Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery in a Fifth Grade Class

The following information was compiled after using *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* to teach analytic thinking for children to two fifth grade classes from September of 1981 through May of 1982 at Wycliff Elementary School in Fort Worth. The program, which was designed as a philosophy class for children, was utilized as a part of the social studies curriculum. Some of the weaknesses and problems encountered in implementing the program are presented first, followed by some of the advantages of the program and the benefits that the children obtained from it.

Analytic thinking for children is most effective when the class or group size is relatively small. This allows for more time for the kids to contribute, less pressure on those who might feel timid about contributing, and the development of a comfortable "community" atmosphere among group members. A situation that I predicted would be an unavoidable problem turned out to be the greatest handicap that I encountered. The groups that I worked with both contained 25 students. The obvious problem with groups of that size is the strong personalities that tend to dominate the class. I found it extremely difficult to always include the less verbal students. Because of their previous conditioning, many times these students felt a little threatened or "put on the spot" when called upon to respond. My daydreamers were not often compelled to pay attention. The development of a community of inquiry, which is so important to the overall success of this program would have been much stronger if my class size could have been cut in half.

Because the classrooms at Wycliff are not totally self-contained, the fifth grade students alternate their social studies and science classes on a weekly basis. This type of scheduling presented several problems. Since I taught each class every other week, it became necessary to spend a considerable amount of time every Monday refreshing memories. We often re-read chapters or portions of chapters and reviewed main ideas or exercises that we had completed two weeks earlier. This sort of incongruency developed into somewhat of a problem. The students who needed the review were naturally frustrated and would have been alienated without it; however, those children who did not need to backtrack resented the time that was spent on review and were extremely bored by it. As the teacher, I felt discouraged by the amount of time spent on review and the lack of progress that it caused.

Most fifth graders like the traditional social studies curriculum. The social studies that they know consists of history lessons, map skills, and building projects. They enjoy social studies because it involves doing things. Since my students really wanted the maps and the history lessons and since they are important parts of the fifth grade social studies curriculum, I limited the analytical thinking lessons to three days a week. This meant that each class only had analytical thinking six days a month. Although having analytical thinking six days a month is better than having none at all, I think the kids could have benefited from more time with it. In my experience, philosophy for children is most effective when the lessons are given frequent attention.

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Not all of the difficulties that I faced with teaching analytical thinking were derived from scheduling and class size. Some of the exercises themselves presented problems for the students. Perhaps the greatest of these difficulties had to do with vocabulary. Because Wycliff is not a magnet school, the classrooms tend to be very diverse. The range of performance levels in my class was great. I had a few exceptionally bright children, a few very low level achievers, and a great many average students. Many of the words presented to the students in the exercises from the manual which accompanies *Harry Stottlemeier* were words with which even my sharpest students were not familiar. Words such as "enlightened," "fluent," "genocide," "agricultural," "graffiti," "agile," "exertion," and "fatigue," to name a few, are not common in a fifth grader's vocabulary. For my homeroom class, the exercises which presented vocabulary problems were dealt with easily. We used some of our reading and spelling time each week to learn the new words. This provided a natural reinforcement of vocabulary lessons which proved beneficial. For the other fifth grade students, there was, however, no extra time during the week that I could devote to the study of the unfamiliar words. We either omitted the lessons with difficult vocabulary or spent more time with them than I felt was justified.

Unknown vocabulary words were not the only language difficulty we encountered with the exercises in the manual. Although they were less common, unfamiliar phrases were also a puzzlement to the students. "Giving someone a dig" or "squaring accounts" were phrases that the stu-

dents had never heard. Surprisingly, the phrase "letting off steam" was equally confusing to them.

It is unrealistic to expect all lesson outlines in a teacher's manual to be greeted with enthusiasm by a group of students. A few of the discussion plans that were of interest to me were not interesting to the children in my classes. Unless such exercises were centered around logic, whose mastery was essential for the understanding of future lessons, I found that their pursuit was somewhat of an exercise in futility.

