 courses per term), severely limiting our possibilities for in-classroom staff development, though each of us has done a little of this above and beyond conducting intensive workshops conducted by a single staff developer. The remarks which follow primarily reflect my own experience, but they substantially reflect the experience of Liz and John as well.

B. EXPERIENCE

To date I have personally conducted 6 5-day workshops, 3 3-day workshops (plus some in-classroom follow-up in a few cases), 1 3-day workshop followed by 4 half days, 1 7-day workshop, 2 10-day workshops, 1 once-a-week workshop (entire day) for 5 weeks, and 8 once-a-week workshops (3 hrs) for 10 weeks (as a regular evening college class). All except 4 were Harry Workshops; 2 were Suki Workshops (begun with Harry); and 3 were Pixie Workshops (1 begun with Harry).

Except for the college classes, most were workshops contracted with school districts. Several were workshops offered during the summer on college campuses. (We have offered several of these which we have had to cancel for lack of adequate enrollment.) Only a few were offered in retreat-like setting in which participants were removed from other concerns. At the other extreme, only a few were offered during the regular school year in which classroom responsibilities competed for participants' attention. Most have been situations where participants lived at home and school was not in session.

All except for 2, I believe, have been workshops which teachers were free the choose to take or not. Most have been workshops where individual teachers have had to pay a proportion of the costs involved.

Due to circumstances unique to the context of Philosophy for Children's introduction to Oregon, a large proportion of the teachers involved have been teachers working with talented and gifted students.

C. OBSERVATIONS AND 'RESULTS'

1. 'Successes' and 'Failures'

Within this range of experience a few workshops stand out as paradigms of success and few of failure. Success and failure here is measured by my confidence or lack thereof that participants will not only be able to implement Philosophy for Children in their classrooms as it is intended but also be committed to its principles sufficiently to combat competing concerns and understand the Program well enough to represent it well to others. Ideally, success and failure should be measured by on-site observation and follow-up. My circumstances have me from attempting much of this sort of thing.

The most successful workshops for me have been of the longer, intensive variety; or, apart from length, where the participants were already somewhat motivated by a

support structure in place on site prior to the workshop. In each of these cases, there was something of a retreat atmosphere, where other concerns could be pretty much set aside for the duration of the workshop--allowing a strong feeling of community to be established. Also in each of these cases participants were given the opportunity to lead 3 coached sessions and a group of young people were able to come in for a demonstration session.

The least successful were of the shorter, less intensive variety, particularly in those situations where other concerns dictated either little or even negative motivation toward implementing the Program and where there was no support system in place for the teacher. Without the longer duration, such attitudes could not be combatted with any effectiveness by the dynamics of community formation that occur in an intensive workshop. Also and perhaps as significant was the limited experience of making coached presentations. Without at least a second fully coached presentation of their own, accompanied by observation of good modeling by the staff developer of a good variety of discussion situations, participants seem to have little real confidence that they know what they are supposed to do or why.

2. What 'Happens' in an Intensive Workshop?

I have referred above to the 'dynamics of community formation' in an intensive Philosophy for Children workshop. There is clearly more than this that goes on.

In my limited experience most teachers seem to come to a workshop expecting to learn what is for them a new teaching method to add to their repetoire and become acquainted with some new classroom materials; together the method and materials amount to what they imagine is a new 'content' to lay alongside the existing subjects with which they are already familiar--nothing, in other words, that might call for any inward change on their part. Regardless of what they hear initially to the contrary, these tend to be the habituated expectations of participants. In other words, they have very little notion of the rather radical shift in their thinking about education and their self-image as teachers that will be called for.

A fully successful Philosophy for Children workshop is for the participant a kind of 'conversion experience.' At first it asks participants to adopt a novel role in a classroom situation. But as they begin to think themselves into that role in practice and become habituated to philosophical thinking in the emergent community, a new vulnerable sense of themselves emerges and a new horizon of teaching possibilities comes into view, to which we are seeking to get them to become committed. I wish to call attention to the significance and radicalness of this transformation--the more so for participants previously unacquainted as adults with first hand philosophical inquiry and for those habituated to a level of distrust and to maintenance of a certain assured self-image among fellow educators. To my mind it calls for a kind of therapeutic tact, sensitivity, and encouragement on the part of the staff developer as coach. As the community of participants gradually forms, particularly where participants are initially strangers, much of the needed support is provided by fellow participants. It is often not much there at the early stages. If the participant does not feel it, to that extent she will give herself less to the process of learning the Program in any depth. In short, the whole process takes time.

Typically a 'crisis' threatens or is reached sometime around the third day of an intensive workshop. It is evidenced by a cascade of complaints, a 'venting' of frustrations, a sense of exhaustion from "cognitive overload" (as more than one teacher has put it), a need to pause and sort through things. Often participants who have been 'problems' up to that point get turned around and become incredibly helpful and cooperative--finally catching on to 'what it's all about.' In my judgement, if this crises occurs and is successfully navigated, the workshop will become a success and the

participants will look back upon it as one of the significant experiences of their lives. If it does not occur or if it is less than successfully navigated, the workshop will be less than a full success, especially for some participants.

