REFLECTIVE THINKING IN TEACHER TRAINING: THREE MODELS IN KENTUCKY

Teacher training is unarguably the single most important element in Philosophy for Children. Because Philosophy for Children is above all else educational reform, the program means nothing if it is not taught well year after year by career teachers in everyday classrooms. For this to come about, training in Philosophy for Children must fit into existing structures of teacher education. In this paper I will argue that making such training conform to current practices in the training of teachers risks weakening long-term implementation and that only a new approach to teacher training in Philosophy for Children can bring about genuine educational reform in the schools.

In the remarks that follow, I will confine my discussion to in-service teacher training, and will describe and comment on three successive models we have used in Kentucky. I will include in these comments reasons for believing that our third model is the most effective, and will conclude with some remarks about sources of further revisions of in-service education. An underlying theme of the paper is our continual effort to find paths within existing educational systems that enable us to train teachers in ways resulting in long-term effective educational reform.

The three models I will discuss consist first of a five-day summer workshop, next of a three-day workshop, followed by a two-day session several months later, and finally of a highly integrated long-term combination of meetings, visits, and consultations. We at the Berea Center of Philosophy for Children presently confine our training to this third option, for reasons to be explained below.

Following the then standard IAPC model, in our first years of operation we gave several five-day workshops in Berea and in Louisville, Kentucky. Each workshop concentrated on a single novel; by the third day, teachers had received coaching and were beginning to run sessions. This model, or some variation of it, will likely be familiar to anyone who has had any connection with teacher training in Philosophy for Children over the last 14 years and I will not describe it in detail here.

We have come to regard our use of this first model as an educational failure. While virtually all the teachers in these workshops implemented the program in the term following their workshop, inquiries after four years showed that of approximately 108 teachers trained, only 27 percent were still using Philosophy for Children. An outstanding exception to this low rate of success was the J. Graham Brown School in Louisville, where Philosophy for Children was still being taught by 84% of the staff we had trained. Numerous later contacts with teachers who had taken these workshops, including the teachers at the Brown School, suggested five reasons for the overall low rate of long-term success:

1. The five-day summer workshop pattern was perceived as conforming to standard procedures for training in an innovative program in education.
2. The workshop sessions tended to be experienced as utopian, heightening contrasts between Philosophy for Children and day-to-day actual teaching.
3. Lack of adequate follow-up.
4. The teachers tended to isolate their philosophy sessions rather than build connections between them and the rest of their curriculum.
5. The workshops promoted a vision of the standards of Philosophy for Children that made them appear especially to realize in practice.

I will now discuss each reason in detail.

1. The workshops as standard procedure: It is common practice to attempt to implement educational innovations by means of in-service workshops, some lasting a few hours, others as long as a week. Training for more than a few days usually takes place in the summer. Little or no follow-up is provided for these in-service sessions; there is a clear presumption that initial exposure is sufficient. Public school teachers are typically expected--and in many cases required--to attend such sessions each year. Because the first model conformed to this pattern, teachers tended to act under the impression that follow-up was often interpreted as suggesting ineptitude on the part of the teacher. Also, by conforming to standard practice, use of this model reinforced the impression that Philosophy for Children is just another innovation among the many hundreds competing for teachers' attention, thus encouraging teachers to forget about it just as they do the vast majority of innovations to which they are exposed. In sum: by conforming to the standard pattern, the first model helped program Philosophy for Children for failure.

2. The workshops as utopian experiences: Paradoxically, while tending to discount Philosophy for Children as just another innovation, teachers found the workshop experiences to be unusually rewarding. Many still look back on their sessions with nostalgia; we are often told that this was the first time in their professional careers that they felt treated as intellectual equals, as contributing members of a thoughtful community, worthy of respect for their ideas and their interest in education. Several have asked to be invited back to another workshop, and on occasion we have accommodated a few. Unfortunately, however, they have described these experiences as so unusual as to utopian, and have drawn sharp contrasts between Philosophy for Children and the world of daily teaching. In effect, by forming powerful communities of inquiry within the workshops, the five-day model encouraged teachers to think of such communities as unrealizable in their practice.

3. Another reason for failure of the first model was our lack of adequate follow-up. Even when we got to make them, our visits tended to be thought of as courtesy calls if not hinting at teacher ineptitude, as mentioned above. We eventually realized the model itself helps to create the impression that follow-up visits are insignificant since they are not a structural part of it.

