Analytical Thinking in Kindergarten

When I returned to my school building to prepare my room for the opening of the 1979-1980 school year, my principal, Don Couch, told me of an opportunity that would be open to the members of our faculty for that school year. We were to be given an opportunity to participate in a six-credit graduate course in Analytical Thinking to be offered on our campus by Texas Wesleyan College. This was my introduction to one of the most exciting, most enjoyable, and most profitable experiences in my teaching career.

I am not a beginning teacher. I will complete my twenty-eighth year in the classroom this May. I have taught all levels from kindergarten through senior high, and I have always been acutely aware of the fact that something was missing. How many of us, as classroom teachers, have not felt the frustration of seeing children who have mastered the "facts" but are unable to apply them? I have encountered this weakness on all levels. We have all seen the student who reads well but does not grasp the meaning of anything read, or the one who knows math facts but is unable to do the simplest stated problem. I believe the implementation of Texas Wesleyan's program for the Advancement of Analytical Thinking for Children in a school's curriculum will do much to strengthen the student's ability to apply acquired knowledge to everyday problem solving. It is my first experience with a program designed for the express purpose of developing the student's thinking skills. It seems to me this is the most basic of the basics.

I took the class in Analytical Thinking with Dr. Ronald Reed during the 1979-1980 school year. In this class we used the novel Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, written by Matthew Lipman, to help children in grades four through six develop their skills in analytical thinking. Dr. Reed was, at that time, in the process of developing a series of novels to be used with children in Kindergarten through third grade. I used one of these novels, Rebecca, with my kindergarten class from January 1980 to June 1980.

Rebecca is a whimsical story about a little girl who has a flying green elephant. She loves frogs but does not love princes. The situations in this enjoyable story provide opportunities to probe the young minds to consider such questions as:

> What is true and what is make-believe? How do we determine what is true and what is false or make-believe? What is probable, what is possible, and what is actual? If a thing is actual, does that mean it is possible? When is it appropriate to vote? When will voting make a difference? Did you ever try not thinking about frogs?

It is fun! It is exciting! It is, in my opinion, a valuable, mind-expanding experience.

The children learn to examine their opinions on different subjects and to discover why they believe certain things. During one of our discussions I asked the children if they could think of anything they believed to be true when they were younger but that they now know to be make-believe. They started to name things, mostly from television, and someone said he used to believe that Superman could really fly. "He can fly!" exclaimed Michelle. "I saw him in a movie!" The children began to explain to Michelle how the filming is done to make it appear that Superman is flying. She did not waver in her belief that he really does fly. She had seen him

fly in a movie! I asked Michelle if she could explain how Superman could fly when people are not capable of flying? She said, "It's the cape." I told her that I own a cape and asked if I would be able to fly with my cape. "No," she said, "His cape is special." I asked if I would be able to fly with his cape, and she said, "Yes." Michelle believed that the cape would enable any of us to fly. She was not ready to let go of the fantasy and accept reality, but she did examine her thinking and gave reasons for her opinion.

I am using the same material with my class this year. After reading a story about Santa Mouse to them, I asked if this was a true story. Right away many of the children said, "No, it's make-believe." As always I asked them why they thought it was make-believe. They gave some good reasons such as: mice don't talk, mice don't wear clothes, etc. Then Stephanie began to tell us about some mice who live in her bed. These mice sleep when she sleeps, eat when she eats, and she is making clothes for them. The children began to express doubts about the truth of Stephanie's story. I said, "What is Stephanie doing?" Someone said, "She is pretending." Another said, "She's imagining it. It's make-believe." Then Mark said, "She is lying." So we had an analytical thinking session right then when we discussed lying, making-believe and pretending. Is there a difference? If so, what is that difference? I think one of the kindergarten children said it pretty well in this statement: "Lying is when you mean to fool someone, and make-believe is just for fun."

It is a thrill for me when I see these thinking skills being infused into other areas of our school day as they were at story time when I read Santa Mouse. How can we prepare children to live in the world of the future, when we do not know what that world will

be like. We must teach them to think for themselves and to analyze new knowledge as it is acquired and to make decisions based on good reasoning. I believe Analytical Thinking will give them the tools to enable them to do these things.

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