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Primary School Philosophy of Nature Curriculum: A Proposal for an APA Grant-Funded Project

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Project Purpose and Benefits for the Profession

Purpose. The purpose of the proposed project is to re-write the IAPC curriculum titles *Kio and Gus* and *Wondering at the World* as a comprehensive philosophy of nature program for primary school children.

Rationale. The importance of environmental education for children of all ages has never been more widely recognized. Most children and teachers are aware of environmental crises such as global warming and species endangerment, and perhaps of instances of local environmental degradation. However, most children and teachers study nature only through the discipline of science, and occasionally through social studies, when environmental crises become political issues. The use of philosophy as a disciplinary approach to pre-college environmental studies is virtually unheard of, in spite of its obvious relevance. For instance, there are many programs for environmental education that give students relevant facts and information and involve them in action projects,¹ but none that engage students in reasoned inquiry into the philosophical presuppositions of such programs. Likewise, programs of environmental education often

¹ See "Specific Techniques for EE in Schools," Environmental Education and Training Partnership Bulletin No. 119 (May 2004), <http://eelink.net/eetap/info119.pdf>, accessed 2/25/08 (funded by U.S. EPA).

induce students to cultivate dispositions of care and responsibility for the environment, but these are typically treated as uncontroversial matters of civic duty or moral obligation, rather than as contestable philosophical concepts. The purpose of the proposed project is to construct a comprehensive philosophy of nature program for primary school children that will:

- Help them learn to recognize and problematize the ethical, aesthetic, political, logical, metaphysical and other philosophical dimensions of environmental science, environmental politics, and of their own experiences with the natural world;
- Familiarize them with perspectives on philosophy of nature from a number of philosophical traditions from around the world; and
- Engage them in rigorous, open-ended philosophical inquiry into questions and issues regarding the natural world and their relationship to it.

The new program will also be designed to fulfill many of the standards of the North American Association for Environmental Education's (NAAEE) recommendations for environmental education materials:²

- 1.2 **Balanced presentation of differing viewpoints and theories:** Where there are differences of opinion or competing scientific explanations, the range of perspectives should be presented in a balanced way.
- 1.3 **Openness to inquiry:** Materials should encourage learners to explore different perspectives and form their own opinions.
- 1.4 **Reflection of diversity:** Different cultures, races, genders, social groups, ages, etc. are included with respect and equity.
- 2.1 **Awareness:** Materials should acknowledge that feelings, experiences and attitudes shape environmental perspectives and issues.
- 2.2 **Focus on concepts:** Rather than presenting a series of facts, materials should use unifying themes and important concepts.
- 2.3 **Concepts in contexts:** Environmental concepts should be set in a context that includes social and economic as well as ecological aspects.
- 3.1 **Applying skills to issues:** Students should learn to arrive at their own conclusions about what needs to be done based on thorough research and study, rather than being taught that a certain course of action is best.
- 3.2 **Critical and creative thinking:** Learners should be challenged to use and improve their critical thinking and creative skills.
- 4.1 **Sense of personal stake and responsibility:** Materials should help learners to examine the possible consequences of their behaviors on the environment and evaluate choices they can make which may help resolve environmental issues.
- 4.2 **Self-efficacy:** Materials should aim to strengthen learners' perception of their ability to influence the outcome of a situation.
- 5.1 **Learner-centered instruction:** When appropriate, learning should be based on learner interest and on the learner's ability to construct knowledge to gain conceptual understanding.
- 5.3 **Connection to learners' everyday lives:** Materials should present information and ideas in a way that is relevant to learners.
- 5.4 **Expanded learning environment:** Students should learn in environments that extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Background.

The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC; est. 1974) publishes philosophy curriculum materials for use in grades P-12, designed to engage students in exploring the philosophical dimensions of their experience, with particular attention to logical, ethical and aesthetic dimensions.³ The curriculum novels depict children puzzling over philosophical issues with friends and family, and in doing

² *Environmental Education Materials: Guidelines for Excellence*, pp. 5-7, 9 and 14 (http://naaee.org/npeee/materials_guidelines/chap1.pdf, accessed 6/08/08).

³ See "Publications Catalogue" at www.montclair.edu/iapc, accessed 6/12/08.

so, representing major positions from the history of philosophy and modeling the skills of philosophical inquiry. The curriculum manuals contain conceptual explanations for teachers as well as thinking exercises, concept discussion plans and other activities that can be used to supplement the students' inquiry. These materials have been translated into over 40 languages and are now used in over 60 countries.

