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# CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION	1
I. THINKING AND REASONING	4
1. The Philosophy For Young Thinkers Curriculum	6
2. Teaching Philosophical Concepts	13
3. Teaching Students How To Think	18
II. PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM-SOLVING	25
4. The Method of Problem-Solving	26
5. The Problem-Solving Classroom	32
III. INTRODUCTION TO STUDENT ACTIVITY BOOKS	40
6. MG-1: Human Configurations	41
7. MG-2: Beat Him When He Sneezes	51
8. MG-3: Wrong-Think/Non-Think	59

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## PART ONE

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# THINKING AND REASONING

### Overview:

Contemporary philosophy has increasingly become the province of academic professionals, each of whom strives to become a specialist in some single area or type of philosophy. The result has been devastating for philosophy. These specialists usually meet annually in their respective associations, speak to each other in a highly technical vocabulary, and analyze problems which are of interest only to their narrow group of associates.

Any person who speaks of the ancient and universal concerns of the meaning of life and death, or the possibility of faith, hope, and love in a vocabulary which is non-technical is suspected, by these professionals, of being a popularizer at best and a tender-hearted pulpit-philosopher at worst.

With such a mood dominating the philosophical world, it is little wonder students have avoided taking philosophy courses at the university level or selecting philosophy as their college major. As the number of graduate students in philosophy continues to decline, we must reevaluate our position and look for ways of engaging students in philosophical thinking.

Many philosophers, upon analysis, would deny that the **Philosophy For Young Thinkers Curriculum** is actually philosophy. After ten years of development, writing, and speaking to professional philosophical groups and educational groups, in 1988 we did receive the positive comments from philosophers about our efforts. Some still maintain that philosophy is an orderly and systematic exposition of what can be known and demonstrated. They say that philosophy must be analytical, rational, and offer evidence which has the force to compel universal assent.

Ours is a pre-college philosophy curriculum. We should not suppose that all philosophy takes place on a college campus. We are asking public school teachers and students to become involved in the philosophical exploration of certain feelings and attitudes in order to form a foundation upon which a more mature philosophy can be constructed.

C.P. Snow reminds us that the perspective of the passionately-minded participant is the starting point of philosophy. Our role as teachers is to create learning activities that will provide our students the opportunity to explore major philosophical ideas and theories. Through this exploration students will gain perspective as they focus their interests and passions on the important issues and problems besetting our society. They will also begin to master a method that will give organization and consistency to their understandings. This will enable students to participate more fully in the future solutions to these now urgent problems.

The culture which secular Man has created with his promise of liberating humans from hunger, pain, and the burden of lifelong labor, with its more effective administration of justice, depends largely upon the predominance of pragmatic problem-solving and abstract modes of thought and action. The activities in this curriculum are designed to provide students with a method for solving human problems as well as engaging their passions.

Our search for wisdom and understanding is not only limited to methodology. We are concerned with our students understanding the human struggle for freedom from fear, egoism, hatred, compulsion, and despair. More than mastering a taxonomy or a method, students should be given the opportunity to reflect upon the future of human life, its quality and possibilities. A major purpose of our program is the removal of barriers to a vivid and full life.

Although philosophy is an important cultural discipline, we need to be reminded that human life and experience cannot be summarized or captured in a system of abstractions and hypotheses. Human beings are always more than they know and know more than they can demonstrate.

Part One of this manual will provide an overview of the **Philosophy For Young Thinkers Curriculum**. It gives a direction and a focus by providing a rationale for its use. Part One also provides background for teaching concepts and developing the rudiments of thinking/reasoning skills with our students. The plan is sound. It is classroom tested. It is also consistent with more mature, philosophical methods.

We have reason to believe this program is foundational. It is not an end unto itself nor is it a prescription for all the ills of our society and world. Rather, it is one approach to a more adequate humanities education for our students. Its effectiveness depends on the academic commitments and creative adaptations of this program to the ongoing curriculum by classroom teachers. Hopefully, it will provide an alternative to what has been, heretofore, a nonsystematic, game-like, and unorganized curriculum for gifted students.

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## CHAPTER ONE

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# THE PHILOSOPHY FOR YOUNG THINKERS CURRICULUM

### Overview:

Traditionally, the backbone of curricular innovation for the gifted has been the teaching of thinking skills and their application in the curriculum through creative problem-solving exercises. While the efforts of teachers and gifted specialists in this area have been extremely important, there is a serious concern that many teachers and curricular developers share, and that is the omission of any sense of coordination of skills toward a common objective.

The purpose of skill development is an important aspect of all teaching. Students, especially the gifted, need a sense of purpose in their schooling. Therefore, skill teaching should be effectively integrated into the content and subject matter of the ongoing classroom. It should be carefully structured so that the relationship of skills which enhance thinking and reasoning to subject related skills and research is clearly apparent.

H.M. Hartoonian<sup>1</sup> has produced a Reasoning Skills Network for the social studies curriculum which makes this application. This network of reasoning skill components has much promise as a model for other curricular areas as it directs sequential skills teaching and learning processes. Hartoonian's **network** provides the process of reasoning a sense of direction and a sequential pattern which, when learned, gives to the student needed practice in the component skills leading to more mature and formal types of thinking. His analysis of the components of reasoning has greatly influenced our efforts in structuring a skills continuum involving the functions of thinking, research, creativity, and conceptual development.

An interesting report<sup>2</sup> from the Educational Commission of the States (ECS)—a nonprofit, nationwide compact formed in 1966—concludes that the “basics” of tomorrow are the skills considered to be of a high level today. The question before us now is what is being done in our schools to develop these higher level skills in our students? Although the report is lengthy, one interesting program has emerged: the College Board has targeted the development of reasoning skills as one of the six major areas to emphasize in keeping up with the accelerating change in the use of high technology that is today affecting business and industry.

Considering this need, we too must give emphasis to the idea that as Silicon Valley continues to develop so-called “intelligent” machines, we must also produce **more than** non-thinking students in our schools. Indeed, intelligent machines will require intelligent people to use them. It was V. A. Mitscherlich who pointed out more than fifteen years ago that our schools have, at least, three important tasks:

- (1) To teach students how to think—cognitive education;
- (2) To teach students how to feel— affective education; and
- (3) To teach students about life—social education<sup>3</sup>.

Of course, we have been reminded that one of the current problems in education is that many of our teachers have fallen into “the memorization trap,” as if an over abundance of factual information, so digested, is what is needed to earn a living in today's world. Although vocational education is a necessary ingredient in our schools, in the larger scheme of human living, it is trivial. It is a sad fact we tend to live and educate by transitory values and transmit these to our children. It is no wonder their world view is often fragmented and lacks the perspective needed for living in a global universe. Herber W. Schneider says a well-educated person is never a finished product and one continues throughout life to absorb the cultural resources, natural opportunities, and new experiences which stimulate reflective thinking. Schneider reminds us that education is not merely a storage of knowledge but an ability to intelligently use this knowledge as well.