A problem that has existed in every class of analytical thinking with which I have been involved is that of keeping the students on the subject. This is more of a problem with certain exercises than with others. A good teacher usually learns early in the semester which students are most likely to present problems in this area and should be able to direct the questioning in such a way as to avoid wasting too much time. I found it was usually my good storytellers who wanted to lead the classes off on tangents of slight relation to the subject for the day. Occasionally, I felt it was advantageous for the class to go in a less structured direction and allowed this to happen. Often, I found some degree of difficulty in keeping 25 minds and comments to the subject at hand.

The positive results of using analytical thinking for children in my classroom certainly outweighed any negative aspects that we encountered. The program teaches many different kinds of skills, but perhaps its greatest achievement is in the area of improving children's reasoning abilities. At the end of the year, my students displayed more confidence in their own potential than they did in September. They seemed to be much less dependent on me and much more reliant on their own thinking skills.

Analytical thinking helped me to deal with some problems in classroom management. The structure of analytical thinking creates an air of respect in the classroom. Children learn to listen to their peers with the same degree of respect that they expect to receive. Giving kids time to talk is important, and knowing that they will be listened to is equally important. Some of the activities we performed allowed the children to air their resentments. These exercises were big hits.

Another positive aspect of analytical thinking is the humor that its introduction into the classroom brings. Many of the exercises in the teacher's manual were delightfully funny. When children see humor in jumping to conclusions, or in stereotyping, they are more likely to recognize the absurdity of these practices.

I often think the child's imagination gets very little exercise in the classroom. The program for analytical thinking allows opportunities for children to explore the world of make believe. Utilizing a child's imagination is not only enjoyable for the child, it also provides teachers with a great deal of insight into the personalities and motivations of students.

Many of the exercises in analytical thinking had a definite correlation and acted as a reinforcement to our reading and spelling lessons. Causality, syllogisms, analogies, similes, metaphors, and synonyms are a few of the topics that were covered in reading, spelling, and analytical thinking. The advantages of this type of carry-over are obvious. Children understand that these skills must be important if they are part of the curriculum in several subject areas, and the varied approaches to the study of these topics makes them more interesting for the students.

In the program for philosophy for children, students learn to analyze truth. This proved beneficial for my classes. Students were asked to identify true statements, and by taking the process one step further and teaching the kids that truth can be proven by either definition or by evidence, the kids were given some valuable skills that they may be able to use in everyday situations. Being able to differentiate truth from falsehood helps children to become less vulnerable and more independent.

One of the most important tasks a teacher faces is that of making education relevant to the needs of students. Some of the most meaningful activities dealt with the purpose of education and were excellent vehicles for having kids think about why they attend school. I had both classes compile a list of ten long-range goals of the education process. Surprisingly, the lists were quite similar. It is difficult for me to know exactly how much influence I had on their final lists, but I agreed with most of their goals and felt that this was one of the most significant activities that I chose for my students. Although the kids could not agree on the order of their importance, the groups did feel satisfied with their goals. This is the list of purposes of education that my class compiled:

1. Learning to think for yourself;
2. Preparing for the future (job, etc.);
3. Becoming someone important;
4. Learning what is necessary to become independent;
5. Learning what you want in life;
6. Appreciating yourself;
7. Learning discipline;
8. Appreciating art;
9. Learning to get along with others;
10. Learning responsibility.

