

Working with the Graduate Students at the I.A.P.C.

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During the past few years, I have had the opportunity to spend considerable time with the graduate students at the IAPC at Montclair State University. The work has been both stimulating and satisfying. Students have come from several countries in addition to the United States. Their backgrounds in philosophy have varied: some have had an extensive background, having majored in philosophy at some undergraduate institution; others with different major interests as undergraduates have taken from many to almost no previous philosophy courses, and have read much or little from the literature. Some have come directly after completing undergraduate work, while others have had varying amounts and kinds of working experience. All have shared a strong interest in and devotion to philosophy for children.

I was involved with the students in several aspects of their graduate work. Within the Institute, the students took seminars focusing on several of the novels. Beyond the Institute they were required to take a number of graduate courses, those required for the master of Education degree by Montclair. (Earlier, students worked for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree, which also required a number of courses outside IAPC, but different ones.) Outside the university, students did some practise teaching of philosophy for children at near-by schools. May part in the program was to participate in seminars and work with students on their many papers, to supervise practice teaching, and to hold weekly meetings with the students. It is those meetings about which I write here. Description of and comment on the kinds of work undertaken in the weekly graduate students' meetings at IAPC may be of interest to others in a similar situation.

CONDUCTING CHILDREN'S CLASSES

A major topic for graduate students who were themselves working with children was consideration of various ways in which classes may be conducted. Listed here are those issues taken up in the seminar, with indication of some possible ways of handling them.

(i) Rules for the P4C class:

what rules are appropriate for facilitator, and for children; how rules may be decided-by leader, by children, by class teacher; how, and how often, rules should be reviewed; how rules may be enforced.

(ii) Reading the novel:

who whom it should be read-whether by all children in turn, by readers designated by leader, by role playing, by choice of previous reader, by a few volunteers; length of reading-a sentence each, a paragraph each, 5 10 10 lines per reader; for younger children, whether section should be read by teacher first and then by children, or should teacher read most, or all;

(iii) Raising of issues:

whether all questions/comments suggested by class should be listed before discussion, or each question talked over briefly as it is offered, or first question discussed as thoroughly as group wishes before another is stated; whether all questions if written first, should be compared, grouped; how much time is enough/not enough/too much for formulating issues; whether children should be paired or grouped to formulate issues.

(iv) Choosing among issues:

whether best done by voting, by taking up in order, as they happen to have been written down, by choice of leader, by drawing a number from a hat, by choice of some non-questioner or someone who rarely speaks; if questions have been grouped, should largest group be taken, or smallest; whether it's advisable to use one set pattern, or to seek variety.

(v) Classroom management:

dealing with the irrepressible anecdote-teller; preventing/discouraging negative comments; avoiding competitiveness; dealing with calling out, hand-waving, monopolizing floor encouraging the ponderer, the slow-speaker.

(vi) Facilitating the discussion:

who this might be-advantages and problems of student teacher, member or members of class, letting each speaker call on successor; functions of facilitator focusing discussion, recognizing speakers, relating comments made by children to each other, asking follow-up questions (seeking clarification, assumptions, consequences, reasons); extent to which detailed advance planning is possible or advisable;

(vii) Use of manual:

graduate students had access to a useful article by Matthew Lipman discussing the kinds of exercises and discussion plans considerations that went into their composition, purposes for which various kinds were developed. (Lipman, unpublished article)

(viii) Possible uses of written work: making pictures, keeping journals, doing exercises, answering questions put by teacher.

(ix) Increasing children's responsibility for their learning.

using student leaders; having children help to keep order; calling on each other; reminding of rules; choice of discussion topics; evaluation of class.

(x) Concluding the class:

discussing any problem felt by leader or by children; letting each person comment on what was interesting/funny/new etc.; evaluating class-by voting, by giving thumbs up or down signal, writing briefly in journal on some specific question related to day's discussion.

REPORTING TO THE GROUP

Near the end of teach term (both fall and spring) I scheduled time for each student teacher to report to the group on his/her experiences. I had tried informally opening the floor for students to report triumphs, concerns, successes, problems, etc. That didn't prove very successful, rarely eliciting comments unless someone had a significant problem. The assignment of half to three quarters of a hour for a formal report was much more successful. Students had their journals (discussed below-Miscellaneous #4) as well as their memories to rely on. Having an assigned time gave each persona specific responsibility.

