Transcript Analysis And Teacher Training

Transcript analysis can be a valuable learning tool not only for a better understanding of discussions but also for a better understanding of student arguments. Therefore it can provide both an insight into student thinking and a starting point for examining standard thinking and teaching strategies.

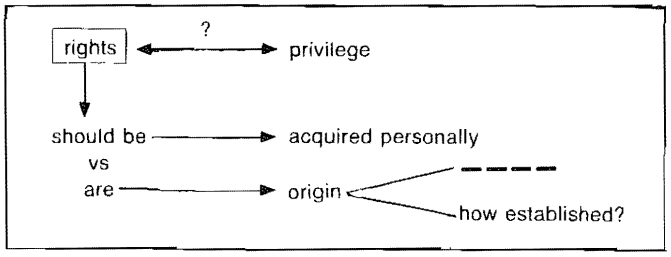
This presentation of transcript analysis and teacher training has three parts: 1) it begins with two examples of insights into student thinking — insights gained by careful examination of a videotaped Philosophy for Children discussion, 2) it outlines some theoretical perspectives on the value of transcript analysis as a component of teacher training in Philosophy for Children, and 3) it concludes with an overview of the La Crosse teacher-training workshop in which these ideas and perspectives were developed and explored.

I. Insights Into Student Thinking

As part of the workshop, I examined some sections of the transcript of Judy Kyle's class discussion and gained two insights which illustrate student thinking about the nature of an idea or concept: the first via mapping and the second by listening repeatedly to the tape.

The focus of my first insight is the concept of a contract and it was gained by mapping the part of the transcript that ran from speaker 37 through speaker 57 — especially Dawn's intervention (#45 - #57). See Figure 1 for the map which was developed by the workshop participants.

FIGURE 1. Thinking Map — Section 1



(See Pieter Mostert's "Mapping Thinking" Figure 3. Thinking Map — Section 3)

Allow me to reconstruct my thinking about Dawn's position. Dawn begins by using what she calls a model case. She makes the point that she is talking about children who are the natural children of their parents as well as children who are adopted: "If they wanted Hilda so much, why don't they treat her the way they are supposed to"? When asked if Hilda has a right to be treated correctly, Dawn repeats her statement — "because she was had or adopted." What is not clearly stated but is implicit in Dawn's agrument is a commitment on the part of parents to fair treatment of the child. It is an unspoken contract to fair treatment. Without stretching Dawn's argument too far, we could hear her saying, "If Hilda's parents decided to have or adopt her, they also made a commitment to treat her fairly. They made a contract with her or in her name by choosing to have her or to adopt her."

This speculation about Dawn's conceptualization as revealed in her example and commentary is at best a tentative statement about her argument for although it was arrived at after careful examination of her words, it is nonetheless an interpretation which goes beyond her words. If one had an opportunity to ask Dawn the meaning of her statements, the idea of the contract could be verified.

Why are this student's comments philosophical and how can I state that her comments are within the realm of contractual relations? First, defining the nature of rights is a topic with a long history in philosophy; there is little doubt about this. Second, and more difficult to understand, is the structuring of Dawn's argument in terms of a discussion on contrasts or, maybe more accurately, seeing that structure in Dawn's argument.

In some ways this structure may be seen as turning Locke upside-down. Locke states as a given that men in a state of nature are free and equal. Based on that freedom and equality men have a right to protect their property. And the law of nature requires that "no man ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions." This given becomes the foundation on which Locke develops a civil government by persons voluntarily leaving the state of nature and forming a contract in which some freedoms are given up in order to protect freedom because all persons are not equal in strength and resources and therefore by use of power might infringe on the freedoms of the weaker. Locke states:

> The great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths (a contractual relationship), and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature, there are many things wanting.[1]

Locke goes on to list these wants of the state of Nature: first, the lack of a known law; second, a known and indifferent judge; and third, the power to back and support sentences when right.

Dawn approaches the problem of rights from the opposite direction. as a child she is aware of the state of inequality within Nature, particularly the inequality between adults and children. She therefore sees adult commitment to having children, whether "adopted or had", as a commitment to the child. A parent, she states, gives a commitment to provide children with food, life, and good treatment because they made a choice concerning the child's existence. This commitment is an unspoken and unwritten contract with the "unadopted or un-had" child. It is a contract which comes before and is the basis for adult/child relationships. The purpose of the contract is to guarantee the child's life, health (food), and liberty (good treatment). This contract is, at least as developed so far by Dawn, a one-sided contract but one involving two parties: adults and children. At a later point in the discussion, Marnie states that if you respect your parents, you will be willing to do things for them (interaction #95). This may be the beginning of a more elaborate contractual relationship but the point is not pursued within the context established by Dawn, at least not explicitly.