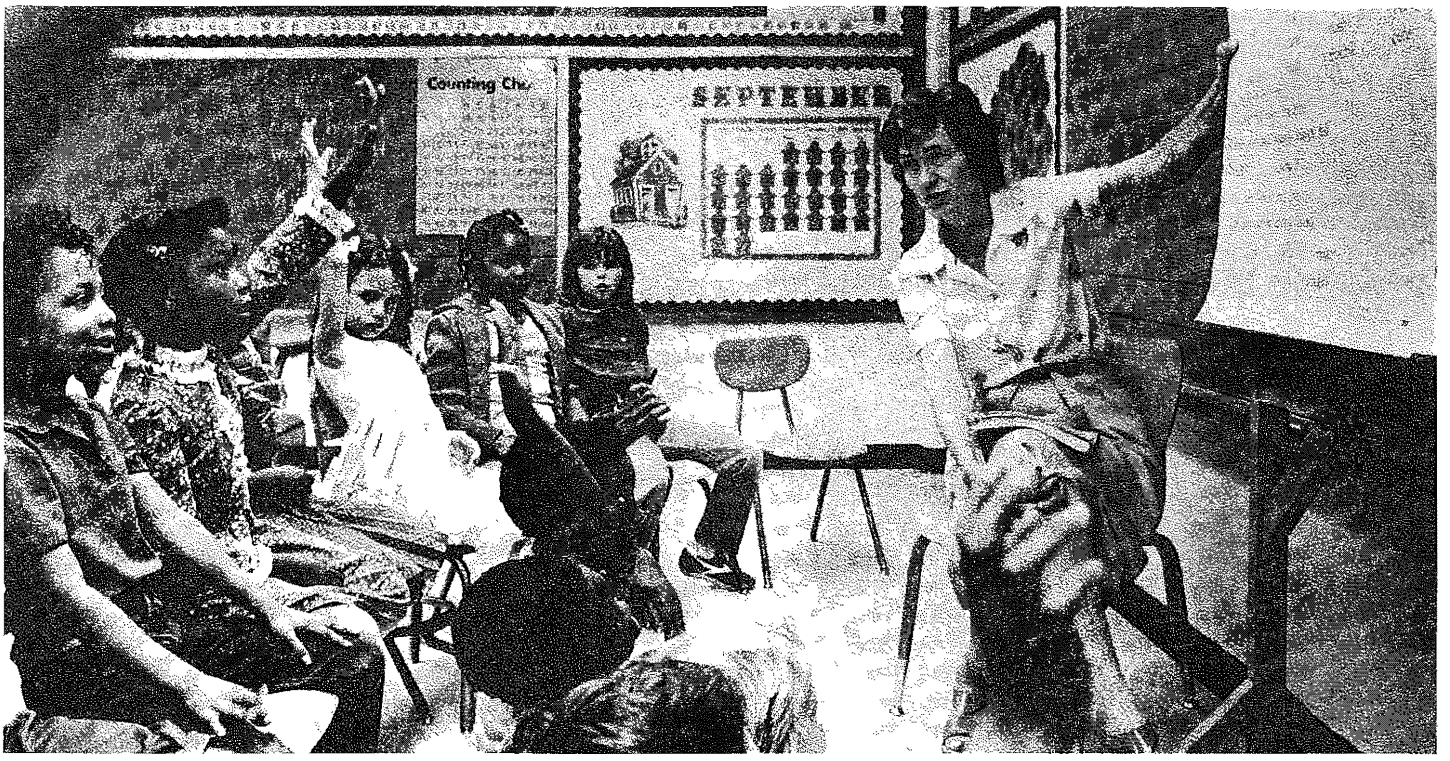
The other fifth grade class compiled a list of the purposes of education which contained many of the same ideas. They were as follows:

1. Preparing for a vocation;
2. Being able to make sound judgments;
3. Getting along with people;
4. Learning to handle money;
5. Developing your talents;
6. Learning responsibility;
7. Becoming independent;
8. Learning to practice good citizenship;
9. Coping with problems;
10. Learning to do something productive with your life.

Although both lists contain a certain amount of redundancy, I think the kids performed the activity very well. It was very interesting to have the students put the goals in the order of their importance and to justify their choices.

Elementary school students seem to have a very narrow view of good citizenship. Their citizenship grade is a reflection of how well they listen to the teacher, how much they talk in class, how well they get along with others, and how well they complete their assignments. Translating good citizenship from these terms into qualities that are characteristic of good citizenship for adults seems to be quite difficult for children. Analytical thinking proved quite beneficial in broadening my students' concepts of "good citizenship."

One of the most interesting discussion plans in *Harry Stottlemeier* was centered around "superstitions." The children were given the assignment of asking their parents and grandparents what some common superstitions of previous years were. We were all fascinated by the infor-



mation that resulted from this assignment. The children were so intrigued that it was difficult for them to move on to the next leading idea.

There were many other times that my students enjoyed an activity so much that they did not want to move on to another discussion plan. This is one of the reasons that analytical thinking has been so successful in my classes. The children enjoy talking. When you can direct their discourse into areas that are both interesting and provide learning experiences, as in *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, you are showing the students that learning can be very relevant to their needs and interests and that it can be fun. Even if there were no other advantages to using analytical thinking for children in the classroom, the fact that it helps make education relevant and enjoyable for the students is justification for the use of the program.

Rebecca Gordon