PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN WORKSHOPS:
Reflections from Kalamazoo

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We have been conducting IAPC workshops for teachers together since 1982. Most of these workshops have been held in Michigan. However, occasionally we have conducted workshops in other states as well. In fact, our introduction to each other was at a workshop we conducted in another state.

In the summer of 1982 a junior high principal from a nearby state made a request to IAPC for a *Lisa* workshop. Since Marie Hungerman was about to move to Kalammoo, where Michael Pritchard was already working with teachers and students, IAPC invited us to run the workshop together. This, it was suggested, would be a good opportunity for us to get acquainted with each other.

It turned out to be much more than this. By the end of our five day workshop we concluded that, not only did we work very well together, we were **survivors**. We had survived such an incredible array of obstacles thrown our way during that week that we emerged confident that we could salvage something worthwhile even under extreme fire.

We met each other for the first time just fifteen minutes before meeting the eighteen teachers in our workshop. Immediately upon his arrival, Michael Pritchard was told by the school principal, "I want you to know that I really believe in philosophy for children — even more, perhaps, than Matthew Lipman!" She repeated this for Marie Hungerman when she arrived a few minutes later.

Next the principal informed us that, as far as she was concerned, the workshop was for only about 6 or 7 of the 18 teachers in the workshop. These were the teachers who would accompany her and a cadre of students next summer to Greece to visit the ancient sites which gave birth to philosophy as we know it today. These were the teachers who would be interviewed by the press. These were the teachers who would model Philosophy for Children for the surrounding schools, thus elevating this school into the limelight. So, these were the teachers we must be certain understand the full meaning and importance of the program.

What about the other teachers in the workshop? They, we were told, do not matter. Funding for the project required 18 teachers. But it did not require 18 teachers who "have what it takes" to understand and teach Philosophy for Children. So much, then, for the idea of forming a **community** of inquiry among the teachers!

This was our ten minute introduction to each other and to what would be in store for us for the next five days. We now had five minutes to huddle privately and plot our strategy. ***How***, we wondered, were we going to conduct a workshop on *Lisa* which focuses on ethical inquiry, while under the surveillance of a principal whose aims seemed directly opposite those of the program?

We decided that we would simply push ahead and try to deflect the principal's intrusions as best we could. Each day we gently fended off the principal's attempts to nudge the group toward seeing the *Lisa* materials as tools for moral indoctrination. At the end of each session she spoke favorably of how the day had gone as she drove us back to our hotel. However, at night she must have agonized over our shortcomings in meeting her objectives, for each morning she spent the 15 minute drive to the school laying out her concerns about what had or had not happened thus far.

Just before being picked up on the fifth day, Marie Hungerman said to Michael Pritchard, "She ***can't*** come up with any ***more*** surprises, can she?" Only two. On the way to the school the principal indicated she might bring in a group of children for the teachers to work with — unannounced to the teachers! We quickly suggested that taking both the children and teachers by surprise would be unwise. Fortunately, she offered no resistance to this suggestion. Next, as we entered the school, she noticed graffiti on a table in the hallway. This was a signal to her that one of the local gangs was in the building. As a consequence, all of us spent each break in the workshop carting valued school equipment upstairs to a locked vault.

Needless to say, we learned many valuable lessons from this workshop. Many were negative, but one was decidedly positive. Despite the principal's mixed agenda and intrusiveness, the teachers responded very well to *Lisa*. At least for the five day period a genuine community of inquiry seemed to have developed. Sadly, however,

there is little reason to believe that this was sustained, even though all the teachers were from the same school. The principal remained convinced that only a handful were well suited for the program, and there is little reason to believe that we altered her original conception of the program.

It might seem reasonable to conclude that school administrators should be kept out of teacher workshops. But, subsequent workshops have convinced us that this is not so. Some of our most successful workshops have included administrators as participants. However, the key is that they were willing to participate in the same manner as their teachers, temporarily suspending their role as overseers. Teachers who are going to use IAPC programs in their classrooms need the understanding and support of their administration. So, the enthusiastic participation of administrators in a workshop can be a real plus.

Still, we received an early lesson on not being misled by appearances. Our first workshop did have the enthusiastic support of an administrator. It was well funded, and it had a full complement of teachers who were committed putting in five full days at a workshop. However, the principal's agenda did not match well with IAPC's. Consequently, neither did the teachers'. Few of the teachers had any prior acquaintance with Philosophy for Children. Most were recruited for the workshop for the purpose of filling the quota necessary for funding. They were paid to attend. But few had any expectation of using the materials in their classes (and it was clear that their principal would actively discourage this in most instances).