What I am getting at is that staff development in Philosophy for Children involves the very sort of thing that Plato is getting at in the Myth of the Cave. For most of the participants in our workshops, we are doing something very analogous to liberating them from their chains of habituation to the shadows of other people's ideas projected on the walls of their minds--and simultaneously inducting them into the activity of liberating others' minds. We should not underestimate the radicalness of the transformation they experience or the conditions which enable and/or hinder it. (Once we realize this, we should understand a little better why some philosophic temperaments are better attuned to staff development in Philosophy for Children than others.)

3. Becoming Acquainted with the Domain of Philosophy

There is another factor involved here as well that needs remarking. I have come to understand that one of the chief reasons that staff developers are professional philosophers is that there is 'out there' a conceptual terrain that is discovered and explored through philosophical investigation--a terrain with which we philosophers have become reasonably well acquainted. Few of the participants in our workshops have ventured forth with any seriousness to explore any of it before. (Few have any idea that it exists.) As coaches, we are acting as a kind of forest guide to help them acquire confident 'footing' and 'the say of the land'--e.g., the dead-ends, the pitfalls, the paths that lead to breath-taking vistas--in other words, to help them acquire an initial acquaintance with it that will elicit in them the interest, confidence, and enthusiasm that will be able to support the free and open dialogical explorations of their students. In order for this to take place, sufficient time again is needed.

Sufficient time is also needed to conduct a quick survey (via discussion) at first hand of the main issues that lie out there to be explored in the program unit they will be implementing. I have discovered a few teachers who only had a very short workshop (3 days) allowing their students to explore issues in a chapter of Harry only in the most cursory way because they had not come to realize there was any depth there to plumb.

For this initial acquaintance with the 'lay of the land' to be effective, I have come to believe that workshop participants may need to become aware of a range and variety of elementary strategies of philosophical investigation--most of which are implicit in discussion plans and exercises of the manuals. For example, reflection on how we ordinarily use words at a point when a fixed abstract idea seems to be dominating the discussion; or drawing out contrary presupposition behind opposing viewpoints; or trying out ('what if . . .') a presupposition opposite of what seems obvious to everyone. A rushed intensive workshop with little attention to highlighting some of these strategies will almost invariably leave teachers with little if any sense of what to do (in any philosophically productive way) at certain junctures of discussion in their classroom.

4. The Teacher's Professional Self-Respect

Finally, there is the dynamic of relationships between the staff developer--the 'authority' on the Program--and the teacher as a professional in her or his own right. Ideally, a workshop should culminate with the teacher receiving some sense of respect from the staff developer (and other participants) as capable of considered judgement in relation to the Program and other pedagogical matters. She will exercise that judgment regardless, once on her own turf. But if the teacher emerges from the workshop with

only a sense of dependence upon the staff developer's judgement (and that of the manual authors) as to what is right with regard to the Program, a teacher with any sense of professionalism will likely not invest much of herself in it. On the contrary, for that investment to take place, she must feel free to do some adapting of it to her own style and approach. The crux is, of course, her autonomous professional judgement. So, what we ought to aim at is to leave the teacher with a clear enough sense of the nature and spirit of the Program in practice so that that judgement will be a responsibly informed one. For that reason, a workshop ideally needs be long enough to include opportunity for the teacher to explore matters where she or he will have to be exercising pedagogical judgment, receive constructive feedback, and attain professional respect in the process. That is what I have aimed at in my longer workshops and have the sense of having attained on the most successful ones.

D. IAPC INTENSIVE WORKSHOP MODEL AND DEPARTURES THEREFROM

1. The IAPC Model
The model of staff development (teacher training) which we received from the IAPC intensive workshops has proved in our experience to require some minor modifications. Some of the modifications we have attempted have already been alluded to above.

The IAPC intensive workshop model which we learned intends that teachers learn Philosophy for Children almost exclusively through participation in discussions generated from the Philosophy for Children curriculum materials, discussion of the sort that ideally would take place within the classroom. Accordingly, there is a minimum of theoretical and pedagogical discussion and that given only response to questions raised by participants--although Philosophy in the Classroom is expected to be read alongside participation in the workshop. (Little if any guidance was given to staff developers as to how certain forms of recurrent situations and problems might be dealt with.) Each participant is to make two or more coached presentations, leading the group in sessions like what should take place in the classroom. Both pre- and post-session coaching is quite informal and does not follow a set of explicit guidelines. (Here too, little if any guidance was given staff developers as to what should go into an ideal coaching experience.) Evaluation of participants, accordingly, is strictly informal and does not involve assessing theoretical understanding of the Program or, in the case of a Harry workshop, assessing mastery of the logic involved.