4. Isolation of philosophy from the whole of the curriculum: The fourth reason for our high rate of failure in achieving long-term implementation illustrated "tunnel-vision" of school curricula. Teachers we had trained under the first model typically saw their own Philosophy for children sessions as so special as to differ substantially from the rest of their school day. While sometimes describing their children as carrying ideas over into "regular" class sessions (such as by turning sentences around or accusing one another of "thinking like Harry"), Philosophy for Children was not perceived by teachers or students as a means for integrating learning across disciplines. It was something else to do, more fun than most events in the school day, but really just another fragment of an incoherent curriculum. We tended to blame our own job of training and the teachers' pre-service education for this outcome; it took a long time before we realized that it would be possible to avoid this result by suitably altering our model of in-service training.

5. Unrealizable standards: Because the five day workshops did not include actual day in and day out teaching with children but were primarily limited to group discussions among adults, we found that they had encouraged the teachers to see themselves as <u>intellectually</u> equal to the demands of Philosophy for Children but not as

clearly capable of teaching these standards to their students. Of teachers interviewed who had ceased to implement, all expressed considerable self-doubts about their own ability to reach the standards of Philosophy for Children in their teaching.

Before abandoning discussion of the first model, I wish to emphasize that it was by no means a complete failure for us. While I have dwelt on our reasons for ultimately rejecting it, this is not meant to imply that the model is inherently a flop. our teachers uniformly agreed that we had challenged them to meet high intellectual standards in their teaching and praised the workshops for this, often bemoaning a lack of such standards in their pre-service education. Also, teachers remarked that we had freed them from a resentment of learning by helping them realize that they can take time for thinking in the classroom and not always be preoccupied with getting on with the lesson. It was largely our experience of these successes that delayed our recognition that from a broader perspective we were not succeeding nearly as well as we should.

Our next model for teacher training split the five-day workshop sessions into two sets of meetings separated by as much as eight months. The first meetings usually ran for three days, the second for two, although some variations did occur. The organizational structure of this model did not differ markedly from that of the first, although the second group of meetings called for some discussion before carrying on where the first had left off. While a primary motive in making the change was to accommodate teachers and schools that could not otherwise have incorporated training in their schedules, we soon realized that this variant offered solutions to some of the problems mentioned above that we were learning to associate with our use of the first model.

While not varying sufficiently from standard practice to break out of the ordinary mold for training, that each set of meetings was considerably shorter than five days clearly helped prevent the development of an overly utopian atmosphere. Also, that the second meetings tended to take place within the school year instead of during the summer encouraged teachers to think of Philosophy for Children in terms of carry-over into their classrooms rather than mainly as contributing to their own personal fulfillment. This shift of perspective was exhibited in two ways. First, during the second meetings the teachers described their successes and failures and asked specific questions about implementation; in effect, they provided some of the insights into their teaching one would expect to gain from on-site visits. Second, they showed far less of the tendency to over-intellectualize Philosophy for Children described above; we consistently noticed a shift in their focus from what we were offering to what they themselves were achieving with their students.

It was during our use of the second model that we found time and intellectual distance sufficient to enable us to look back on what we had actually achieved in teacher training. We found that of 52 teachers we could locate in Kentucky (out of 108 trained using the five-day model), only 14 were still consistently implementing Philosophy for Children on an annual basis. And as we entered the third year of using the second, split-sessions model, we discovered that two of six teachers we had trained in our first split-session workshop were not planning to implement.

Because of the many intensive pressures on teachers and on school curricula, it was quite tempting to blame these long term failures on forces beyond our control. Our teachers supported this interpretation, describing the many things they are obliged to cover each school year. But however comforting, this type of explanation would have conveniently allowed us to abandon all responsibility for failure to provide adequate training. For this reason we set it aside and asked ourselves seriously to consider how we might improve our workshops. We began by looking to our comparatively few successes for clues to how better to train teachers.

Upon review, we found two special features characteristic of those teachers still

implementing after three years: either they had gone out of their way to maintain frequent contact with us or they consistently enjoyed support from an infrastructure of other teachers also implementing the program in the same school of in schools nearby. Although our early investigations suggested that these types of support were based on personal friendship, more thorough consideration showed us that what is distinctive about these contacts is that they all mimic features of a community of inquiry in Philosophy for Children. These teachers shared mutual respect as teachers, a lively interest in the pursuit of inquiry, and especially a clear understanding of jointly held intellectual and moral standards for teaching. It was this discovery that our successful teachers had formed communities of inquiry among themselves that suggested a new approach to teacher training: making the training itself conform to standards of Philosophy for children. This is the basis of our current model of in-service teacher training.

