

Analytic Teaching with Four Severe Language Delay Elementary Students: The Methodology without the Novel

The severe language delay (SLD) students that I see are assigned to a self-contained class of 11 students ranging in age from 5 years through 10 years. The class is taught by a speech language pathologist. She is responsible for teaching all the academics with an emphasis on language development. The students come to me each day for concentrated instruction in developing language skills. Because of the various needs and ages of the students, I planned to use analytic teaching with the older four students assigned to the third, fourth, and fifth grades.

Wendy is a tall, thin, fifth-grade girl. She is always dressed in a neat shirt and a pair of blue jeans. Her wavy blond hair is pulled back and neatly braided in a single braid. Her demeanor is quiet and reserved. Her eyes are often downcast. She does not like to be the focus of attention. She refuses to participate in class pantomime activities.

Kim is a pleasant, outgoing, talkative, sandy-haired, fourth grade girl. She always has a wind-blown look, no matter what the weather is. In her classroom, she is quick to help the younger children with personal needs or schoolwork. In my class, I could almost always depend on her to at least try a new activity and to encourage the others to take part also. Her "come on you guys, quit acting so silly" or "you guys, this isn't so hard" was most helpful sometimes. She loves pantomime activities and is good at them.

Kerry is a quiet, dark-eyed, freckle-faced fifth grade boy of slender stature. He enjoys class participation but is always hesitant to respond. His eyes would dart around the group always checking how his remarks were being received. He wants to cooperate with the teachers but at the same time, if the others are cutting up, he wants to participate in that, too. Sometimes he had a hard time deciding which way to go.

Michael is a nice-looking third grade black boy of average size. He is always well groomed. He is capable of doing some good schoolwork, but often he drifts off into his own thoughts. Sometimes he produced clicking or blowing sounds. Frequently, when I would ask him about something, he would frown and say, "I don't know, that's too hard," without making any effort at all. When another student was having difficulty with a question, sometimes Michael would answer it if asked. He seldom if ever, volunteered an answer. Often it was difficult to know whether or not Michael was following the class discussion.

All of these students were assessed by a psychologist using standardized tests. It has been determined that each student has normal intellectual potential. On language tests, the SLD students show significant delay in verbal expression and auditory association skills. Language output is less than for other children. Sentences are shorter and lack the descriptive qualities that others have. These students may have

word-finding difficulties and often use only declarative sentences. They have a meager vocabulary and do not easily incorporate new words into their personal vocabulary. These students do not function well in large group learning situations. They are reluctant to speak up or answer questions. They perform better on tasks that do not require verbalization. My students have limited ability to make language work effectively for them. They are limited in their ability to interpret and comprehend what they hear and to express their thoughts meaningfully. The ability to think internally is linked directly to language skills. By using the analytic teaching materials, my students would have opportunity to develop language concepts and thinking skills within an interesting and stimulating framework.

I have observed that the SLD students have had so much difficulty deciphering language that they have developed defense mechanisms. They get one way of thinking or one perception about something. Out of self defense, they say, "that is the way it is." They tend to be more rigid in their thinking in an effort to be correct. They resist language exploration. It appears to be threatening and confusing to them. The SLD students have experienced failure often. To avoid failure they have become experts at sitting back, not participating, as taking part in a class discussion is difficult and risky. They have learned to be spectators. Early on in our philosophical inquiries, I became intensely aware of their resistance to verbal participation. Because of this, it became clear very quickly that in order to use the analytic teaching techniques and materials and develop an environment of inquiry, I would have to make some adaptations.

II

At the beginning of the school year, I was concerned that the analytic teaching material might be too difficult for my students. I selected the *Rebecca* series. I planned to have two sessions of analytic teaching per week, 20 minutes per session.

For the first few sessions my students were very quiet; discussion was minimal. I did not expect in-depth dialogue as I was well aware of their disabilities, but I also knew they were capable of more than they were giving. It was difficult for me to determine where the problem was.

By the middle of October, I was encountering some resistance from the class about *Rebecca* and some of the activities. This is not to say that we did not have some successful sessions. Every one responded well to an activity on possibility. The activity involved grouping things and events according to what really happens, will not happen, might happen. It was a dark, rainy day. One of the cards to categorize said, "The sun will shine." This really puzzled them; they looked out the window, saw the dark clouds and the rain, and insisted the sun would not shine. We finally moved on to the next example, "Smart person gets an A in math." This was much easier. Several more examples were read: "A frog turns into a prince," "Elephants turn green." The discussion reached a frustrating level. Kim said "Let's think about this stuff later." Whenever Kim made a statement such as this, the others would always agree, and

it was time to move on. Previously we had discussed forming opinions. I showed them a Kiwi fruit. No one had seen one before. Each person felt it, smelled it, and stated whether or not they liked it. Three said they did not like it; Michael was noncommittal.

