

Harry: The Connection

After my initial class in Analytic Teaching during the summer, I was convinced that this was the program for my kids. I was hoping that this class would help my students express themselves more clearly and get in touch with what they were really thinking. The idea that they could increase their reasoning and thinking skills was important to me.

I set about getting approval from my principal, Mrs. Joy Read, and from my professor, Dr. Ronald Reed. Dr. Reed accepted my application and my principal was elated. She had allowed two teachers to pilot the program the previous year for the accelerated language arts groups in the fifth and sixth grades. She was thrilled when I wanted to use the Analytic Teaching methods and materials with my high-average language class of sixth graders.

My school, C. E. Dunn Elementary, is located in a high socio-economic neighborhood in Southwest Arlington. The parent community is very involved. They volunteer many hours each week in the school parent-aide program and are greatly interested in all of their children's activities. With this in mind, I wondered how my parents would react to a Philosophy for Children Program. Would they be supportive? I could hardly wait for school to start, as I was anxious to begin Analytic Teaching.

After only two days of inservice meetings, my enthusiasm was waning. I was nervous and concerned over the new teacher evaluation system. I wondered how I could possibly cope with the challenge of Analytic Teaching and the new appraisal system, too. I found myself pondering this over and over throughout the year.

After the first few hectic weeks of school had passed, I briefly talked about the program to my students. Then I sent home a letter that explained the program and I attached permission slips. I was relieved when it was warmly received by my parent community. They were happy that their children were finally having a special program, especially one that could possibly enhance their children's critical thinking and reasoning skills.

Dunn is an open-concept school with nearly 900 students. It is somewhat cramped for available space. My classroom is situated between two other sections of sixth-grade classes. During my language arts period, there is no other unoccupied space available. I knew the limited space in my classroom would have to do. Therefore, I arranged the desks in my teaching area so I could have a cozy corner on the floor by the windows. I also added a small, moveable blackboard that could be used when necessary.

I have thirty high-average sixth-grade students in my language arts class. I knew that this was far too large a group to work with, so I had already decided to have two groups with fifteen in each group. Grouping them was not a problem since I had been fortunate enough to have been their fourth-grade language arts teacher two years earlier. I was excited to have them again in the sixth grade. With this background information, I divided the group. I had seven girls and eight boys in one group. In the other group, I had six girls and nine boys. I also tried to equally distribute the more-verbal and the less-verbal students between the two groups.

With the make-up of the groups in place, I planned for both groups to have two weekly sessions. Each session would last for approximately thirty minutes. This worked well for me. While I had one group with me, the other group worked on independent reading activities. Then we switched after thirty minutes and I would repeat the lesson. I used the novel, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*¹, for the children's text. I used the instructional manual, *Philosophical Inquiry*², as a guide to accompany the text.

My first session was just to set up our rules. We have an assertive discipline plan for our entire school, so we decided to use our basic school rules. They were to speak one at a time, and to raise hands before speaking. They should show respect for their classmates by not interrupting one another. Once the rules were in place, I decided to begin by playing, "Petals Around the Roses". This was a board game that Dr. Reed had used during our class in the summer. I thought the kids would be motivated by the game-like atmosphere and besides that, I knew the answers. By doing this I would be comfortable and relaxed for our first session. The kids thought this first session was great! They said, "If Analytic Teaching was games and no tests, just talk, they could hardly wait!"

During my second session, I introduced the text, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. We read the first chapter and made a list of the characters. Next, we made a list of questions they found interesting. They readily identified with Harry and considered him as a typical boy in their eyes. It was in this session that we shortened our class name to A. T. instead of calling it Analytic Teaching. We also named our groups as Wednesday's and Friday's group. Then we could alternate which group would come up first, depending on the day. They also decided to keep minutes of our sessions. The role of secretary was to be rotated so that each member was responsible for his/her summary notes periodically.

We were well into the second week of A. T. classes and I was feeling very inadequate. I didn't feel comfortable trying to lead the discussions. I was very concerned with not knowing where the discussions

were headed at times. I didn't know when to jump in or if I did, I wasn't sure what I should say.

Then in one session I was using the discussion plan on resentment. I was so surprised when someone brought up cutting in-line by teachers, adults, and peers. All members participated in this discussion. I encouraged them to support their opinions with reasons. I was still struggling, but I knew they were at least understanding one another's feelings and maybe really listening to what was being said. When we closed this session, many wanted to stay and continue. As a result of that session, lunch that day was a bit touchy. Comments were made when teachers wanted to get their lunch trays before some of the students. There was a lot of joking and kidding between the teachers and the students. Good manners won out.

Some lessons were strictly logic at the beginning. I think I felt most comfortable doing these. This was where I knew what to do. It was just like teaching a reading skills lesson. The kids accepted the logic exercises, but it was hard keeping their attention. I felt they were humoring me so they could hurry and get back to talking about the story and other related topics.

However, the next day Lauren brought me a book of logic games. She said that those kinds of games had always seemed boring to her before A. T. classes began. This made me feel especially good. She went on to tell me that she had reread her book and that now she thinks about the book of games in a completely different way. We used her book of games as a warm-up activity for many of our sessions. I began to think it really is worth the hard work and the struggle for me.

We were just getting into the program when Dr. Reed made his first visit. We were discussing fairness. He really opened up the discussion and it was inspiring to see how he directed the conversation. They came up with some really unique thoughts on fairness. In fact, Carol said, "If equal treatment for everyone is fair, then all people would have to go to jail if even one person had to go. Fair treatment was the same treatment for all." Another student said that A. T. should be called, "I don't know what I think is fair anymore." Many ideas were beginning to flow. Of course, time ran out.

The weeks were moving on and the kids were very excited about A. T. However, every time we would get started, it seemed like the time was up and I had other things that had to be covered. Time was always precious and the curriculum was packed.

It was well into December before I began to see the students exchange ideas between each other without first being recognized by me. This was the beginning of more involvement between my students. Each student began giving examples that supported his/her

beliefs. