Analytic Teaching: Special Feature Transcript Analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, quite a few transcripts from Philosophy for Children classes have been published both in *Thinking* and in *Analytic Teaching*. And in Philosophy for Children teacher-training sessions it is common practice to show video tapes of Philosophy for Children classes — with or without transcripts depending on their availability. In this issue you will find another transcript, not simply for the sake of adding one, but as a starting point for some closer reading and analysis.

This special feature on Transcript Analysis is the result of the combined efforts of three geographically separated Philosophy for Children enthusiasts who came together at a Philosophy for Children teacher-training workshop at Viterbo College, La Crosse, Wisconsin in July, 1984. Dr. Richard (Mort) Morehouse of Viterbo College conducted the workshop and was assisted in the last three days by Judy Kyle, teacher of Philosophy for Children in Montreal, Canada and by Pieter Mostert, teacher of philosophy in The Netherlands.

Having seen a number of video tapes at numerous workshops, we shared an interest in finding ways to make better use of video-taped sessions of children's discussions and the La Crosse workshop provided us with an opportunity to implement and explore what proved to be a very powerful tool. As often happens at Philosophy for Children workshops, we learned a lot — from the children, from the participants and from each other — so much so that we wanted to formalize and share our findings.

Most of the information about our classes we get in three ways: 1) from our own impressions, 2) from the students, in their comments, assignments, and tests, and 3) from formal annual tests. The value of transcript analysis can be formulated this way: it can improve our own observational skills, it can make our own impressions more reliable, and it can add personal and qualitative aspects to the more quantitative results we get from tests. In a way, transcript analysis stands in between everyday impressions of our students' learning and the more general test results. It can make visible what in either of the two other ways remains invisible. That this actually is the case we want to show through the transcript analysis in this issue. By careful study of a discussion by a "regular" class (and therefore in some sense a model case), we hope to reveal what a wealth of thoughts and steps from one thought to another is involved in almost every discussion.

Although we all know the difference between spoken and written language, once we look at a transcript of a discussion in which we participated, we are suprised to see how we actually expressed our thoughts. Like the first time you see yourself on video, the first time you read your own spoken words, you are a bit shocked. About what actually? Most likely about the repetition of words, the unfinished or halfway changed sentences and the loose connection between sentences. Much is left up to the benevolent listener who builds his/her understanding from the bits we provide.

Reading transcripts may not be very entertaining. Compared to written language (especially written dialogue), the language is rather loose, much remains unclear, many aspects are not touched upon, and the progress that has been made seldom is very rewarding. So why read transcripts?

A first reason might be that transcript analysis might result in the improvement of our spoken language — that of both teacher and students. However, that will not be our main concern. Before changing habits, we want to take a closer look at these habits. To do so may not only give us a better, more detailed understanding of our speech habits, but also of the thinking processes "behind" them. And since cannot study them directly, we will approach them indirectly, through the recording of spoken language.

This special feature on transcript analysis begins with the verbatim transcript of a Philosophy for Children discussion on the subject of rights in general and children's rights in particular. The transcript is preceded by an introduction which explains briefly many of the procedures which the children follow during the discussion but which may not be readily apparent either to viewers of the video tape or to readers of the transcript. These procedures were developed by the children during their year and a half in the program and in many ways are as important to an understanding of the dynamics of the discussion as the discussion itself. Copies of the video tape may be obtained by contacting any of the sources mentioned in Note 1 at the end of the transcript.

Following the transcript are two articles which outline a number of different and powerful uses to which transcript analysis can be put.

First, Pieter Mostert's article "Mapping Thinking" is an example of one way to make coherent sense of a children's discussion. He suggests the metaphor of "mapping" the children's thinking and examines what it means to do that. He then gives specific directions as to how to map the thinking which is revealed by the analysis of the transcript, makes suggestions for the application of this technique both with teachers and with the children themselves, and concludes with the actual maps which were generated by the La Crosse Workshop participants. His article provides an analysis of the transcript while at the same time offering practical suggestions which can be applied when working with other transcripts.

Not only can transcript analysis be rich and valuable in and of itself, but it can also be put to excellent use in the training of Philosophy for Children teachers. In the second article, "Transcript Analysis and Teacher Training", Mort Morehouse begins with a fundamental issue in teacher training in Philosophy for Children: the identification of the philosophical content of children's thinking. Using both the mapping thinking technique and text analysis, he outlines two specific insights which transcript analysis led to — insights which may not have occurred without the close attention that transcript analysis involves. In describing these

insights, Mort shows at once the results and the process of transcript analysis.

In Part II of his paper, Mort reflects on the process and results of transcript analysis as described in Part I and says, in effect, "That's great but so what?" This question leads him to consideration of the implications of transcript analysis for teacher training from a more theoretical point of view and he argues that from this perspective too, transcript analysis can be shown to have an important role to play.

Mort's paper then ends with a description of a case in point. Transcript analysis was a small (in terms of time) but important part of the workshop he conducted in La Crosse in July 1984 and Mort gives a brief and informative overview of how, in this case, it was handled. Much more is involved than simply providing participants with a transcript while they watch. The richness of the experience, for all concerned, lies in the shared analysis.

Finally, this special feature ends with some suggestions from Pieter Mostert for making both video recordings and transcripts. They are suggestions based on considerable experience and should serve as a useful checklist for others who wish to make video tapes and transcripts of their own groups.

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Judy A. Kyle
Pieter Mostert