The Philosopher-in-Residence

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If there is a place for philosophy in the elementary and secondary school, is there a place for a full time philosopher? In what way can a school (or school system) benefit from the addition of a philosophy specialist in the faculty? These are questions which, before Philosophy for Children, may have gone unasked. Yet now, with the acknowledgement that philosophy can have a valuable place in the curriculum, the question is an important one.

The implementation of Philosophy for Children in a school has normally been a process brought in from outside.[1] A teacher-guide arrives on the scene, remains for a while running workshops, modeling in classes and observing, and perhaps returns once a week for a period to run continuing seminars for teachers. That teacher-guide comes into the school as a stranger; s/he is not a faculty member. As such, the program is imported from without, and must rely on its own momentum to take root in that school.

Such a process is very difficult. Philosophy for Children can face many impediments to its growth in a school. As with any educational reform necessitating a change in the routine on the part of both teachers and students, the program faces resistance. Problems can and do arise, and the tendency with a new program is to phase it out of the classroom when it presents such problems. Without help and reinforcement, a teacher may well stop using the program not long after the teacher-guide leaves the school. The growth of Philosophy for Children calls for a permanent, on-site staff developer, at least for the first years.

Of course, few schools or school systems can afford to hire a Philosophy for Children teacher-guide on a full time basis, just to bring in the program, working with teachers. But what else could such a position entail? Some would suggest creating a position like that of an art or music teacher for the philosopher — another specialist visiting classes twice a week. In this way, staff development could be avoided. The philosophy specialist would simply lead all the philosophy sessions.

This, however, is highly impractical. If the program is used in more than a few classes, the demands are too much for one person. It is one thing to teach five sessions of music, art (or any subject, for that matter), and quite another to lead five different philosophical discussions a day, with many different groups throughout the week. In addition, a teacher brought in to lead all the philosophy sessions removes one of the most important effects of the program — that of bringing the regular classroom teacher into a process of inquiry with his/her students. A successful community of inquiry in a classroom is best facilitated by the regular teacher, who is in constant contact with the students, and who can relate philosophical themes and practice to other subjects throughout the day.

What, then, could be the role of a Philosophy for Children specialist working full time in a school,[2] beyond the training of teachers? Hired for a two year period in an international school in Quito, Ecuador, I had the chance to explore the opportunities suggested by this question. Having been brought in to work with teachers, I was given full freedom to take the program wherever in the school that I saw fit. My only regularly scheduled class was the International Baccalaureate Theory of Knowledge course, which met only four times a week. Other than that, I could use my time as I wanted. In a two year period I discovered that, apart from the basic implementation of the program, there are many activities a philosophy specialist can as-

sume in a school. Indeed, during this period at Academia Cotopaxi we went a long way towards creating a new kind of position, and showing the value of such a position in a regular educational setting.

In the remainder of this article, I will describe what this position is, the actual activities that took place, and the possibilities that I see for it. Since the term "Philosophy for Children teacher-guide" or "teacher trainer" doesn't completely capture the variety of work engaged in, I will use the term "philosopher-in-residence." Such a person is not the "philosophy teacher," but rather the philosophy facilitator, the gadfly or spark to open discussion all around the school. The major purpose of the philosopher-in-residence, as I see it, is to bring philosophical inquiry into as many places in a school as possible, in both formal and informal settings. If a main goal of Philosophy for Children is to create a community of inquiry in classrooms, a goal of the philosopher-in-residence position is to create and maintain a community of inquiry school-wide, among students, among faculty, between students and faculty, between faculty and administration, and between the school community and parents. The community of inquiry can go beyond the school and out into the general community — with the help of the philosopher-in-residence.

Before discussing the various areas of pedagogical value to be found with a full time philosopher-in-residence, I will describe the actual work both as I experienced it and as I envision it. First and most obviously, the position calls for experience and expertise in work with the Philosophy for Children program. An ability to work in all aspects of teacher guidance, from workshops to modeling and ongoing seminars is assumed. However, there are some aspects of full time work in a school which differ from that which a teacher-guide normally experiences. In such a situation, the guide has much more time in that location, and is able to expand on various activities. In-class work is far more extensive, with the trainer able to model the program for a duration of several weeks or more, depending on the teacher. Consistent observations are made possible, as are wide ranging seminar sessions.

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For this reason, workshops assume a different role. Normally, the workshop is the center of the training process, for the guide must leave the school after a short period. Thus, the workshop requires more time, at least several days. With the presence of a philosopher-in-residence, the workshop may be shorter, serving a mostly introductory role.