I peeled and sliced the fruit, and each person took a slice. With varying degrees of apprehension, each decided to taste it. To their surprise, they liked it and wanted more! This had been a good session. They stayed past the bell into their recess time and did not even realize it!

We had other good sessions with *Rebecca*. Michael was my "fall in the crack" student. Most of the time he was not with us. Any comments he made were not relevant to the discussion topic. However, on occasion he was more on target than the other three. The topic was good and bad reasons and the differences between them. Again, I had written questions on cards. Michael's card read, "Do we have good reason to believe children will outgrow their blue jeans?" Michael read the card and with out hesitation responded, "When I get to be 9 years old, my jeans won't fit because I'll be too big."

Another time Michael was really on target was when we were discussing what our names mean and why the name we have fits us. I really did not expect Michael to have much to say. When it came his turn to share what he thought about his name, his response was "My mother chose Michael for me because she thought it was the best name for me." He said it with a serious and proud tone of voice. I really appreciated his contribution.

As time went on, the class was becoming more outspoken about their dislike of the *Rebecca* story and some of the activities. Their body language of sticking their fingers in their ears was not difficult to interpret. It was evident the class was not responding in an appropriate and creative way. Class sessions were best with more participation when I had some related pictures or other visual stimuli. By mid-October, it was apparent I had misjudged my students. They needed something more mature. They told me more than once they did not like it. On occasions I adapted some activities from *Philosophical Inquiries: An Instructional Manual to Accompany Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. These proved to be more successful. They said *Rebecca* was "weird" and "dumb" and "boring." I believe their reaction was due in part to their lack of language ability. I also was becoming aware that I had misjudged their maturity. After consulting with my faculty advisors at TWC, I obtained *Kio & Gus* and the teacher's manual, *Wondering at the World*. Our first session with the new book was November 1, 1984.

For me, the *Kio & Gus* story was fascinating. I was really looking forward to using it. I hoped the children would share my enthusiasm. I continued to try to have objects, pictures, or some sort of visual stimuli. It was December and our topic for the day was "Wondering or Marveling." I took a small radio with batteries, a sea shell, and a piece of rock called pyrite. Pyrite always forms a square or cube shape. I hoped these items would stimulate discussion to make a list of things we wonder or marvel about and why. The class was very restrained. They showed interest in the three items, but

very little discussion was forthcoming. Kim usually made some efforts at participating and made some sort of contribution. Nothing seemed to engage them. I was really disappointed. I had expected them to come up with a long list of things to wonder about. We had three things listed: why the Cowboys did not win a football game, how I see, and how I talk. I had to fight to keep from making a list of things I wonder or marvel about.

It was not long until I began to hear the same comments about the *Kio & Gus* story that I heard regarding *Rebecca*. Each time they saw the book I heard: "Do we have to do that again?" "That's boring." "It's weird. I don't like it." Their body language spoke as loudly as did their spoken language. When I picked up *Kio & Gus* they physically pushed away from the table, turned their backs. I am not one to give in to every whim and complaint of my students; I persisted. My students were encountering a different type of school task, one that required verbalizing and talking with one another. They were being challenged with new and different thoughts. We continued to have periods of silence. Gradually Kim began to take some responsibility for class participation. Her efforts were usually positive and helped the other three enter into participation.

As the teacher, I attempted to help the class understand that it was acceptable to have a different answer and that sometimes no one answer is best or correct. I continued to have some type of visual stimuli. It was obvious that this was necessary to keep them engaged in the session. They did persist with negative comments whenever I referred to *Kio & Gus*. I did notice if I did not refer to *Kio & Gus* in any way or have the book visible, the class accepted the activities with a much more favorable attitude. They were honest in telling me what they thought and how they felt about *Kio & Gus*. I continued to be disappointed in their reaction to the story. And I was less honest with them when they came into class and asked, "Do we have to do *Kio & Gus*?" With a straight face I said "No." We went right into the analytic teaching activity I had planned. It became obvious that class went much better with this omission.