It is to the credit of the IAPC materials that, despite such obstacles, it is possible to have a good workshop. But this is, at best, short-term success. What happens after the workshop? We have heard nothing further from the principal or teachers at our first workshop. We are not optimistic about what may have happened. We have doubts about other workshops as well.

Here are some of the problems we have observed. Teachers who are enthusiastic about an IAPC program are transferred to another grade level. Sometimes this occurs after they have used the program for a year. Sometimes it is before they have had an opportunity even to begin. Other teachers indicate that they are isolated from others who use IAPC materials, and they get little if any support from their schools to experiment. This is particularly so for teachers who have come to our workshops from small schools from outlying parts of the state. Many indicate that what they are already required to do in the classroom will not permit them the luxury of introducing one more set of materials.

These are hard realities, and they do present serious problems for Philosophy for Children. They point to the need for adjustments — not despair. We proceed now to some recommendations in based on our experiences.

Workshop Format

Our workshops have ranged from five consecutive days to two days separated by one week. The number of IAPC programs considered in these workshops has varied from as many as three to as few as one. Our conclusion is that five day workshops are preferable to shorter ones, and concentrating on one program is preferable to trying to cover two or more. Other formats seem to us to pose a real danger of diluting the programs. Less clear to us is whether a consecutive day format is preferable to staggering them over a longer period of time. An advantage of meeting on consecutive days is that, through the workshop's greater intensity, teachers may have a better feel for philosophical inquiry as they begin meeting with their students. An advantage of staggered sessions is that teachers have opportunities to try out materials and discuss how they are progressing at later sessions. An optimal arrangement might be to have an intensive five day workshop with several follow-up mini workshops. However, it is difficult to find a district that is willing to invest that much time and money into the program.

In addition, those who conduct workshops may have difficulty finding time for frequent return visits, especially when this involves travelling some distance. This is a problem for us since we are both full-time college teachers. A promising remedy, we believe, is for teachers themselves to meet periodically on their own, with experienced teachers serving as discussion leaders. This has worked particularly well in Detroit, where we have regularly conducted five day workshops in the summer. This requires coordinated effort within the school system itself. Fortunately, Bessie Duncan, Director of Gifted and Talented Programs in the Detroit Public Schools, has exerted strong leadership and provided the necessary follow-up support.

It might be thought that some teachers are reluctant to invest five days in a workshop. Some are. But we have observed that those who are the first to say, "I've been doing this for a long time already," typically are the ones most in need of an intensive introduction to the distinctiveness of Philosophy for Children. Often they fail to see that the program has aims other than getting students to talk with one another (seemingly about anything).

Those who seem most naturally suited for the program seldom complain that a five day workshop is too long. They are more aware of the richness of the program and the value of working through as much of it as possible.

We have also found it important to allow more time

for broader discussion of educational goals, pedagogical concerns, relationships between IAPC programs and other available materials, and problems in introducing the program into the schools (e.g., community resistance, unsupportive administrators, crowded curriculum).

Of course, the reality is that the difficulty of obtaining funding and the lure of "quick fixes" compete against a five day format. Three day workshops are more salable, and we have conducted many that have gone quite well. However, we continue to worry about diluting the programs, and we are quite careful to point out that a three day workshop is not enough. Unfortunately, often we have not been given the opportunity to conduct follow-up sessions. Still, as long as we exercise "truth in advertising," we remain convinced that three days is better than none.

Use of IAPC Materials

We use IAPC materials in our workshops. However, at virtually every workshop we have conducted it has been clear that at least some of the participants do not intend to use IAPC materials in their classes. (We have already mentioned many of the reasons they might have for not using the materials.) Nevertheless, they have come to the workshop for something. We believe that our workshops should offer them something worthwhile. Actually, we believe that a workshop that confines itself to introducing IAPC materials can be quite valuable even for those who will never make direct use of them. Still, we are fairly certain we do not offer these teachers as much as we could.

IAPC programs are clearly well suited for introducing teachers to the role philosophy might play in their classrooms. However, it does not follow that the IAPC programs should be viewed as a necessary vehicle for philosophical inquiry in the classroom. At this point in time there are no serious competitors to the IAPC programs for systematically encouraging the philosophical thinking of children. So departures from these materials should be viewed with great care. In the long run, however, it is unlikely that philosophy in the classroom will gain widespread and lasting acceptance if IAPC materials continue to be "the only show in town."

One of the shortcomings of our workshops is that we have not allowed sufficient time for teachers to explore ways in which other materials might be used to promote philosophical inquiry. More time could be spent discussing the philosophical potential of materials already in use. This would accord teachers a stronger role in redesigning their curriculum than if they simply adopt an IAPC program.