Though it cannot claim to be comprehensive in covering all philosophical concepts, issues and methods of inquiry, the IAPC Curriculum is systematic in two ways: it introduces pre-college students to the major branches of western philosophy, and helps them to develop skills in reasoning, dialogue, language and perception. The first IAPC curriculum title, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, introduces 5th and 6th-grade students to Aristotelian logic, to the concept of inquiry as beginning with questions or problems and ending in reasoned judgments, and to the method of dialogue. Each of the curriculum titles for older grades then represents a particular branch of philosophical inquiry: ethics (*Lisa*), aesthetics (*Suki*), and political philosophy (*Mark*). Curriculum titles for grades below the 5th and 6th introduce children to a variety of philosophical concepts and issues, but focus on sets of philosophical skills: language and analogical thinking (*Pixie*), perception (*Kio & Gus*), and making distinctions and comparisons (*Elfie*).

The IAPC curriculum titles *Kio and Gus* and *Wondering at the World* were published in 1985, and focus on the development of skills of sensory perception, and on paying close attention to the world around you. The novel, *Kio and Gus*, is a story of a girl, Augusta, who is blind, and her friend Kio, who is sighted. As the two explore their environment together, a dialogue ensues between their different perspectives. Most of novel finds the children in a natural environment, observing plants, animals, rivers, stars, etc., and most of their philosophical wondering is directed at nature. The accompanying manual, *Wondering at the World*, provides philosophical exercises for developing perceptual, linguistic and logical skills, and discussion plans for exploring a number of themes in philosophy of nature. However, as they were developed in 1985, these titles do not constitute a systematic or comprehensive program in either environmental ethics or philosophy of nature. The purpose of this proposed project is to make them such, by substantial re-writing.

The brief history behind the proposed project starts in 2001, when Philosophy for Children fellows at the academic institute GrupIREF (Group for innovation and research in the teaching of philosophy; www.grupiref.org) in Catalonia, Spain, partnered with P4C fellows in Austria, Portugal and Spain, to create a CD-Rom called *Ecodialogo* (www.grupiref.org/philosophy-for-children/ecodialogo.htm) for environmental education through philosophical dialogue, with support from the European Union. The IAPC granted permission for many of the discussion plans and exercises from *Wondering at the World* to be used in this product. In recent years, graduate students working with the IAPC have used *Kio and Gus*, *Wondering at the World* and *Ecodialogo* in the IAPC's Philosophy in Schools program and in Montclair State University's Gifted and Talented Youth Summer Camp.

In 2003 Ms. Katrina Macht, a doctoral student in Philosophy for Children and 5th-grade teacher at Raritan-Hillside Middle School, began using *Kio and Gus* and *Wondering at the World* with her 5th-grade class, in conjunction with her program in environmental education, and her class project to convert much of the land around the school into a protected habitat for local species. That project was conducted under the auspices of the Jane Goodall Institute's "Roots and Shoots" program (www.janegoodall.org/rs/index.html), and in 2004 the Institute (JGI) designated the school as the first "Roots and Shoots" school in the U.S. Dr. Goodall visited the school for an inauguration ceremony, and in April 2004 JGI Vice President Jeanne McCarty came to the IAPC for a day-long seminar exploring possibilities for collaboration between JGI and IAPC. Participants at this meeting determined that the IAPC's emphasis on philosophical concepts and issues, and on rigorous, value-oriented inquiry was a perfect compliment to JGI's emphases on knowledge, compassion and action. JGI has expressed willingness to review the revised philosophy of nature curriculum proposed in this project with the view of endorsing it.

In October 2005 a committee of faculty and graduate students affiliated with the IAPC was formed to begin reconstructing *Kio and Gus* and *Wondering at the World* as a philosophy of nature curriculum. We conducted a review of literature in order to identify major themes in environmental education and

philosophy of nature. We also drafted a new protocol for using the revised curriculum and created a new organizational system for the manual, with five categories of material:

- Explanations and bibliography of philosophical concepts and issues in each chapter;
- Discussion plans for dialogical inquiry into philosophical concepts and issues;
- Exercises for logical, linguistic and other inquiry skills;
- Reflective activities such as guided observations, philosophical journaling and experimentation
- Activities for assessment of philosophical content, skills and inquiry process.

We predict that these new categories of materials and the new protocol for using them will greatly help school teachers conduct better philosophical discussions. (In addition, the IAPC now offers online courses in Philosophy for Children that help teachers use these curriculum materials more effectively.)

The following summer, July 2006, the IAPC arranged for Dr. Jen Glaser—long time IAPC fellow and faculty at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University and the Mandel Leadership Institute, Jerusalem, and current president of the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (www.icpic.org)—to spend a week at the IAPC with Drs. Gregory and Kennedy, creating a thematic outline, chapter-by-chapter, for the revised curriculum.