For example, on one occasion, we had a good session on using first and third person pronouns. We were discussing who was doing the telling in a paragraph. Was it a character in a story or was the story told by an observer? We were writing and rewriting sentences. Kerry made some good contributions to class that day. He had good success in going from first to third person. Everyone participated. This was January 8, 1985.

On January 15, 1985, the discussion topic was probability. Why does Gus say, "Roger is probably hiding?" Everyone seemed frustrated. I believe it was because they were so accustomed to dealing with concrete situations. This was more abstract. They could use the word "probably" in a sentence but were hard-pressed to define probably. Kerry said "might happen." Wendy did not want to discuss it, Kim tried but could not get thoughts organized, and Michael was not trying at all. They could give the correct answer but could not get at why — "It just happened."

January was really an up and down month. On January 28th, we were discussing cats and the concept of right and

wrong. They all had cats, and this activity seemed to appeal to them. They actually looked at one another and began to discuss the topic. They acknowledged that they could not decide about right and wrong. As the discussion progressed, their thoughts on right and wrong shifted. For the first time, not having one correct answer did not seem so frustrating to them. I felt that this was a real milestone. Everyone had a good time with the discussion. I had omitted any mention of the *Kio & Gus* story.

A real breakthrough occurred in February. We were discussing "play" and its various meanings. Kerry actually challenged Kim on one of her statements. She said something about play, and he came right in with a counter example. They engaged in a brief exchange. We continued on to another point. Kerry was able to relate what had been said previously to a current comment. He and Kim had another exchange, and both changed their minds from their original positions! Again, I had omitted any mention of the *Kio & Gus* story.

The verbal output and exchanges gradually increased. Three of the four were participating much more readily in the discussions. I remember the day Kerry for the first time said he did not agree with an answer Kim had given. His brown eyes danced, his voice was quiet and hesitant as he offered his thoughts. The others listened and said "Yeah."

I made a decision to see how the class would do if I omitted the *Kio & Gus* story altogether. I like things to connect. I made efforts at connecting the activity to something in their environment or made up a brief story to set the stage for some of the activities. Our discussions continued to improve. It was clear who the class leader was. Whenever Kim had had enough discussion on a point or felt sufficiently frustrated, she signalled an end to that exchange by saying, "Oh, I don't know," or "That's too hard. Let's talk about something else." The others would agree. It was time to move the discussion on to the next item.

Kerry was venturing into class discussions more and more. His contributions were interesting and appropriate. He seemed genuinely pleased at being able to participate verbally in a creative and meaningful way. Wendy had the ability to participate more appropriately than any of the others, but so often she took a thought to the absurd and started acting silly. Her other extreme was to sit head down and almost sulk. Her classroom teacher and I were making efforts to help her adopt more creative ways of responding. Michael contributed occasionally but was a spectator mostly.

I still wanted to use the *Kio & Gus* story. I like the story, but the minute my students would see the book or hear any part of it, I had lost them. The talk would turn to how much they disliked it. I do not know why they reacted so negatively. I do know they thought the names *Kio and Gus* were strange. I tried to draw them out but continued to get the same two or three reasons over and over. It appeared best to continue with the activities and omit the story line. I believed the students were missing something by not hearing the story, but we were having discussions that included almost everyone. The content was becoming more interesting. Kerry was more trusting of his own ability to offer interesting thoughts. This was exciting.

We had some good sessions on making comparisons. Michael needed more repetition than the others in order to make a comparison statement. Kim, Kerry, and Wendy were very quick to reprimand Michael when he answered incorrectly. Fortunately, Michael persisted in making an effort.

On March 27, 1985, my faculty advisor was scheduled to visit our class. Previously when he came, all four children had been very reserved. On this day, Kim and Wendy came in giggling and acting silly. The thinking activity for the day was giving examples. We had done something similar previously. I began the lesson with a brief introduction. The first responses were silly answers which caused more giggling "Things that are people-made, have no motors, but fly," seemed to be a hard one to give examples for. They could not get away from airplanes and birds. Kerry started in giggling. The next card said "Things that are shaped like boxes and play music." The responses were "Music Boxes, Radio, Juke Box, Stereo."

The answers came as we went around the table. The giggling and acting silly continued amidst the good responses. I had to intervene with a reprimand about behavior.