When one works full time in a school over an extended period, s/he has many opportunities to meet with teachers both individually and in groups. Many different discussion meetings can be called. Individual consultations can occur frequently, either formally or informally. The trainer has the opportunity for long range, consistent follow-up; s/he always is aware of how Philosophy for Chil-

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dren is coming along in each classroom. For these reasons, a school considering a wide ranging implementation of the program is well served by the presence of a philosopher-in-residence.

Yet such a philosopher's work can go beyond basic implementation of the program. The most obvious example is the availability to teach, in secondary school settings, either a regular philosophy course or, in international schools, the Theory of Knowledge course. These are only two of the possibilities.

Every discipline in a school, from the earliest grades to the latest, occasionally touches on philosophical issues (and perhaps should touch on them more frequently). Often these issues are either ignored or quickly dispensed with. Perhaps the content teacher avoids discussion of these issues for perceived lack of time; more likely a discussion is avoided due to the teacher's lack of exposure to the philosophical aspects of these questions. Here, a philosopher-in-residence can be called upon to visit that class, in order to lead discussion around that topic. Examples abound. Science classes should occasionally deal with questions of truth, of the validity of method, of the difference between inductive and deductive approaches, and so on. History classes shouldn't avoid discussions of what makes history, what sources to accept, how much of history is a creation of the historian, etc. Art classes should come to terms with various aesthetic questions. All manner of philosophical questions arise in the reading of literature in English classes. Even in mathematics, there is often room for discussion of open questions (what do numbers represent,

how is mathematical truth different from the facts of science, etc.). With this in mind, the philosopher-in-residence has the responsibility of regularly conversing with content teachers about developments in their classes.

In any of these areas, and in many more not mentioned, a school is well served by the availability of a person trained in the facilitation of philosophical inquiry. A philosopher-in-residence can even write specific dialogues tailored to bring on discussion about an issue which arose in a classroom days before (or a teacher may perceive such an issue beforehand, and ask the philosopher to visit). During my time at Academia Cotopaxi, I made many such visits, treating themes from scientific method to beauty to the philosophical implications of studying and learning from computers.

A common phenomena which may strike observers of schools is the separation which exists between various sectors of the community, and between students and the learning material. Starting from two such gaps which John Dewey brought to attention many years ago,[3] we can notice the separation between the experience of the students and the material of the standard curriculum. Philosophy for Children seeks to address this problem overtly, and enough has been written on this that I need not go into it here. Another is the separation between the school and the outside community. Philosophy for Children can be a force to bridge this gap, but requires the presence of someone to organize a bridge. The philosopher-in-residence can do several things. In addition to awareness sessions with parents, the philosopher can organize ongoing discussion groups with them, including teachers, administration and students. Philosophy for Children, as well as other materials can be used to spark these discussions. Also, the philosopher can write up a schedule of times when Philosophy for Children is being done in that school, and distribute it to parents with an invitation to attend a session as a participant. Finally, the philosopher can distribute literature pertaining to the program, or to educational issues in general to parents.

Through all of this, it is hoped to bring the parents into an awareness of the educational process in that school, and the process of inquiry taking place. Thus, when their children come home, perhaps mentioning one of the ideas which came up in class, the inquiry can continue. A philosopher-in-residence has other opportunities for bridging gaps. Organizing discussion groups with faculty is an important activity. All too often, faculty from different areas never dis-

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cuss their field or their teaching with teachers in other disciplines. Philosophical inquiry between them is a good way to cross-fertilize ideas which can find their way into classroom work. We want teachers who are aware of the various interrelations between their disciplines and others, so as to be able to point out these connections to their students. More group faculty inquiry can help to initiate this. In addition, the schedule of Philosophy for Children sessions can be distributed to teachers, with encouragement to visit other classrooms as a participant. It is even possible that teachers can work out arrangements to allow students to visit other classes doing philosophy in other grade levels (for one obvious chasm existing in schools is between students of different grades).

Continuing along in this vein, administration can be invited to some of the inquiry groups or seminars, again, as participants, not merely as observers. The general point here is that a philosopher-in-residence, having the time and resources, can attempt to foster dialogue and inquiry between groups that are usually mutually isolated, or whose interaction is often limited by certain institutional norms.

A philosopher-in-residence has other possibilities. S/he can organize independent discussion groups among students. S/he can disseminate literature to teachers, and follow up on this by asking about the ideas in this literature around school. S/he can even write in-school articles concerning different aspects of the program, critical thinking and various points in educational theory and philosophy pertinent to that community at that time, and distribute them to faculty, administration and parent.

