Toward a Common Understanding of the Objectives of Staff Development in Philosophy for Children

I. THE ASSOCIATION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN

The Association of Staff Developers in Philosophy for Children (ASDPC) came into being in 1988. It was the result of staff developers feeling a need to be a part of an ongoing community of inquiry among themselves concerning problems of staff development, drawing upon our collective experience as staff developers, and recognizing our autonomy as philosophers (as opposed to being IAPC 'disciples'). At the San Antonio Symposium in April of 1989, an Executive Board of 5 persons was elected: Marie Hungerman, Gerard Potvin, Cynthia Duque, Ron Reed, Ann Sharp, and myself, Dale Cannon, as President. One of our decisions at that meeting was to solicit reports from different Centers of Philosophy for Children on their experience with different formats of staff development and publish them in Analytic Teaching. The longer range goal was and is to pool our collective experience, evaluate it critically, and distill its lessons for inclusion in a projected resource manual for staff development.

The Executive Board met again in Montreal, April 21 and 22, 1990, partly for the purpose of reviewing the reports received so far. They included reports from Phil Guin with the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) on his experience with the Naitonal Diffusion Network (NDN) model; Catherine McCall with the IAPC; myself with Philosophy for Children, Northwest; Fred Oscanyan with the Berea Center in Kentucky; and Barry Curtis in Hawaii. Since then I have had the opportunity to review reports from Tom Jackson in Hawaii and from Marie Hungerman and Michael Pritchard with the Michigan Center for Philosophy and Critical Thinking in the Schools.

My remarks today are presented as a first attempt to distill some of the lessons emerging from this growing collection of experience. I wish to make clear that I do not regard the reports received so far as representative of all significant variations of staff developers' experience--e.g., none represent non-US experience. We are still soliciting experience from other Centers around the world. So also, I wish to make clear that my remarks are not meant to represent the official view of the Executive Committee as a whole or views of any of its members other than myself, although I have tried in my remarks to take into account matters brought up in Executive Board discussion. Members of the Executive Board have not had an opportunity to read or hear these remarks before today. Thus this paper is clearly intended to be a reflection on an inquiry still in process.

II. DIFFERENT FORMATS IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT

On reading the seven reports submitted so far I am struck by rich variety of experience in staff development and the rich variety of strengths different staff developers bring to the task. It is important, I think, to note that we do not all share an identical viewpoint, either personally or philosophically. This diversity is an important asset that needs acknowledgment, appreciation, and taking advantage of.

Let me be more specific. The seven reports speak of several different formats of staff development. But even when the same format is being discussed--say, the 5 day intensive workshop--significantly different experiences of staff development may result. There are of course differences due to place, timing, personalities and attitudes of participants, grade level, etc., the sort of things that are mentioned in the reports. But I have in mind something that only appears when these reports--and informal knowledge of

writers--are juxtaposed: I have in mind differences due to the distinctive talents and experiences of the particular staff developers involved. These differences are such that what makes one workshop with one staff developer successful in certain respects may not be something that would make another workshop with another staff developer (or even the very same workshop with another staff developer) successful in the same respects. Similarly, what makes one workshop format unsuccessful in certain respects may not necessarily be something that would make that format unsuccessful for a different staff developer. (A great deal depends, however, which criteria of 'success' we employ. I will have more to say on this in what follows.

For example, the unhibited creative play that Tom Jackson brings to an Elfie workshop may not be something that would work well for me, whereas I might be able successfully to bring a fuller discussion of theory into a workshop than Tom would find comfortable. This of course does not mean I have little to learn from Tom's practice or Tom from my practice. On the contrary, I have already learned much from him. (I recall with sympathy Phil Guin's remark in his report, "I shudder to think of my slavish allegiance to 'plain vanilla,' as Tom Jackson calls it, during those years under Title IV-C. Whole years went by in this fashion.") Whatever I learn from Tom will be adapted to my own approach, which will remain significantyly different from his. I assume and expect that the same will hold true for him.

Again, I wish to stress that this diversity needs to be recognized for what it is and needs to be prized as a strength--even when it departs from IAPC models from which we originally learned what Philosophy for Children was about. Especially so, in view of the fact that staff development is an art and not a science. Even more especially so, in view of our mutual prizing of the principles of a community of inquiry, a community of philosophical inquiry in which the 'style' of philosophical thinking of each member of the community is welcomed. It follows from this, I believe, that the significant insights that emerge from these reports are 'context-embedded'--more than they appear at first sight-- and that we should be wary of any easy generalizations. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible for us to share, and incumbent on us, to share a common vision of what should result from staff development, a common understanding of its objectives.