As we explored the potential relationship between Philosophy for Children and teacher training, we developed our new model by asking how such training could properly be analogous to the study of philosophy with children. This led to the following reflections. It is a commonplace in Philosophy for Children that one ought not expect children to think well immediately, that months or even a year may be required before they will consistently think reflectively. Why expect that teachers will require less time to learn how to incorporate reflective thought in their teaching? Philosophy for children calls for experiential learning where the experiences are richly infused with meaning and reflection upon them encouraged through open discussion, patience with silence, and the development of shared inquiry. Since teachers' experiences are found in classrooms, not artificial workshop settings, isn't it likely to be more productive to work with them in their classes and by getting to know their children rather than isolate them in workshops? And if teachers, like their students, can gain support and encouragement from one another for maintaining high standards in their teaching, wouldn't it be best to develop a lasting community of inquiry among teachers being trained?

Our current model begins with an introductory planning session designed to give the teachers an overview of their participation in the program. We describe the main features of Philosophy for Children as a discipline in reflective thinking and discuss the importance of its relationship to the whole of their curriculum; we emphasize from the start that the thinking skills promoted by Philosophy for Children should be used throughout the entire school day and not be confined to a single class period. During this time we schedule two more after-school sessions that will be attended by all the teachers. The first session covers one or two chapters of a novel and its manual. As preparation for the second session, we encourage the teachers to begin implementation although they have had just one session on the material; we ask them to take responsibility for their own learning--to think and act reflectively about their own teaching. To encourage this, we ask them to use their experiences in teaching of philosophy as a basis for discovering what they will need from us at the next session. We gather this information from each teacher, then collate and disseminate it to all participants prior to the second session; this list of needs becomes a main agenda item at that meeting along with one or more succeeding chapters of the novel and manual.

The second session is usually scheduled about a month after the first. During this meeting, we arrange our visits to teachers' classes, both while they are implementing Philosophy for Children and when they are not. In the case of a Gifted and Talented pull-out program we arrange to meet other teachers of those children so as to be able to observe the children when they are not engaged with philosophy (in Fayette County, teams of Gifted and Talented and regular classroom teachers from the same schools are currently participating in training). Where we are able to identify well-respected

master teachers who have already received training and can help with the visits, these too are scheduled. Visits to sessions other than philosophy classes are intended to enable us better to help the teachers being trained by identifying how specific standards and skills of Philosophy for Children best connect with other subjects and materials in the curricula. Notes on such observations are shared with the teachers and, as appropriate, are discussed at subsequent sessions.

At the end of the second session, we schedule the next session; subsequent sessions have the same format as the second session. Needs, outcomes, successes and failures are repeatedly discussed during these sessions with teachers; we encourage them to take full responsibility for their learning by sharing ideas with one another in a developing community of inquirers seeking the improvement of their own teaching. On the average, it takes roughly two years to complete training in one novel.

Our new model is vulnerable to at least two objections, cost and intrusiveness. From a school system's point of view, the main difference in cost involves increased expenses for our visits. But to us, cost is paramount: spending this much time with each teacher severely limits the number of teachers we can train per year and powerfully restricts our income from teacher training. Any Center depending on such income for survival may find the model prohibitively expensive. Also, since our model calls for many visits to classes including several when the teacher is not working with Philosophy for Children, it can seem--and sometimes be--intrusive, invading the teachers's domain of responsibility. We try to avoid this by flexibility in scheduling and by basing visits on teacher's requests as far as possible, but visits are essential to this model.

To conclude: The five day model of in-service teacher training came into existence largely in response to teachers' requests and suggestions, as did the manuals in form and content. By attending to our teachers over several years, we have been led to radically modify in-service training. We see our model as inspired by much the same intentions as generated the original: seeking to provide first-class training designed to meet the educational needs of teachers by enabling them to develop communities of reflective inquiry in their classrooms year after year. It is only by further attending to our teachers and their students and through comments and criticisms from our colleagues in Philosophy for Children that we will discover whether our current model contains the proper framework for in-service teacher training that results in genuine long-term implementation. For the present, it seems obvious to us that only an extensive working relationship with teachers can truly enable Philosophy for Children to contribute to educational reform in the schools.

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