

## BOOK REVIEWS

# *Philosophy for Kinder Kids*

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*Philosophy for Kinder Kids Kit*  
Chris de Haan and San MacColl  
School of Philosophy  
University of New South Wales  
Kensington 2033, Australia 1991  
four 20-page booklets, \$9.95

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**N**ew materials for doing philosophy with school children are always welcome, and the more so when they come from places other than the United States. The booklets discussed here come from Australia, one of the many countries in which Philosophy for Children seems to be taking root. Chris de Haan and San MacColl, from the University of New South Wales, offer us the Philosophy for Kinder Kids Kit — a set of four booklets designed to be used by the classroom teacher, together with story books already in existence.

The authors of these materials, like others of us around the world, aim to help children develop, in their sense of themselves and in their thinking, through discussion in a community with their peers. Their goal, and the assumptions which guide the development of materials, would be familiar to, and assented to, by the teachers and professors the world over who work in the Philosophy for Children vineyard:

*Teaching philosophy at school has immense value because it builds self esteem and contributes to the development of independent thinking, good judgment and reasonableness. We are laying the foundations here by learning to give reasons, to formulate questions and to articulate ideas. (Philosophy for Kinder Kids Kit, p.2 in all books.) (Hereafter referred to as PPK kit.)*

The program will be familiar in many aspects to those who are acquainted with the program of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children developed by Matthew Lipman and

his associates. The authors envision children sitting together, learning (or recalling) the story in a shared experience, expressing their interests, raising their questions, and talking about them.

The PPK kit consists of four booklets, each center on a general topic. The topics are: *Being Somebody*, *Making Connections*, *What's Fair*, and *Using Our Brains*. For each topic, four themes are selected for concentration. For example, *Being Somebody* is approached through themes — “What’s My Name?,” “Being Yourself,” “Making Believe,” and “Belonging.” For each topic, three books are specifically suggested which bear importantly on the topic. All three might be used with a class, or one of them, or other books might be chosen. Additional books are listed for each topic, and there is a master list at the end of each booklet. Many of the books are appropriate in more than one context. For example, a book which is central for one topic may be listed among “Other Books” elsewhere.

**Discussion plans** suggest questions considered to be of help in exploring the interests of the children. Some relate specifically to a particular story; others are more general and might be appropriate to any discussion of the topic. These tend to be quite open. There are also **exercises** related to each topic, which tend to call for more structured responses. Further, there are **activities**, a particularly worthwhile part of the program. Young children have need of much physical motion, and of work with concrete materials. The activities generally provide both. There are games in some cases, and in others, projects involving music, paints, and other materials. Exercises and activities tend, furthermore, to suggest various ways in which all the children in a group — even those reluctant to form questions or comments — are given turns. They are asked to give their names, for example, or to tell a favorite food, to name a neighbor in the circle.

Looking over the lists of story books, one notes that most have been published in Australia, and one would guess that the authors are Australian. (The remaining books bear British publication

data; however, some of the authors are American.) In a recent issue of *Analytic Teaching* (Vol. 12, No. 2, April 1992) Jen Glasser of the Victoria Association of Philosophy for Children spoke of the strong interest among members in finding literature with Australian settings, and avoiding American backgrounds. These books seem to suggest just such a criterion in choice of materials. This would make them especially suitable for Australian schools, though, of course, it might tend to limit the uses to which they could be put in others countries — in the United States, in particular. The program, however, is not necessarily tied to just one set of books. The approach would be adaptable to other stories. Any teacher or librarian well acquainted with books available locally would probably be able to suggest plenty of substitutes for the stories listed in the kit.