Keeping in mind this diversity of 'styles' of staff development, there have emerged several distinct formats of staff development with which, collectively, we have had considerable experience. Roughly they fall into the following groups:

A. In-service Staff Development

1. A short--e.g., 3 day--intensive workshop using one or more of the IAPC programs, designed to get teachers interested in and prepared to try out Philosophy for Children in their classrooms (the minimum National Diffusion Network [NDN] model--hopefully followed up by subsequent sessions either in-classroom or out-of-classroom.

2. A 5 to 10 day intensive workshop (or longer, as in a regular university course) taking place outside of the classroom (possibly with a visit by a group of pupils for demonstration), going through one or more of the IAPC programs.

3. An intensive workshop (5 or more days) split up into at least two sessions, between which teachers are to be implementing an IAPC program, with later session(s) devoted in part to discussion of teachers' experience with the program, with little or no actual in-class modeling or observation.

4. A short, e.g., 3 to 5 day intensive workshop, (possibly split into two sessions)

followed by repeated in-classroom visits (e.g.,3), involving modeling and coaching, and ideally involving some subsequent out-of-classroom sessions with teachers.

5. 1 to 2 years of in-classroom modelling and coached presentations, combined with periodic (weekly or monthly) out-of-classroom sessions, usually prefaced by a 1 or more day initial session, using one or more of the IAPC programs. (Conceivably this format could be for a shorter period, e.g., a half year or 10 weeks.)

B. Pre-service Staff Development

(Although none of the reports discussed pre-service staff development to any extent, we seriously need to consider this among the formats being discussed.)

1. One or more regular university level courses in Philosophy for Children, conceived along the lines of an intensive, in-service workshop, possibly involving some supervised, in-classroom practice, using one or more of the IAPC programs. (This might be an elective course or a major course within a program of teacher education.)

2. A comprehensive program of teacher education (or a major component thereof), involving training in Philosophy for Children with supervised, in-classroom practice, but also a general community of philosophical inquiry approach to all aspects of teaching and learning to teach.

3. A graduate level program in Philosophical Inquiry with Children, for students with a strong background in philosophy--of the sort that the IAPC has administered for the past several years--involving extensive, supervised, in-classroom practice.

Quite a range of formats, isn't it! Given this range, any assessment of the adequacy of these formats depends upon the criteria we are to use, the objectives that are supposed to result from staff development. What criteria we should be using is not clear. (Should there be different objectives for different formats?) Indeed, do staff developers currently share enough of a common sense of what is involved in staff development that we can articulate a coherent, common set of criteria? I would like to think we do, but to what extent we can I am uncertain.

For the sake of provoking thought, let me begin to list some possible candidates for such criteria: (a) that staff development workshops in Philosophy for Children are offered and have a sufficient number of participants to take place; (b) that workshop participants have a good time and experience no significant alienation; (c) that participants are introduced IAPC materials and their appropriate use; and (d) that staff development workshops replicate what the staff developer experienced in the IAPC workshop in which she or he received training. It occurs to me that some of us (and I include myself), especially in our first attempts at staff development, may not have looked much beyond this limited set of criteria. Thus we have operated a workshop in basically the way we learned how to run one and judged whether it had gone well on the basis of how closely it replicated what we ourselves experienced.

However, the reports submitted from the different Centers of staff development are encouraging us to consider further criteria, criteria that require us to look beyond the surface to judge to what extent staff development has been a success. They call us to evaluate an experience of staff development in terms of criteria that go beyond

replication. (Please note: I do not mean to imply that the following criteria are absent from what we have received from the IAPC; I only mean to convey that they require us to measure our 'success' in terms other than replication.) In any case, I find implicit in these reports criteria such as these: (a) that teachers are inspired to try out Philosophy for Children in their classrooms; (b) that they actually do try it out for an extended period of time; (c) that teachers become acquainted in some depth with the scope, sequence, and power of the IAPC materials for generating children's philosophical inquiry; (d) that teachers become acquainted with the domain of philosophical discussion opened up by the IAPc materials (e.g., the range of basic questions on a given topic, the typical kinds of answers and the implications that follow from them, etc.); (e) that they understand the materials and the program in its distinctiveness well enough to represent them and it faithfully to others; (f) that teachers experience apprenticeship in the appropriate use of the IAPC materials; (g) that they attain mastery in this (not just confidence but competence); (h) that teachers experience apprenticeship in facilitating communities of philosophical inquirey with children--not necessarily wedded to IAPC materials; (i) that they attain mastery in this; (j) that teachers actually implement Philosophy for Children in their classrooms 'as it is meant to be implemented' (To what extent does this mean adaptation to the teacher's own style?); (k) that such implementation is sustained over time, say, for 5 years; (l) that a community of philosophical inquiry takes place in the teacher's classroom (How often? In relation to matters other than IAPC materials?); (m) that a community of philosophical inquiry becomes a pervasive, ongoing feature of the classroom; (n) that teachers become part of an ongoing community of inquiry and support system to sustain and nurture their classroom efforts; and (o) that teachers develop a disposition to relate the principles of a community of philosophical inquiry to all aspects of their students' education.