2. The Need for Theory
Partly because of the request of participants (e.g., through workshop evaluation forms) and partly because we have needed teachers to be able to explain the Program to administrators, colleagues, and parent groups, we have come to include a substantial discussion of the nature of the Program and its pedagogy within the workshop. One need in particular motivating this change is the requirement upon teachers in Oregon to identify specific curriculum objectives being realized by every program in use. Lack of guidance in this matter has proved to be seriously detrimental to Philosophy for Children in certain districts. We have not settled on the best way to do this. Simply asking participants to read Philosophy in the Classroom does not do the job. John Thomas, for instance, assigns participants portions of Philosophy in the Classroom to be discussed in the same manner as a chapter from Harry. When the workshop is taken for college credit, I now regularly assign a set 12 essay questions to be completed within a month following the workshop which are of the sort teachers would have to answer to interpret the Program to other persons--e.g., how is a philosophical discussion different from other discussions and what is distinctive about the approach of

Philosophy for Children to moral and ethical issues? Then I schedule times within the total workshop to discuss these questions, always seeking to begin with questions participants have raised. In connection with reading Philosophy in the Classroom, I ask them to read several handouts which I have prepared. On the whole we and the participants have found this modification of the basic model to be very helpful.

3. Coaching

Again, partly in response to requests from participants, I have made out a set of guidelines on paper for participants to prepare for a presentation. Their completion of these steps puts them in a much more assured place for sharing with me what they expect to take place in their session and for carrying through a self assessment after their session. Included with these guidelines is a fairly comprehensive Teacher Appraisal Form, listing 28 'teacher behaviors' which they are expected to master (but only a few at a time). In addition to verbal post-session feedback (and to help structure my appraisal), I fill out a one page form speaking to different aspects of each presentation and identify two to four objectives to work on in the participant's next presentation. In general I find that more of my effort in coaching goes into identifying and building confidence in teachers' strengths than in helping them identify areas to improve. This modification has proved as well to be very helpful.

4. Modeling

Given this format for coaching participants, I find in general that for almost all participants the experience of leading a students-centered discussion is so novel that they can anticipate very little of how they will do before they do it. This has meant that practical guidance, e.g., for helping a discussion become genuinely philosophical pretty much needs to take place in a second or third presentation. Repeated modeling by the staff developer both prior to initial presentations and throughout the workshop is essential--particularly given the fact that staff development is an experience of apprenticeship.

5. Involvement by the Presenter

One specific area of coaching I have modified from the model which I received pertains to the nature and extent of involvement by the presenter in the workshop discussions. A large proportion of teachers I have trained have a difficult time learning how not to take advantage of their role as presenter in dominating a discussion. An even larger proportion of teachers have a difficult time selectively participating in a discussion to facilitate (a) involvement of as many persons as possible; (b) non-domination of the discussion by a few participants; (c) keeping discussion focused long enough for philosophical insight to begin to emerge; and (d) making sure clarifying questions are asked and answered to enable the entire group to follow the discussion. Just waiting for post-session guidance has proved insufficient for these learnings to take place. E.g., some presenters hold back so much from any involvement that there is nothing on which to give them feedback. Particularly with the latter, I have come to recommend more active paraphrasing and clarifying questions in the context of the workshop than the workshop discussion may itself require, just so I will be able to give presenters useful perspective on their skills at managing a discussion. More or less governing this advice is the objective of acquiring the skill of active listening (and helping students do the same).

6. Handling the Logic in *Harry*

One other matter that has proved a source of persistent problems in Harry workshops and which I have tried a variety of strategies to solve is the matter of

formal logic. Specifically, it is a source of difficulties for teachers who themselves have 'math anxiety'--despite the fact that it is very elementary logic. It is not only difficult for them to learn to teach; it is also often difficult for them simply to learn it for themselves. A presenter who has 'math anxiety,' without very careful coaching and guidance, in my experience is more likely to panic in the midst of a presentation than not--with the result that either the logic is not effectively focused on at all or it becomes a matter of considerable confusion. One solution is simply to have the students themselves explore it in a somewhat fitful, stumbling way so afar as they are able to, with the teacher playing a role simply of facilitator (drawing little or not at all upon the manual commentary). If that is the choice, then 'learning the elements of formal logic (in the Harry program)' simply should not be one of the objectives that govern the Program's use. But if it is to be one of the objectives, teachers need to acquire mastery both of the logic and strategies for teaching it in a student-centered way. I have not yet settled on any happy resolution of the latter choice, yet I have felt committed to it up to now. Accordingly, when the workshop time frame permits it, I insist that the formal logic be dealt with and set an objective for the participants to learn it (and have a quiz at the end to assess how well they have learned).

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We all want to say how much we enjoy working with the Program in staff development workshops, as well as with children when we are able to. For us it is too important not to do well, too important not to have the workshop be the best possible experience for equipping teachers to handle the Program as it intends to be handled and be inspired by and committed to its vision of children's experience of philosophy. Accordingly we have modified the workshop in ways that are responsible to those ends and will continue to do so as we learn from our experience and from the experience of other staff developers.

Dale Cannon