A second and related insight, understanding the meaning of a student's use of a word, was gained not by mapping but by listening to the tape for the second time in two days. Beginning with interaction #115, Fiona is explaining the point that different persons have different rights and that some persons have more rights. Fiona states: ... he didn't earn any rights, he just took off and did all these stupid things. And some people go to school and get educated, and they have rights, more rights than people who don't really earn their rights." In an earlier statement, she talks about bums and persons who are stupid and messy and dirty.

At first inspection this argument appears to be a simple statement that other people don't have the same rights as I do. It appears to be a classic statement. But if the word "right" is replaced by the word "claim", the argument takes on a slightly different color. This occurs because the argument moves from "universal rights" to individual "claims". This is a subtle shift in understanding which is only partially cleared up by redefining the word "right".

In a discussion, unless a student (or the leader of the discussion) is quick enough to notice this shift in perspective, this redefinition of the word "right", the issues are muddy and not cleared up. Fiona makes a significant effort at redefining "right" but does not have the tools to make her case as clearly as she might. In fact, without the tools, she not only appears to be making an unclear statement but also appears to be confusing the argument.

On first listening to her argument, I also misunderstood her point. Judy Kyle, in discussing the videotape with our class, said that Fiona came up to her during the break to state her concern for having stereotyped poor people in giving her example. It appears as though Fiona misunderstood the point which she was trying to make as well. (Fiona may not have misunderstood — rather it may be an example of "thinking on her feet" and the thought being expressed was in the process of being formulated — thus, perhaps, incomplete.) I likewise did not see the "claim" argument the first five times I saw the tape. (Pieter Mostert was the person who used the word "claim" in private discussion).

In-depth examination, along with review of the videotape, can be valuable and these two examples make clear the insights which one person can gain by careful inspection of a class discussion is a long and rigorous process and allows, perhaps, for some personal insights; but what can be gained that goes beyond personal insight and moves toward a theoretical perspective on teacher training in Philosophy for Children?

II. Toward a Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective for the use of transcript analysis as a part of teacher training in Philosophy for Children is drawn from three sources: 1) Vygotsky's work in *Mind In Society*[2], 2) the use of phenomenological tools for investigating teacher/classroom behavior and 3) the Philosophy for Children curriculum.

Vygotsky presents several ideas which are helpful in understanding the learning process and which also are related to the use of transcript analysis in a discussion class. Important to Vygotsky's theory of development is the use of symbols and tools. Vygotsky sees symbols as another form of tool. The use of a particular set of symbols, that is, words, is one of the things which distinguishes humans from animals. Vygotsky states: "The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of developement, converge."[3]

Vygotsky is especially interested in what Piaget called "egocentric speech". This is the speech in which children appear to talk for the sake of talking. Vygotsky observed this speech during problem-solving situations and concluded, after a variety of experimental interventions, that children do speak just for the sake of hearing themselves but in fact as a part of their problem-solving mechanisms. Children's speech plays a more important role if the problem is complicated; in fact the more complicated the problem, the more speech and action are linked. Vygotsky does not discuss older children and the solution of abstract problems; nevertheless another of his observations, his insight regarding "zones of proximity", leads us in a fruitful direction — into development which has implications both for theory and for observation or experimentation.

Vygotsky states that most often we, as teachers and researchers, are most concerned with "fossilized behavior", that is, behavior which is already learned and a permanent part of a pattern of behavior. If we intend to explore the "how" of children's learning, then we need to examine behavior as it is being learned or as it is about to be learned: for example, watching children learn to read on their own as opposed to testing reading skills. Vygotsky's brilliant methodological insight led him to set up experiments for children which were just beyond their ability level. This method of approaching the understanding of learning in children led to the idea of the zone of proximal development — the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.[4]

To place these two ideals together, that is ,to place zones of proximal development with speech as a problem-solving tool, is the beginning point for a fruitful examination of philosophical discussion in the classroom. The area of exploration which is open to us by this pulling together of insights is how children learn to think philosophically, and which kinds of teacher intervention are most effective in aiding students as they begin to learn the skills of philosophical discussion. A philosophical discussion fits almost perfectly Vygotsky's definition of a zone of proximal development in that a discussion will always be in "collaboration with more capable peers." The question is how best to observe this development.