The next card read, "Things that are printed, have covers, and contain no stories." This was harder, but amidst the persistent giggling some really good answers were coming out: "Dictionaries, Math books, Speller, English books."

I suggested matchbooks; the class was not sure about that. Wendy and Kim continued with silly comments and distracting behavior which almost caused us to miss Kerry's response. He was beginning to fall into the giggling, but yet his interest was in the thinking activity. His brown eyes dancing, he said, "What about history books?" We now had opportunity to discuss what was contained in a history book. We clarified the statement with "no made up stories." Michael even made a valid contribution. This session was the best and worst rolled into one.

III

The school year is over. I believe my students and I have had a good experience at philosophical inquiry. I have seen them attempt new thoughts. They have told me "It is too hard" and "Move on to the next question" only to come back to the previous one with an additional thought. I see this as growth.

My students have become more willing to challenge each other when they do not agree with a statement. On several occasions they challenged me. Many times in our discussions, no one answer was correct. This was a puzzlement for them, but I saw them begin to understand that sometimes multiple answers are correct and that everything cannot always be resolved. The complaints of boredom waned, and occasionally they volunteered that class had been fun!

I do believe that something may be lost because I do not have these students all day. I do not have the opportunity to relate philosophical inquiry to other class experiences.

In order to assure participation of all my language delayed students, I tried to develop ways to include everyone. The best way I found was to use cards with one discussion question per card. We would go around the table taking turns reading a question. The "it" student got first chance at of-

fering a response and opening the discussion. Someone always wanted to be first. Cards with questions helped to keep students involved. It seemed to give a structure they wanted and needed. For a small group and for me, this proved to be effective. In a larger group, the card technique might work to pull in a stand-back student. I found that it helped the student focus on the particular subject matter and gave the student a feeling of responsibility for that discussion segment. My students need visual cues and reinforcement. The cards were important for this reason also.

Analytic teaching has given my students the opportunity to discuss with one another their opinions and to know that they can and do have thoughts and ideas worth expressing.

My SLD students have had an opportunity for a different experience from the regular basics. The basics of education have been difficult for these students and one could argue that they should stick to only basics. Analytic teaching has provided a change, one that they have enjoyed more or less throughout the year. Hopefully, language exploration will open up more interest and skill in the basic subjects.

Our initial involvement with analytic teaching has been one of ups and downs, few plateaus. For the most part, my students either responded favorably or unfavorably to our attempts at discussion. As the teacher, I have felt very much the student again as I attempt to learn how to engage children successfully in philosophical inquiry.

Analytic teaching has given me a way of playing with language with my students. They have been involved in verbal play that would have otherwise been missed.

My SLD students have had the opportunity to begin an awareness that there may not always be a right or wrong answer. This has been a new concept for them. They have met failure so often in and out of school and have learned to expect that all questions have right or wrong answers. All too frequently they have experienced being on the wrong side. It was a good experience for them to hear me as an adult say that I did not always have the right answer. On several occasions when I told them I did not know, they seemed surprised. When I agreed with various ones, they were pleased.

I have had a good time with analytic teaching and my SLD students. I know and appreciate them much more because of our discussions. The biggest challenge for me has been to know when to let the discussion go on its own, when to refocus it or when to push the students for more.

I want to continue to develop my skills in analytic teaching. My plan is to continue it as a permanent part of my curriculum for my language delayed students. Analytic teaching offers so much for me to offer my students.

POSTSCRIPT

It remains a puzzle to me why my students had such negative reactions to the stories *Rebecca* and *Kio & Gus*. I had expected them to want to know what was going to happen next and ask for more to be read. I can only speculate on the reasons for the negative reactions.

I do believe I misjudged the maturity level of my students at the beginning of the year. However, they never did tell

me *Rebecca* was for "little kids."

Kio & Gus is written in first person, and this may have been confusing to them since most stories they encounter are written in the third person. It may be that the subject matter is different enough and being presented in the way it is, it became more than they could understand.

I desire that my students grow not only in language usage but also in appreciation for the story and the characters in it. I speculate that if the story and the people in it did not fit their preconceived idea of how a story should be, it was not considered a valid story. By omitting the stories, I think my students missed an opportunity to see a glimpse of themselves reflected in *Rebecca*, *Kio*, and *Gus*.

Personally, I liked the stories. I plan to use both again in the future. It will be interesting to see if different children will have a more positive reaction to the stories and if that makes a difference in our pursuit of philosophical inquiry.

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