Can we all subscribe to this entire list? And if we can, how should they be prioritized? It is not clear that each deserves equal emphasis. In any case, assessment of success in staff development depends crucially upon which objectives are being employed as criteria.

So, for example, when one of the reports wonders whether **quantity of time** in staff development is a significant variable, the answer to that question will depend upon the objectives being pursued. If an experience of apprenticeship leading to mastery is a primary objective, then quantity of time is certainly a significant variable. (What exactly does 'mastery' involve? Have we common agreement about this?) In any case, mastery as a criterion implies the responsibility of objective assessment--beyond verifying that a workshop generally appears to have gone well.

Partly because most of us who are philosophers have not been disciplined in the ways of empirical testing, we have not been naturally disposed to subject the results of our efforts at staff development to objective assessment. It is, I think, the presence of teacher educators among us and the very teachers we have come to work closely with that are calling us to task in these matters and asking us to modify our methods and revise our materials if we desire to have results fully consonant with the vision of children's philosophizing they have come to share with us.

The Berea Center in Kentucky under the direction of Fred Oscanyan is something of an exception to this reluctance to consider results. Philosophy for Children is nothing, he claims, if it is not taught well year after year by career teachers in everyday classrooms. Upon finding that four years after training only 27% of teachers trained (in what were considered at the time to be successful 5 day intensive workshops) were still using the program, he concluded that the 5 day workshop is an educational failure. His analysis goes into greater depth than I am able to present here, and there are several important questions about it that it does not answer. My point is that each of us need to look carefully at the results we are producing and exercise the self-criticism and courage

that the Berea Center has exercised. Like Fred, at some point we need to say, "No, we will not undertake staff development unless it is likely to result in long term results--and specifically, in the reform of ongoing teaching practice." If we want to have a long term impact on education on behalf of children's philosophical inquiry, we are going to have to plan for it deliberately and not just hope for the best.

What changes in the formats of staff development this effort at self-criticism may result in I shall not attempt to predict. Nor am I ready to make concrete proposals. We still have work to do to clarify mutually our goals and priorities.

III. COMPETITION BETWEEN GOALS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

One of the more powerful insights to emerge from the Executive Committee review of reports submitted thus far is a recognition of latent conflict between some of the objectives of staff development identified above. Put differently, we detect a set of competing motivations at work, not always acknowledged and sometimes in conflict. Three areas of potential conflict, if not actual conflict, exist. First, there is a potential conflict between the motivation to disseminate the Philosophy for Children Program (and the IAPC materials as embodying the program) as widely and efficiently as possible and a concern to help teachers attain mastery in handling the Program. Second, there is a potential conflict between the goal of short term mastery (e.g., as evidenced in an intensive workshop) and the goal of long term impact on teaching practice. Third, there is a potential conflict between the goal of mastery of the Program as identified with IAPC materials and the broader goal of mastery of facilitating a community of philosophical inquiry with children with other materials and in other contexts. I have briefly touched on the first of these two areas of potential conflict already. About the third area I have a few further remarks.

In plain terms, staff development oriented primarily toward introducing teachers to the IAPC materials and to their appropriate use--as worthy as that may be-- unfortunately tends to encourage them to place exclusive trust in those materials to insure the philosophical substance of student discussions. Especially so when teachers do not develop in the context of staff development any accredited sense of independent judgment about what is philosophically substantial from what is not. As good as the IAPC materials are--and about this I have no question, encouraging teachers to place exclusive trust in those materials to insure **at second hand** the philosophical substance of student discussions countervenes the trust in first hand philosophical inquiry we seek to instill within them, both for their students and for themselves as teachers.

None of us have any doubt that the IAPC materials are the best available. As Marie Hungerman and Michael Pritchard put it, "It is the proven success of these programs that has earned philosophy serious consideration in the classroom." About this there is no question. Nevertheless, they are not perfect, and we should not hide the fact that they are not perfect. On the contrary, to the extent that we care about having the best materials possible, we should undertake what Hungerman and Pritchard call "homework":

> We should be actively exploring the potential that existing teaching materials have for adaptations and supplementation. We should become more familiar with children's fiction that has philosophical import. It is important for those of us who conduct workshops to begin to identify and develop other materials. This should not be viewed as undermining IAPC materials. Instead, it should be viewed as demonstrating more plainly their value--showing that there is some continuity between IAPC programs and what others have already done, are doing, or could do in the future. After all, in the long run, IAPC programs are best seen as one means for facilitating the philosophical

inquiry of children than as its sole, or even primary, source.