In March 2006 the IAPC was obliged to attempt to become self-supporting, which meant that all revenues derived from workshops and curriculum sales must be applied to operating costs, and all research and development projects must be funded by external grants. Since that time, work on this philosophy of nature curriculum project has been suspended.

Objectives. The proposed project has four objectives:

1. Re-organize existing exercises in *Wondering at the World* according to the thematic outline created in 2006, in the categories listed above.
2. Create new exercises and determine which existing exercises to eliminate.
3. Re-write *Kio and Gus* novel to encompass new philosophy of nature themes.
4. Prepare new draft versions of each title for piloting.

Benefits. The accomplishment of these objectives would have the following benefits for the profession:

Teachers and students around the world who already engage in philosophical study and discourse in pre-college educational settings will have a quality curriculum with which to study philosophy of nature and environmental ethics. We will seek additional funding from various sources to pilot test this new curriculum, and we will present the results of these tests in academic conferences and journal articles.

We also anticipate that children, their families and their educators who have developed philosophical inquiry skills, and philosophical perspectives about nature and environmental issues by using this curriculum will be able to bring those skills and perspectives to bear in other contexts in which such issues are raised and addressed.

The current, widespread recognition of environmental ethics as an immensely important focus of study for students of all ages provides an important and timely opportunity to introduce young people and their teachers and parents to the discipline of philosophy. We anticipate that our new curriculum on philosophy of nature will be of interest to many who have never considered studying philosophy before, and that their experiences with this curriculum will lead many of them to pursue philosophy further. Helping a new generation to discover the relevance and importance of philosophy is the major anticipated benefit of this project.

Plan and Timeline for Achieving the Objectives

The following tasks must be done simultaneously:

- Re-organize existing exercises in *Wondering at the World* according to the thematic outline created in 2006, in the categories listed above.

- Create new exercises and determine which existing exercises to eliminate.
- Re-write *Kio and Gus* novel to encompass new philosophy of nature themes.

Beginning in January 2009, one faculty member and one doctoral student will work together on these tasks for approximately seven hours per week. From time to time they will elicit the help of other faculty and graduate students in creating the new exercises. They will meet with the Institute Director and Assistant Director monthly to report on their progress, and will also make progress reports at the monthly IAPC Cabinet Meetings. We plan to have these tasks completed by September 2009, and the final objective—preparation of a new draft manuscript of each title for piloting—completed by the following November.

Designation of Project Fiscal Agent: Joanne Matkowski, IAPC Assistant Director;
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Information about Other Funding

Since 2006 the IAPC has not had an internal budget for curriculum development or renewal, so grant opportunities of this kind are critical to our ability to update, revise and improve our valuable curriculum and professional development materials.

In March 2008 the IAPC submitted a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to conduct an NEH Summer Institute for U.S. school teachers on philosophy of nature in July 2009. Part of that program involves preparing teachers to conduct some kind of philosophy of nature educational program in their classrooms. We hope to have a pilot draft of the new philosophy of nature curriculum completed by July 2009 in order to introduce it to those teachers and enlist some of them to pilot test it in their classrooms.

When we have secured funding to commence with the project described in this proposal, we will seek funding from state and national agencies and private foundations to pilot test the curriculum and to make it available in print and electronic formats.

Project Budget with a Schedule for Allocation of Project Funds

- Project Budget

Item	Rate	Total
Doctoral student assistance	\$20 per hour x 150 hours	\$3,000
Fringe for doctoral students	7.65% of \$3,375	\$230
Faculty assistance	\$900 / month x 7 months	\$6,300
Fringe for faculty	9% of \$6,300	\$567
Total		\$10,097

- Allocation: This money would be paid to the faculty member monthly
- Note to University Administrators on Indirect Costs: The American Philosophical Association has a policy prohibiting universities from taking indirect costs from APA grant awards. See www.apa.udel.edu/apa/facilitiesandadministrativecostpolicy.html.

Report on Current APA Grant

In November 2007 the APA awarded the IAPC \$8,275 to construct its “Philosophy for Children History and Research Archive.” This project has progressed steadily and is now projected to be completed by November 2008. The archive index has grown to approximately 50 pages, and its organization has evolved to include the following major categories:

1. IAPC Administration
2. IAPC Scholarship

3. Degree Programs
4. Professional Development Services
5. IAPC Curriculum and Teaching Resources
6. Philosophy in Schools and Programs for Children
7. Visiting Scholars to the IAPC
8. Dissemination & Promotion
9. International Centers & Individuals (alphabetical by country)
10. National Centers & Individuals (USA; alphabetical by state)
11. Regional and Global P4C Organizations
12. Affiliations, Honors & Credentials
13. Miscellaneous Inquiries & Correspondence
14. Other Approaches to Philosophy for Children