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BOOK REVIEWS

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Teaching Philosophy with Picture Books

Teaching Philosophy with Picture Books
Karin Murris
London: Infonet Publications Ltd., 1992
    67-69 Chancery Lane
    London WC2A 1AF

In *Teaching Philosophy with Picture Books*, Karin Murris brings us an attractive addition to the literature regarding doing philosophy with children. As the title indicates, Murris suggests ways of using existing books, already in the schools and popular with children, to foster philosophical discussion.

This work is the outgrowth of Murris' experiences with children. She has, she says, used the picture books successfully with "...whole, mixed-ability classes" of children from five to eleven years of age. "Many children involved have emotional and behavioral problems and/or learning difficulties ... The age-difference in some classes was two or three years." (Teaching Philosophy, How to Use the Manual, p. 2) That is, she worked in the school as she found it, not with any specially selected groups. The books were found to be suitable for varying age levels.

In addition to the picture books, Murris advises using videos of the books. For all but one of the books which she describes, these are available from a single firm. Videos and their use will be discussed after a description of the materials.

Teaching Philosophy with Picture Books is a group of 27 booklets, each individually stapled, all hole-punched for inclusion in a large binder. There is a Table of Contents providing an index of all the booklets and an index as well of the topics — from "Afraid" to "Zoo" — relevant to specific stories. This last makes it possible to find easily the particular story that is relevant to a given topic which may seem useful to the teacher or of especial interest to the children.

The "Introduction" booklet discusses the program in general —its purposes and values, reasons for particular features, philosophy's place in children's education. Some lengthy quotations from children talking about several topics, including the program itself, can help to acquaint teachers with the kind of discussion that may be expected (or at least hoped for) and with the role of the teacher-facilitator. "How to Use the Manual" deals more specifically with the workings of the program, including such topics as questioning and follow-up work, as well as classroom organization and discipline. The two booklets indicate ways in which the program realizes goals of the National Curriculum of Great Britain. There is lengthy discussion of ways in which the program is related to and of value for specific aspects of the curriculum. These booklets will be of particular interest to teachers of that curriculum.

Then there are the 21 booklets, one for each story, which discuss the materials for teaching. In each, the story is summarized, and information given about both book and related video. If there are differences between book and

video, that is pointed out. There are several pages of Questions which may be relevant to topics suggested by the books; as many as 10 topics are listed for a given book. The interests expressed by the children are always to be the start and the basis of the discussion; they are primary. Questions are offered to help teachers follow up the initial discussion, and to suggest how children may be led into deeper consideration of topics which they themselves have first focussed upon. Finally, there are a number of related activities suggesting ways in which children may express themselves in art, music, drama, writing and games, after their discussion. A final supplementary booklet provides 20 pages of worksheets, which may be duplicated for use by children individually at home or in school, and later discussed in the group.

The use of booklets should, it would seem, be quite handy, to keep related materials together, and separate from the rest. It would probably be helpful, however, if there were a single numbering for the sake of reference, rather than individual numbering of each of the booklets.

Discussion of the use of picture books and videos will be of interest to those — many, surely, in the case of subscribers to this journal — who are familiar with the Philosophy for Children materials of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC). IAPC materials consist of novels, and except for the covers there are no pictures.

Murris indicates that she was familiar with other materials available for doing philosophy with children but says she considered them to be "...unsuitable for me as a teacher, and for those children in particular" (Teaching Philosophy, Preface, P. 1). The picture books are already available in the schools. Their brevity makes it possible for each to be read in a short time. Furthermore, an entire story is read at once. If children are often absent, or transferred among schools, or taken away for special activities, this is an obvious advantage.

The books chosen have, Murris points out, differing styles of writing and of illustration. Pictures are of high quality and tend to stimulate (not to discourage) thought. We, the viewers, give meaning to pictures as we do to words, and to stories (Teaching Philosophy, Introduction, p. 13).

Murris uses videos related to these specific books. They present the stories in a brief time, and their large size makes it possible for a whole group to watch at once, and to examine pictures in detail. It may well be less expensive for a school to rent the video than to buy numerous

copies of the books. The videos Murris uses come from a firm, Weston Woods, which though headquartered in the the United States, has offices in a number of other countries. Some of the videos are available in languages other than English, and some have been captioned for the hearing impaired.

The use of videos has other values, in Murris' view. They can help to make children more thoughtful and critical in their viewing of the omnipresent television. A story-book video is not simply soaked up in mindless viewing, but is examined, questioned, and discussed. In addition to the words of the story, children experience visual images, sound, and motion.

In order to indicate the adaptability which the author finds in these stories, and the age range for which they are appropriate, it is interesting to compare her treatment of one of the books with that suggested for its use with young children. The book is *Tikki Tikki Tembo*, a folk tale retold by Arlene Mosel. Linda Oho and Thomas Jackson, in Hawaii, include it among materials suggested for preparing young children to use the IAPC novels. (*Elfie Start Up Kit for Grades K and 1*, unpub. ms.) The story is to be used to help children understand and practise what questions are, and how to answer them with reasons.