The "homework" of which they speak is, here and there, already underway. The staff development resource manual which I mentioned earlier will be in part a hoped for collation of these efforts. But this is a digression from my topic.

For teachers to come to recognize for themselves that the IAPC materials are one reliable way of facilitating student philosophical inquiry, but not the only one, they need to develop a sense of independent philosophical judgment. Consequently, staff development needs to place priority on helping teachers develop for themselves an ability to differentiate what is philosophically substantive from what is not. I suggest that this must not be left merely to hope and chance, but that it become a deliberate focus of staff development.

What George Ghanotakis and Tom Jackson have done with WRAITEC as a framework for helping teachers and children assess whether or not a discussion has been 'philosophical' addresses this concern.

Negatively put, if a discussion has proceeded and there were no calls for clarification at any point (W), no reasons were offered in support of claims made (R), no assumptions were either revealed or probed (A), no inferences or implications recognized or pursued (I), no questions of truth or claims raised (T), no examples (E) given, nor counterexamples (C) offered, the Community can be fairly confident that nothing of philosophical merit has transpired. Positively put, WRAITEC provides an indication of the kinds of things philosophers do, the kinds of questions they tend to ask, the kinds of things they tend to be on the look out for.

A different effort to address the same concern is shown in Barry Curtis' assignment to his teachers to build discussion plans and exercises on the model of those found in the IAPC manuals.

IV. NOTABLE INNOVATIONS

There are many other things worth remarking in these reports. I do not have time to cover them all. I wish nevertheless to mention briefly some significant innovations beyond those I have just mentioned:

Although it represents a considerable investment of time and effort, Barry Curtis' journal, compiling entries from a diary of classroom visitations, which he later shared with his teachers (and now the rest of us, for it is being published), appears to be a considerable aid for the teachers he works with. Not least because it helps them visit vicariously the classrooms of the other teachers with whom they are receiving training.

Fred Oscanyan and the Berea Center invest in-classroom time not only modeling and observing Philosophy for Children sessions, but also visiting the same teachers and classrooms at other times to help the teachers discover how Philosophy for Children can be more fully integrated into their teaching. So also they look to see how the students involved in Philosophy for Children relate to other subject matters and classmates.

Tom Jackson has a remarkable talent for coming up with simple, catchy ways of conveying important abstract ideas. For example, his idea of "plain vanilla" as a standard pedagogical format from which one departs from time to time to try out other "flavors"-- e.g., methods of reading, methods of identifying student questions, and methods of pursuing philosophical discussion. Similarly, his idea of the "philosophical cycle" of three phases of reading, questioning, and discussion. Among other things, it highlights the philosophical importance of the first two phases whose significance is otherwise lost sight of. Then there are those inimitable phrases for use by students in the discussion: IDUS

("I don't understand."), SPLAT ("What you said traveled about six inches beyond your lips and went 'splat' onto the floor."), POPAAT ("Please, one person at a time!"), and OMT ("One more time.")

A number of the reports emphasized the need to discuss certain theoretical issues, particularly as they bear upon helping teachers relate Philosophy for Children to their current educational praxis. Dale Cannon wrote of how John Thomas has had success assigning portions of Philosophy in the Classroom to be read and discussed in the same manner as one of the IAPC novels might be discussed.

I should also mention Catherine McCall's helpful identification of a number of key or essential features of staff development in Philosophy for Children. She identifies four fundamental functions: (a) familiarization with the content of the IAPC materials; (b) modeling of the community of inquiry methodology; (c) practice in using that methodology with the materials; and (d) experience in being a member of a community of inquiry. There is much of genuine insight and value in her analysis. However, I see a need for us to discuss these matters at length. There may indeed be other fundamental functions, perhaps related to the list of criteria I offered above. One I have in mind is acquaintance with the distinctive philosophical domain which discussion of the IAPC materials affords access, and a sense of how to find and maintain one's bearings within that domain.

V. TOWARD A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF OBJECTIVES OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In spite of the declarative mode of most of my comments, my chief purpose has been to raise some questions. Realistically, what are we accomplishing by our respective efforts at staff development? How well do our results (objectively assessed) realize our intentions? On the other hand, what exactly are our intentions? And how are those intentions translated into what we do in staff development?

I have clearly raised more questions than I have answered. That has been my intent--namely, to provoke discussion of what objectives should govern staff development. I encourage any of you as members of this informal 'association of staff developers' to respond to these issues--not only in discussion at this conference, but at subsequent conferences or in the pages of Analytic Teaching. Whether in general or in direct rsponse to particular reports, I solicit your contribution to this communal inquiry.

Dale Cannon