Transcript analysis may also be seen as a subject for a more general method of research, that is, phenomenological research. The method of qualitative inquiry or phenomenological research has three elements: observing, recording, and reflecting. Mapping specifically, and

transcript analysis in general, may be seen as applications of qualitative inquiry. One dialogues with the event (that is, the classroom discussion as it is recorded), one reflects on the discussion, and one allows for patterns to emerge which might have remained hidden if not carefully examined and thought about.

From the perspective of Philosophy for Children, Vygotsky can be seen to provide some of the questions to ask and the places to look. Qualitative inquiry provides the larger framework into which transcript analysis fits. And the Philosophy for Children curriculum and class discussion provide the subject matter and the context within which to examine the thinking processes of children.

The perspective presented this far provides the context for raising the question about the value of transcript analysis in teacher training in Philosophy for Children. If teachers are to be effective in leading discussions in Philosophy for Children, they need to know, in addition to basic knowledge of philosophy and the material at hand, specific ways of improving the quality of classroom discussion and these ought to be based on some kind of knowledge of the level and style of the students' thinking. Transcript analysis can provide teachers with these insights. Additionally, transcript analysis can also give teachers an insight into their own thinking on the subjects discussed.

Now, how can the examination of a student's argument fit into a discussion of transcript analysis as a tool for learning how students think and how can transcript analysis serve as an aid to improving the quality of discussions?

First, to go back to the "contract" argument explored earlier, how does this analysis help us understand how this student is thinking? We see Dawn attempting to develop a model case — a case which will include not only children raised by their natural parents. She is attempting to find a way to establish an obligation from the parents to the child. This obligation is based on a commitment to "have or adopt" a child. Her thinking moves in a direction which is reasonable but her ability to state her meaning clearly falls short. A teacher might invite Dawn to look more closely at her "model case" by asking her a series of follow-up questions such as: Are there any other examples of relationships of obligation which are similar to the one stated here? Are there any obligations which go from child to parent or is this a one-way set of obligations?

Second, how can the transcript analysis be used to improve the discussion? One way is to find places where arguments are related or might be related. The two arguments presented here are not specifically related though they are a part of the same discussion on the nature of children's rights. One could ask either or both students to think about and examine the similarities and differences between "claim" and "obligation" and how each is related to or helps explain the nature of "rights" and if these ideas have a particular relationship to "children's rights". If the transcript is used by the students, they might be able to ask some of these questions themselves. Transcript analysis allows for many new insights for students and teachers alike.

III. Use of Transcript Analysis in a Philosophy for Children Workshop

In July 1984, an eight-day teacher training workshop was conducted at Viterbo College, La Crosse, Wisconsin. An important feature of this workshop was the emphasis on transcript analysis in the last three days and it is described here in order to provide an example of some of the ways in which video tapes with transcripts can be used profitably in the training of Philosophy for Children teachers.

The eight-day workshop was divided into two sessions. The objectives of the first five days were:

- To become acquainted with a body of material, namely *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery,*[6]
- To learn techniques for presenting ideas and developing discussions in philosophy,
- To learn shared inquiry, and
- To learn critical thinking skills.

The objectives of the last three days were:

- To learn how to move a discussion forward,
- To explore ways of increasing participation and leadership in discussions, and
- To examine concerns and issues raised by teaching experience.

a) Training in Harry

The format of the first part of the workshop followed the traditional training in Philosophy for Children with modeling of lessons as well as opportunities for teachers to conduct at least two lessons each, often in a planning session with another teacher. The workshop began with an overview of the material and a half-day lecture/discussion on some of the key points in *Philosophy in the Classroom.*[5] The centrality of student interest was discussed in the context of learning as a search for meaning. Doing philosophy was presented as both the method and the goal of the program and this doing of philosophy was shown to occur within a community of inquiry.

As the workshop began, there was an awareness of the nature of the second part of the program; Therefore, some of the points to be presented during the methodology part of the workshop were introduced. For example, as discussions were analyzed after student presentation, the strategy of "Discussion 'Moves'"[7] was introduced. Constructive discussions establish criteria, make clear standards of judgements, and generally work toward a conclusion. A discussion 'move' was defined for the workshop as anything which makes a discussion more inclusive, comprehensive and constructive — anything which moves the discussion from what was to what it could be — from the specific case to a broader understanding of the issue or problem. Making moves in a discussion refers to the conscious use participants make of certain

strategies to move the discussion forward. These strategies include such things as giving examples, asking clarifying questions or pointing out consequences of particular thoughts. A move may also help participants to better understand the implications of their own comments.