Those teachers who have the greatest aptitude for discussing philosophical ideas with their students can be expected to come up with creative ways of adapting or developing other materials for similar ends. We see no reason to discourage this by treating IAPC materials as necessary for structured philosophical discussion in the classroom. But, for us to assist such teachers in exploring alternatives, we feel that we need to do more "homework." We need to spend more time ourselves exploring relationships between IAPC programs and other available materials.

Of course, there is the fear that less philosophically inclined teachers will misunderstand the IAPC programs and end up abandoning philosophy in the classroom if they move away from the IAPC materials. This might well happen. But there is little reson to be confident that such teachers will not distort the intended use of the IAPC materials themselves.

Some Recommendations

So what recommendations are we making about workshops for teachers? We recommend that the workshops continue to concentrate primarily on giving teachers a thorough introduction to IAPC programs appropriate to their grade level. These are the programs that have been classroom tested and that have received NDN recognition. It is the proven success of these programs that has earned philosophy serious consideration in the classroom.

At the same time, we should realize that not everyone who is willing to invest time in learning about IAPC programs is either willing or able to adopt them in the classroom. We should be upfront with teachers about this realization, and we should be prepared to offer advice about other ways in which philosophical inquiry in the classroom might be fostered.

For most of us who conduct workshops, this means more "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 rather than as its sole, or even primary, source.

Finally, those of us who conduct workshops should be prepared to learn from the teachers in our workshops. That is, teachers should be regarded as invaluable resources, thus encouraging a more reciprocal relationship

between teachers and workshop leaders. This not only adds richness to the workshops, it respects the teachers and increases the chances that they will eagerly contribute to the community of inquiry that workshops are designed to encourage.

Additional Problems and Suggestions

We have found, particularly in *Harry* workshops, that the order in which materials are introduced in the workbooks is not necessarily the best order in which to introduce them to the teachers. Furthermore, supplementing IAPC materials with other materials may sometimes be desirable. Particularly in the area of logic, teachers often feel inadequate. We believe it is a mistake to introduce logic to such teachers by the same discovery method used in *Harry*. Also, since their students will often bring up ideas not covered in the workbook, teachers need further exposure to logic than the IAPC programs provide. This is not so that teachers can then relay this additional material to their students. It is so that they can be more responsive to the innovative remarks that might otherwise not be given the attention they warrant.

Rearranging and supplementing the logic materials in *Harry* does pose a danger. Some teachers may conclude that logic is a "pullout" that can be taught separately, and they may fail to see its interconnections with other aspects of philosophical inquiry. But this seems a risk worth taking, since otherwise many teachers are left confused and ill-prepared to use the logic materials with their students. This is an especially acute problem in the shorter, three day workshops. If teachers are clearly told that there is a difference between how they are being introduced to logic and how it should be handled in the classroom, the risk is reduced, even if it is not eliminated.

Another problem involving how materials are covered in workshops concerns assigning teachers leadership tasks. While this is often quite successful, frequently it is not. Particularly in shorter workshops, a session that is poorly led is rather costly. There is not time to have another try at the chapter, lesson plans, or exercises. For some, the basic problem is that of simply having little sensitivity to the philosophical directions a discussion might take. For others, there is a resistance to trying to simulate a classroom discussion when, after all, one's "students" are one's colleagues. And there are many teachers who find it very difficult, in this kind of context, to resist raising pedagogical questions in the middle of what is supposed to be a philosophical discussion. So, while we agree that some "hands-on" teaching experience in a workshop is desirable, we are somewhat uncertain how best to balance this with the need to help teachers grasp the significance of all the materials that are introduced. This is an especially serious problem for five day workshops that introduce more than one program, as well as for three day workshops.

Finally, we wish to say something about the need for greater contact with others who conduct workshops. Many of us are relatively isolated geographically from IAPC and from one another. We need to be in closer contact for at least two reasons. The first relates to pedagogical concerns. We need to share ideas about which discussion plans and exercises seem to work well, which do not — and why. We need to help each other improve existing discussion plans and exercises — and to develop additional ones. We need to discuss what contributes to successful and unsuccessful workshops and implementations in the classroom. Also, we need to keep each other well informed about how some of the newer or less often used programs are faring. For example, how are *Elfie* and *Harry Prime* doing? And what is happening with the *Suki* and *Mark* programs?

The second reason relates to our mutual interest in the philosophical thinking of children as such. There is a need to exchange ideas about the philosophical content and import of children's thinking. This is a dynamic, growing area of philosophical interest; and we have much to learn from each other as well as from children and their teachers.

The two recent international conferences in Texas, the resulting formation of an association of those who conduct workshops, and this issue of *Analytic Teaching* all indicate that a strong network of mutual support may be in the making. We very much hope that this is so.

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