What we wanted to hear was a brief account of the student teacher's experiences. This included procedures tried, tactics developed, problems encountered, successes achieved. Relations with the regular classroom teacher and descriptions of the class or of particular problems within it might be included. The students' ideas about other ways that things might be done in future would be relevant. There was no set pattern, no list of topics for which one was responsible. Just a report, a reflection on the classroom teaching experience, was called for. This kind of oral report did not, I felt, impose an additional burden on the hard-working graduate students.

This kind of reporting turned out to be a valuable procedure. By the end of a term the graduate students were well enough acquainted with each other not to have any hesitation about bringing forward their concerns

when reporting. When listening, they proved interested and appreciative. The tendency was for some particular problem to become central, in a given session. The student teacher voiced a significant concern, and the group discussed it: asked questions, compared experiences, offered suggestions. The whole reporting process was, I felt, most valuable for all of us.

LOGIC

Logic played a significant part in the program for graduate students at the I.A.P.C. About half of our time during the first semester was spent in going over and somewhat extending the areas of logic included in *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. This seemed to me to be necessary because to the classroom teachers with whom I had worked for many years, logic presented such a difficulty. It was, in almost every case, new, strange and difficult to them. They felt little confidence that they could deal with it comfortably with their students, and wanted considerable assistance in mastering it.

The graduate students at I.A.P.C. might well, it could be assumed be called upon to work as teacher-educators, helping classroom teachers prepare to use philosophy in the classroom. They could be expected to explain, to extend, to instill confidence in the teachers with whom they worked. And-my second reason for giving such emphasis to the topic-the graduate students themselves were often weak in that area. some had had almost no previous work in philosophy, and even of those who had, the logic background in some cases was slight.

Accordingly all the topics in logic introduced in *Harry...* seemed to call for inclusion in the graduate students' class: conversion, translation, standardization, relations among the four standard forms, contradiction, universal affirmative syllogisms, hypothetical syllogisms. Relations-symmetry and transitivity-are also discussed in the novel. Diagramming is touched on. Teachers will feel more confident in dealing with all such topics if they are prepared ahead of time.

Some discussion of induction seemed useful, although it is not a prominent topic, in the novel or in the manual. In *Pixie*, the issue of relations appears prominently.

There are several articles that can be helpful to the students. In *Studies in Philosophy for Children: Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, Laurance J. Splitter has an inclusive article on the logic in *Harry...* There are also two articles by Clive Lindop, one on relations, the other exploring the identity (or lack of same) between the various substitutes for "all" suggested in Chapter 2 of *Harry...* Splitter has an article on relations in the recent publication *Studies in Philosophy for Children: Pixie*. Bibliographic information is given at the conclusion of this article.

EVALUATION

Evaluation-of ourselves, or others, of the program-was addressed in a variety of ways, and at many times. Reflection on one's own practise is after all a characteristic of critical thinking.

The Philosophy for Children program has been and continues to be evaluated through the use of tests given to children. One is the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills. This test is typically given at the beginning and at the end of the school year, or observe the development over the course of time in children's abilities to deal with questions of formal and informal logic. When given to groups working with Philosophy for Children and to match control groups not using the program, it can serve as a measure of the effectiveness of the program itself, in developing reasoning skills. There are a number of other tests which can indicate how children deal with questions calling for flexibility and imagination: "What Can You Use It For?", "How Many Reasons?", "What Could It Be?" Graduate students examined all of these tests. their uses were considered. Some questions from each of them were tried and the answers discussed.

Another kind of evaluation of the P4C program was done informally in discussion of Mendham. At the start of our year, the sessions at Mendham were taken as examples, to be followed, revised, even avoided. Students reflected on and discussed the ways in which different approaches, different techniques, tended to further or to impede the satisfactory movement of the sessions. At the end of the school year, graduate students were given an opportunity to comment on the program they had been following, again in a most informal fashion. I tried to provide an opportunity for anonymous comment.