Toward the middle of the first week a "Discussion Discussion" was held also partly in anticipation of part two of the workshop and partly because it provided an opportunity to address important on-going issues. A Discussion Discussion may be seen as a particular type of move, perhaps a meta-move, if you will pardon a rather pretentious word. A Discussion Discussion is a group reflection on successful as well as less-than-successful discussions. It is a turning of the spotlight of inquiry onto the processes used by the class. Rules or discussion guidelines are developed as a beginning point. Later, guidelines are modified and some are thrown out as ways to improve the discussion are agreed on. These guidelines can be as simple as procedures for being heard, ways to listen and aids to remembering the points you wanted to make and as complicated as ways to unstick a discussion that does not go anywhere.

b) Transcript Analysis

The theme of the methodological part of the workshop was "making visible the invisible" and the method was transcript analysis. A question lurks behind this approach: how can we put a thought or a discussion on the table for investigation? To a considerable extent this question is dealt with in the articles preceding this one. What follows here is a short summary of these points as they fit into the overall context of the training program.

The program's second week began with Judy Kyle giving a general introduction to the video-taped discussion with attention being given to class arrangement, the nature of student-led discussions, discussion guidelines, discussion "moves", leader guidelines, dialogue procedures, the name recorder, the use of examples, fictional characters, note-taking and the structure of the lesson. The video was presented not merely to show an example of a "good" discussion but in order to aid the participants in "getting behind" the discussion and in beginning to come to terms with some of the components of it.

After the introduction, the tape was shown in small segments and Judy's comments about the process or content of the taped discussion were often followed by several questions. Considerable time was given to details within the tape and close attention was paid to the spoken word. This attention was enhanced and given greater importance by having given each participant a typed verbatim copy of the transcript. This had the advantage of helping all the workshop members clearly understand the details of the class discussion. It had the disadvantage of not allowing the participants to attend to the nonverbal elements of the tape. (This concern was addressed toward the end of the workshop when participants had the opportunity to examine the videotape as a whole and without the transcript.)

The first day was given exclusively to the examination of the video-taped discussion. However, some time was given to the exploration of teaching techniques which were seen in the classroom as the tape was viewed but not directly used in the discussion. For example, participants noticed words on the walls of the classroom as well as the vocabulary of the students in the discussion. This led naturally to a discussion of the "Word-game", a linguistic 'show and tell' vocabulary game invented by philosophy students and played as a "warm-up" to philosophy sessions. The focus on words began the shift from discussion to writing.

The morning of the second day focused on writing as an aid to and extension of discussion and Judy presented the "thinking-in-writing" approach she uses in her classes. The focus of this session was on thinking while writing not thinking before writing. Although this part of the workshop may appear to have moved away from transcript analysis, it was well within the goal for the workshop which was to make the invisible visible. The process of thinking-in-writing is one particular approach to helpng students (or anyone else for that matter) to" see" their thoughts and their thought processes on paper.

The afternoon session of day two extended the metaphor of thinking on paper by focusing on the thoughts of others which have been placed on the printed page — talking to books. Reading and thinking was the focus of this session. The plan was to allow the participants to experience the integration of someone else's thoughts with their own and to begin a dialogue with the written page. They were invited to pay close attention to the written word, to interpret what the author was saying, and to come to terms with the author's meaning.

Day three focused on mapping thinking. It, to a considerable extent, was a continuation of the first two days. First, the mapping exercise used the video-taped discussion, particularly the transcript of that discussion, as its material. And second, it extended the skill of paying close attention to the spoken and written word. Participants mapped the video-taped discussion in small sections and the total "map" was placed on the blackboard. (See Pieter Mostert, "Mapping Thinking", this issue.)

The day's activities ended with a viewing of the video-taped discussion as a whole. This process not only allowed for a pulling together of the workshop, it also pulled together the processes which were examined and allowed the participants to experience the student discussion as it happened. But this time the participants saw a more complex discussion, asked better questions of it, and in general, participated in a richer experience than they had at the beginning of the workshop.

NOTES

1 Locke, J. *Treatise on Civil Government,* cited in *The Making of the Modern Mind,* Randall, 1940. p. 343.

2 Vygotsky, L.S. *Mind in Society,*eds. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978.

3 *Ibid.* p. 24.

4 *Ibid.* p. 86.

5 Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.

6 Lipman, Matthew. *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery,* Upper Montclair, N.J.: IAPC, 1974.

7 Kyle, Judy A., "Managing Philosophical Discussions" *Analytic Teaching,* Vol. 3, No. 2, 1983, pp. 14-15.

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