Of great importance, although not obvious, is the role of the philosopher-in-residence outside the classroom. Here s/he can be available for discussions of a philosophical nature whenever possible. Such discussions may take place in the library, lunchroom, playground, lounges or hallways. While content teachers commonly leave their disciplines behind when they walk from their classroom, the philosopher-in-residence must be available to encourage, stimulate and follow up on open inquiry where and when it happens (and if it happens outside the classroom, all the better).

All of the above activities occurred as part of my position at Academia Cotopaxi, although perhaps not all of them were completely successful. They came into being as the result of the particular quality of my job; the administration trusted me with a good amount of free time to organize as I saw fit. This time was channelled into the above activities, which occurred to me as the months went on. A philosopher-in- residence will function best in this manner, with the freedom to follow up on areas of inquiry in the school as they arise organically. Ironically, while I was only scheduled into four or five official teaching hours a week, I often felt busier than if I had had a regular teaching post.

From the above description, the overall goals of a philosopher-in-residence begin to emerge. While Philosophy for Children seeks to facilitate a community of inquiry in the classroom, the philosopher-in-residence seeks to facilitate and follow up on a community of inquiry throughout the school, between students, in class and out of class, between teachers (perhaps of different disciplines) during work hours and off hours (my role often times brought me not only into the teacher's lounge, but to restaurants and local pubs — inquiry is not an isolated thing). In addition, the philosopher seeks to extend the inquiry to the home and outside community.

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If a school is serious about facilitating critical thinking among its students, about educating for independent, open minded citizens, then it should do more than dabble in limited experiments with critical thinking programs. Bringing in Philosophy for Children is a good step. Taking on a full time philosopher-in-residence is the further logical move. Only someone who is concen-

trating on this massive project can work and organize to truly change the ambience of a school. Such a philosopher can help to:

• raise the level of general dialogue and inquiry in a school and community. With the achievement of community of inquiry norms, class discussion is more viable in any discipline. Students, teachers and parents who are actively interested in sharing ideas, in and out of class, are bound to create an educational environment of quality.

• motivate students towards a critical approach to all disciplines, perhaps helping them to see interconnections, relevant distinctions, and common problems throughout the subjects.

• eliminate (or smooth) the gaps between class and out-of-class time. Intellectual endeavors can be generalized. The pursuit of knowledge through critical thought and discussion can, after a while, be seen by the students as something continuous with, and not cut off from their "real" life.

• enrich the work experience of teachers through discussion of philosophical topics, which acts as a bridge between their disciplines, hopefully providing new stimulation for their regular classroom work.

I like to think that at Cotopaxi, the simple existence of this position has helped to change the atmosphere of the school. Perhaps it is not yet a paradigm of a community of inquiry; more time is needed for such a thing. But one can see the effects in listening to teachers, in watching them in their classrooms, in listening to their discussions. Even if some remain hostile to Philosophy for Children and the inquiry approach to education, they **are** discussing and arguing. Perhaps more pleasing than this change, and the encouragement from teachers who have described a difference in their students or in their teaching approach, is the memory of the many informal discussions I had with students of all ages. "Mr. Philosophy, are the people on television really real?" an eight year old would ask me as I was hurrying to a class (calling me by a name invented by the students). And I could forget about being on time for that class, as other children gathered around in the playground under the Ecuadorian sun, to discuss metaphysics. Or perhaps it would be a high school student in the library, pestering me as I tried in vain to prepare a class. "Why is there a problem with saying all truth is relative?" And soon I would have to hush the increasing volume, as more students and a few teachers joined in. Thankfully, the librarian never scolded me.

I have no doubt that such a position should be standard in schools and/or school systems throughout the country and around the world. The educational benefits for the community are tremendous. If philosophy has a place in the school (which I believe it does), then there's a place for a philosopher-in-residence to amplify and expand on the work of Philosophy for Children.

NOTES

1. The situation is different in countries like Spain, where philosophy continues to be a traditional part of the high school curriculum. There, the philosophy specialist is the teacher of that course, whose activities are normally limited to such teaching. In Spain for the most part, it is these teachers who are employing the program (at the high school level), rather than teachers in elementary.

2. The philosopher-in-residence may work in a particular school, in the schools of a community, or across various communities that comprise a school district.

3. Most obviously in *The Child and the Curriculum,* 1902, and *The School and Society,* 1915, combined edition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956.

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