When Murris uses *Tikki Tikki Tembo* with her much wider age range among children, she sees many possible areas for discussion: in addition to the story line, she suggests possible questions about names, brothers, single parents, obeying mothers. Even the problem of universals may be approached, in comparing and contrasting common and proper nouns. Exercises include writing, drawing, and games. Evidently this delightful story is suitable for use with children of many ages.

Finally, some general comparisons may be made with the familiar Philosophy for Children programs of the IAPC. In both cases, the program is intended to center on expressed interests of children. Following experience together with a fictional story, the children articulate their comments and questions. The teacher, as co-inquirer and guide, tries to help them follow up their initial questions, to pursue them in philosophical discussion. The number of questions that Murris has taken from manuals of the Philosophy for Children program is an indication of their commonality. Both programs aim to help children develop skills in asking questions, giving reasons, and making distinctions. Working with others in a group should help them both to participate and to

listen, and the experience should develop their capacities to attend to other points of view, and to change their own in response when some other carries conviction. Development of a thoughtful questioning attitude is central to both programs.

Advantages claimed for story books and videos have been mentioned. The Philosophy for Children program, by contrast, has a consecutive development which can help to involve children in the philosophical process. This is less episodic, more a connected experience. Each novel focuses on some areas but includes consideration of many others. If used appropriately, many skills will be introduced, practiced, expanded, reinforced, in an orderly fashion. Continuation of the Philosophy program over a number of years permits variation of story and of central theme, while fostering growth of skills and of community.

One particular value does seem to be built into the IAPC program: that is, that the novels themselves model the community of inquiry which we hope to develop in the classroom. Through reading and living with the novels, children in the schools become acquainted with children in the novels who are always engaged in thoughtful inquiring interaction with one another and with their environment.

One question should be raised: for what teachers is such a program suitable? Murris herself has had considerable experience with both children's literature and philosophy. The description presented in this book is of the program which she herself has worked out with children's classes. Preparation of such a volume, however, evidently supposes its use by others. One wonders whether Murris sees the average classroom teacher using it. She has mentioned (in a personal letter) doing teacher training. It would be most interesting, and useful for possible consideration of her program, to hear from her about the training she finds appropriate.

A last word should go to the children. One of Murris's students recommends philosophy and says (whether threat or promise one can only wonder) that if children had philosophy all the time, "...they would either get bored or want to become philosophers ..." (Teaching Philosophy, Introduction, P. 21). We can only hope to be the kind of guides who will lead children not to boredom, but to philosophy.

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How to submit

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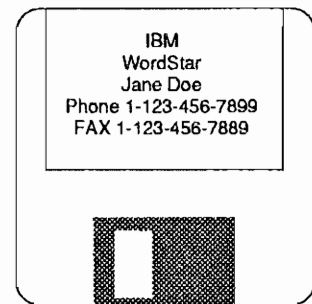
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Notes on Style

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.

For detailed information on APA Style refer to *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Third Edition.*

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, Vygotkian 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. *Analtictic 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

The editors are looking for articles of almost any length which address the areas or audiences outlined under the broad umbrella of the mission statement. "Articles" include the following: reports on program implementation, theoretical/thought pieces, classroom dialogues, essays, original poems relating to children or written by children on philosophical topics, and book reviews. The style of the writing we are looking for might be called "informal" academic, that is, scholarly but as much as possible, jargon free — addressing the reader as a co-learner and working toward a community of scholars within the confines of a journal. *Analytic Teaching* has a readership at all levels of public and private education scattered throughout the world. Contributors should keep this audience and the mission statement in mind as they consider which pieces to submit. The journal, as a rule, accepts only original articles not previously published.

NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

Call for Papers

The purpose of NAACI is to build and promote Philosophy For Children and Community of Inquiry within North America. Of special concern are ways of increasing and enhancing teacher training (teacher formation), engaging new Ph.D.s in teacher education and program development, and maintaining and increasing the quality of existing programs.

The first meeting of NAACI will be on **April 15-16, 1994** at the **University of Texas at Austin**. Papers for the conference should focus on Community of Inquiry and Philosophy for Children. Papers on related topics will be considered.

Paper abstracts should be submitted to me by **Dec. 15, 1993**. Final papers should be submitted by **March 1, 1994**. Selected papers will appear in Analytic Teaching in 1994-95. Abstracts and papers should be submitted to:

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The founding members of NAACI include: Becky Browning, Mary Ann Clark, David Kennedy, Eugenio Echeverria, Teresa de la Garza, Phil Guin, Tony Johnson, Marie-France Daniel, Matthew Lipman, Richard Morehouse, Linda Nowell, Estrella Piastro, Michael Pritchard, Ronald Reed, and Ann Margaret Sharp.