The authors mention, in the introductory material, their aim of using Australian stories for teaching philosophy to children. They also comment that the books are likely to be familiar to children already, or to become so easily. It will not be necessary, they point out, to assume ability to read. This last hardly seems a serious consideration. We adults, heavily schooled, accustomed to dependence on print for wide areas of our knowledge, tend to overemphasize the importance of reading for young children. Of course it is vital to their future development that they learn to read. But we ought not assume that until they do, they are without means of learning. Young children, after all, have been learning widely, eagerly, for all of the four or five years before they enter school. They have been learning by hearing (as well, of course, as through their other senses). They are, in fact, probably **more** likely to remember what they hear than what they read, at such a young age. With that in mind, one might consider use of unfamiliar materials as well as of known stories, and especially of those that might stretch the children's understanding and imagination.

As has previously been mentioned, along with stories, a variety of ways are suggested for their use. Generally there are questions about the stories especially recommended, and in addition what are titled discussion plans, exercises, and activities. The way in which these are presented may well suggest a self-contained program, which need only be opened and used. The general introduction "Philosophy for Kinder Kids" does say:

*This kit is intended for use by kinder teachers who have experience in, or a commitment to, teaching philosophy in schools. It is designed to*

*be used in a classroom community of inquiry and it assumes that the teacher has some background in philosophy. (PKK kit, all booklets, p.1)*

That assumption is nowhere repeated or spelled out. The teacher without any philosophical background, and without any experience in the ways in which a community of inquiry can work, may well find use of these materials a frustrating experience.

The discussion plans in particular present a problem. They are presented as a program, three or four questions to a story. In the introduction, however — a general introduction included in each of the four booklets — there is emphasis on having children raise the issues and develop the agenda of the class:

*After the reading, the children raise questions. It is **their** questions which focus the class procedure.*

This point is reiterated:

*The children are asked what interests them, or puzzles them, or what questions they have. (PKK kit, all books, p.3)*

The teacher who concentrates on the materials rather than the introduction, who has no preparation other than that given in the materials themselves (a definite possibility), may plunge in with the discussion questions supplied, reducing greatly the children's participation in developing the agenda. Certainly the teacher may sometimes achieve a genuine group discussion in pursuit of clarification of an issue which arises from children's questions. But one would wish to see some more emphasis on adequate preparation of teachers who are to be introducing philosophical discussion to young children.

In sum, The Philosophy for Kinder Kids Kit offers a useful suggestive approach for use with young children. Existing children's story books are used, but the program does not merely suggest talking about stories. There is given a clear idea of worthwhile topics to develop. The activities seem worthwhile in themselves, and in stimulating teachers to think of other questions and activities. Teacher preparation is a problem that should be considered. In particular, there's a need to stress openness to give children opportunities to set the direction of the discussions.

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Manuscripts should be prepared using the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Third Edition*, as it is a simple and straightforward approach which will accommodate both international contributors and contributors from different disciplines.

All citations should be placed within the text in parentheses. For example: (Jones, 1990) for the recognition of an idea or (Jones, p. 23, 1990) for a direct quote. References should be cited both in the text and in the reference list and ordered alphabetically by the authors' surnames.

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## Mission Statement

*Analytic Teaching* from its first issue, set out a broad agenda within the context of Philosophy for Children. This tradition continues. Areas of interest to readers and contributors included Philosophy for Children teachers and teacher trainers but also included those interested in the role of narrative in teaching and learning, liberation pedagogy, Vygotskian psychology, and cognitive science, among other areas. The broad agenda might be defined as reflective teaching and community inquiry. These two areas will continue to be the mainstay of contributions to *Analytic Teaching*.

The journal, shaped by the interests and talents of its readers and contributors, will build on these areas. The editors see the journal as having a social as well as an educational agenda. We will be publishing articles, classroom dialogues, research reports, stories, reviews, and essays. *Analytic Teaching* will explore the role of various disciplines and subdisciplines in articulating a broad agenda. Such areas as history of childhood, the literature of childhood (including fiction, poetry, memoirs and film), history of philosophy, social and cultural issues, the works of particular philosophers, cognitive psychologists, and the history and philosophy of education will be integrated within the agenda of the journal.

## What to submit

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