Evaluation of the graduate students themselves as teachers was done both by me and by the students themselves. My evaluation was mostly private and individual. I visited classrooms being taught by the graduate students at several times through the year. During those visits, I took notes on what was going on. Afterwards I discussed the class with the student teacher, asking for his/her reactions as well as giving my own. subsequently I wrote a detailed letter about what I had observed, what I found effective, what problems I saw, what suggestions I had to make. These were definitely individual appraisals: I had no specific standard of exactly what the student teacher should be doing, no list of requirements, but considered each class in light of the children's age, their previous P4C experience, and the experience of the leader. During my first year as supervisor of student teaching, I had to assign grades formally for recording by the college. I used my notes and observation letters together with the college definitions of what grades meant to assign the grades.

As to graduate student self-evaluation, what the students thought to themselves was of course a personal matter. However what the students told us about their classes with children gave considerable indication of what they thought about their own teaching. The reports from student-teachers is taken up elsewhere in this paper.

Evaluation of children in the P4C class, by either student-teacher or regular classroom teacher, using any kind of traditional formal scale, is discouraged. (See Silver, 1988). It is of course inescapable that teachers (student or not) will be aware of the ways in which children respond and in *which* their behavior changes over the course of time. This was a topic of discussion and came up in the accounts graduate students gave of their classes.

Evaluation by the children of their own P4C classes and of their functioning as a group is a more conscious and serious matter. It is after all a part of making children more responsible for their own thinking, to have them consider how they have thought and worked. Ways in which this might be done were suggested in the seminar.

Evaluation by the cooperating classroom teacher of the student-teacher and of the class was a subject that probably should have been discussed more than it was. the cooperating teachers do of course have their own opinions and reactions to what goes on in philosophy discussions of groups which they normally teach. Graduate students shared with us comments made by the classroom teachers. It would, however, seem to me desirable to take this matter up more explicitly and to consider whether, and how, the views of classroom teachers might be elicited.

Some of the members of the seminar will no doubt go on to train classroom teachers. A topic which probably should have been tackled but unfortunately was not is the evaluation of regular classroom teachers as teachers of philosophy to children. A couple of paper-and-pencil instruments have been developed for this purpose, which purport to be assessments of children's behavior but are supposed to be used to evaluate teachers' behavior. I object to these tests as dishonest in pretending to be what they are not, and not making clear what they really are. In addition to these, there are various lists of the appropriate behaviors which should be observed in the P4C classrooms. As I have said, I did not present those for consideration by the graduate students; it would have been a worthwhile addition.

Two of the manuals, those for Harry Stottlemeier's *Discovery* (Lipman et.al., 1979) and for *Pixie* (Lipman et.al., 1982) include suggestions for self-evaluation by the classroom teacher. For Harry... there are questions for teachers to ask themselves following work with the first thirteen chapters, becoming more general in the last two and ending there. For the *Pixie* manual there are questions for self-evaluation for each chapter. Most of the questions in both manuals, draw attention to the method of guiding the class, though there are some that direct attention to the contents of the chapter. None of the others manuals includes such self-evaluations.

For the *Pixie* manual (Lipman et.al., 1982), in addition to the questions there are seven pages at the end of each chapter for recording such things as excerpts of classroom dialogue, exercises used, related books, music and other materials and activities, and appraisals of students. The topics suggested in these pages may well serve as reminders to teachers of how to thin about the philosophy classes, though I do not believe that classroom teachers would actually write in them extensively. For student-teachers they may well be suggestive. One of the graduate students said she herself was using them as a guide to review and record her classes.

MISCELLANEOUS

Finally there is the group of topics I include under this heading, which tended to come up in response to some problem rather than being planned. Some were considered with one class but not with another. Some I

think should be covered in a seminar like the one being discussed here, but they were not.

Relations with the cooperating school: An important area which was, I felt, never satisfactorily dealt with was the issue of relations between the graduate students and the Institute on the one hand, and the school in which they did their practise teaching on the other. One year, we felt that cooperating teachers were inadequately informed of what the graduate students were trying to do, and we planned a meeting at mid-year to improve communication. Although it had been planned ahead and prepared, we were disappointed in the meeting. Few teachers came, and those mostly not the ones directly concerned. One teacher seemed to think this was an opportunity for complaint and recrimination. We were all disappointed. We did, however, feel the idea was a good one, but when I tried to arrange one for the beginning of the next year, the principal said she saw no reason for it. It still seems to me a good idea.

