

Public Relations and Analytic Teaching

A newspaper article is responsible for Texas Wesleyan College having an Analytic Teaching Program.

Joe Mitchell, dean of the School of Education at Wesleyan, was reading the *New York Times* and came across an article about Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children Program. Mitchell's interest was piqued and he wrote to Lipman in New Jersey for information about the program.

Nearly two years later, after Mitchell had received Lipman's materials and had interested Wesleyan President Jon H. Fleming in the possibility of starting a similar program at the College, Ronald Reed came to Fort Worth to direct the Analytic Teaching Program — all on the basis of a single newspaper story.

My point in telling this anecdote is to show that the success of a topnotch program can be widened immeasurably by using the news media to inform others.

Matthew Lipman is a master at interesting media in Philosophy for Children. With stories in *Time*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and a variety of other respected publications, Lipman has paved the way for all of us to enjoy media attention almost instantly.

But why has he spent the effort to interest reporters and editors throughout the country in his program? Because Lipman believes in the value of his program and he knows that one newspaper or magazine can reach hundreds of thousands of people with whom to share the work he is doing. That kind of saturation is difficult, if not impossible, to do through word of mouth or even by scholarly presentations at professional meetings. But those efforts, coupled with news media attention, can promote a program to the prominence it deserves.

An essential reason for seeking media attention is because the audience is not only large but diverse. A single well-placed story can reach parents who may become interested in a similar program for their children's schools and will ask their principals if one is available, or when it might be. Or take the case of Joe Mitchell, who as a college administrator brought an entire program to Texas. Public school administrators, school board members and teachers who could be responsible for setting up a program within a school district are also potential audience members. Most of these people read newspapers, magazines and professional journals on a regular basis as well as watching and hearing a variety of shows on television and radio. They are prime targets to be cultivated via the media to become the most fervent supporters of analytic teaching.

In order to gain media attention for programs in schools across the country, there are three requests one can make of the media at various times with almost certain success:

1. Formally announcing the program to the public at its inception
2. Feature stories to capture public interest throughout the program's existence
3. Announcing new results of a program already in the public eye

Any Philosophy for Children program needs to be officially announced in the media to the community it serves. This can be as sophisticated as a grandiose media campaign or as simple as a speech or program at a local P.T.A.



meeting. Analytic Teaching can be shared in a variety of ways to ever-expanding audiences. Whether the scale is as large as the nation or state, or directed toward the parents of children in a particular school, promotional efforts are similar. Contacts need to be made in order to have stories written about the program for newspapers or magazines, to make appearances on radio or television, or to provide programs for groups. And each of these areas needs to be covered in order to truly inform the public about the worth of an educational concern.

Because of the spectacular media attention that Lipman has received, photo-copies of stories about his program are sometimes the quickest way to interest journalists or educators in Philosophy for Children. There's nothing like a favorable clipping from the *New York Times* to merit a second glance from the jaundiced eye of a professional journalist. And it certainly doesn't hurt to share the clippings with a P.T.A. president either, saying, "We're starting a similar program here." Piggyback on others' good work for your own results. As long as you give credit to the efforts of

others, it helps everyone.

With an initial announcement story there obviously is no proof to be shared with media that a local program works. Once again, we can turn to Lipman and others who have operated successful programs across the country in order to express findings to our result-demanding society.

But use a little caution. Don't promise too much about yet unknown results in original announcements. Simply state the results that others have received and bring out additional good points of the program. Is the teacher training free? Can teachers earn advanced degrees? Where else is it being done? These are important parts of the story that many people may want to know.

Those who are involved in Analytic Teaching at a college or school that has public relations personnel need to cultivate those people so that their programs can be a part of the ongoing news efforts of the institution. But that certainly doesn't excuse each participant from an essential role in publicity. It takes the efforts of people at every level. No one person will be able to carry the whole promotion project.

There are many opportunities in smaller publications for stories to be written by people not on the publication staff. Freelance writers, whether paid or volunteer, are used for many publications. Many suburban or neighborhood newspaper editors will be delighted to receive and print an accurate, prepared story. Bulletins and newsletters from professional groups are often eager to accept the work of guest writers. Here's an opportunity to use those rusty journalistic skills like the five W's— who, what, when, where, why. Sure it takes time to sit down and write a story, but the overall success of your program will certainly be boosted.

Newspaper stories alone are not nearly enough. Opportunities to speak to or write for educational, professional and other community groups should be developed. It's impossible to initiate a program without knowledge of it, so announcing a program to these audiences who can put it into action is essential.

As an example, consider a short article, perhaps three paragraphs long, that appeared in recent educational journal. Perhaps it doesn't sound like that big a deal, but take a look at the results. Ronald Reed received more than 70 inquiries about Wesleyan's Analytic Teaching program following the appearance of that small article. Those inquiries may result in new Wesleyan students who will expand the program to even more schools.

A second step, once a program is announced, is to interest media in the "feature" aspects of a program. For instance, one of the secondary activities of the fledgling Analytic Teaching program at Wesleyan was a special event for gifted children held at the college for two weeks during the summer. A newspaper reporter was contacted and he became interested in the prospect of gifted children from across the country learning philosophy in Fort Worth. The result was a page one story in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, circulation 126,000. That particular spot must have gained the attention of even the most casual reader. Best of all, the story grew broader as the reporter's interest enlarged. The first tip of the gifted students program grew into a solid feature about Analytic Teaching.

There's an old view that kids and dogs pictured on the front page will sell newspapers. Although today's readers seem slightly more sophisticated, it still seems to hold true that a story about children will capture a great deal of public attention and sympathy. Analytic Teaching fills the bill. Why not take advantage of public sentiment?

Feature stories are good at anytime and in nearly any publication. They are slightly less formal than a general news story and often may be longer and include more photographs.

One of the best feature stories about Wesleyan in the last year was in *Texas Monthly*, a slick, general interest magazine which prides itself on its sophisticated readers. The Wesleyan story was the result of a very short letter to the editor to which a photocopy of a story about Lipman that had appeared in *Time* was attached. A month later a reporter had been assigned to the story who came to Fort Worth to interview those involved. A two-page spread in a state-wide magazine is coverage that many colleagues envied. And it was so simply done. Analytic Teaching seems to be a program that interests a wide variety of people who are quite willing to share the news with others.

Perhaps the most satisfying step in a public awareness project takes place once real data is collected to demonstrate the positive effects of a program. This is a time when individual programs stand alone and no longer need the nurturing of Lipman's parent program to back their effectiveness. The public deserves to know about those results. Call in a reporter who did an earlier favorable story or select one who may be interested in education concerns. The time is ripe for another round of publicity just for the asking. And this is the fun part. Usually there have been moments of doubt by even the most confident program directors and participants, but with hard facts to demonstrate student's increased scores in mathematics and reading, the news is good and it's real. Get back on the circuit — newspapers, radio television, community and professional organizations. Tell them that Analytic Teaching works. That's big news in a society where most things don't anymore.

Informing the public takes time and effort — and quite a lot of each. But public information, like Analytic Teaching, works. Sharing the program with parents, teachers, administrators, colleagues or even donors who may fund it, will be much easier with media attention. Through the news media, presentations to professional organizations and community speeches and programs, the success story of Analytic Teaching and Philosophy for Children will be heard. That makes a program grow.

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