Cooperating teachers differed in their relations with the P4C class. Some sat in the group, participated occasionally, gave some **assistance when the class** had been divided into **smaller** groups for some activity. They occasionally helped with discipline but did not interfere. They were, I think, the teachers whom the graduate students most appreciated.

Another group removed themselves from the P4C classes, sometimes physically but at least in spirit. They might observe, and talk with the student teacher later, but during class they sat apart from the group and neither participated nor interfered. Quite troublesome were those who undertook some distracting activity, coming and going with supplies or even talking with another person.

A difficult group to deal with was made up of teachers who wanted to continue to manage the class while philosophy was going on. they reprimanded students, imposed their own standards, supervised the children generally. The graduate students found them difficult to deal with, and there were some unpleasant confrontations. Problems might be avoided if classroom procedures had been discussed and agreed upon in advance of the classes.

One of the graduate students suggested that cooperating teachers might be invited to attend a session at the Institute, a meeting of the seminar in which a group was working on one of the novels. This was never tried, but it sounds to me like an excellent idea.

Meeting school requirements: Schools may need to be better prepared for P4C graduate students, but also the students may need to be better prepared for the schools. Some suggestions might well be given to help ready students for meeting requirements of schools, since some of them are likely to be regular classroom teachers following their graduate work. Such things as preparation of lesson plans, helping principals understand the objectives of P4C classes so they could be appropriately evaluated, leaving worthwhile suggestions for substitutes so that they were not left to founder around trying to figure out what to do during philosophy times-those are topics which could properly be dealt with to some extent in the graduate seminar.

Journals: Before the graduate students started their practise teaching, we talked about keeping a journal of the experience, and considered what should be included. These were such things as what was attempted in each class, what questions were raised, what successes and what problems there were, what (if anything) the classroom teacher thought of the day's activities, and how the student-teacher her/himself thought about the class. The resulting accounts differed widely, of course, from a bare outline of the course of the lesson and how well it had worked, to a full description of the student-teacher's mood, the weather, the classroom atmosphere, how she/he felt during and after the class. Such journals, whether full or bare outlines, can be of value out the student as a record, and especially as a reminder in preparing the report to the seminar. It turned out to be of help also for students in preparing to use their teaching experience as a source for papers in education courses outside the Institute program.

Observations: Leading a P4C group oneself is the best, most complete immersion in the process, but observation can be a valuable experience as well. There are various kinds of observation which are possible and, I think, worthwhile. Graduate students can observe each other's classes with interest: they are all, after all, beginning the process. Soon enough in the term, they know each other well enough to feel quite comfortable about the process.

Observing regular classroom teachers in the schools is desirable, as long as the school and the teachers are comfortable about it. Graduate students should spend some time in their own classrooms to become acquainted with the students, and they can find value and enjoyment for themselves, as well as providing an extra pair of

hands for the teacher, if they spend a bit of time in the class in addition to their regular teaching periods. To gain more understanding of classroom managerial techniques, students might make a point of observing regular classroom teachers who are considered to be particularly effective. I realize fully that the graduate students are busy with all kinds of things other than their practise teaching, but whatever observations they can manage to fit in are surely well worthwhile.

Finally, for the purpose especially of observing the children in their classes, as well as observing the teaching, it is useful for the supervisor to teach the student-teacher's class, at least once. this was something which was not, unfortunately, sufficiently planned for, but when tried the graduate students found the opportunity to watch their own students very enlightening.

Awareness sessions: Patterns for awareness sessions was a welcome topic. Graduate students, especially those from foreign countries, anticipated (with some anxiety) having to introduce the P4C program to groups unacquainted with it. They found it worthwhile to hear about, to ask questions about, to comment on, a variety of patterns that might be used for that purpose.

Games and other activities: Besides the formal reporting on their classroom experiences, student-teachers shared among themselves any games that they had become aware of. Those who had taught P4C before coming to Montclair were called on now and then to offer accounts of classes. I tried to be aware of any activities that might be appropriate. We tried them out in the seminar. They were available for everyone.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I repeat what I said to start: I had the opportunity to lead such a seminar for only a few years. I know I learned a great deal from the experience. I offer this account of the things we did, and some we didn't but should have, in hopes that it may be useful to others directing similar sessions.

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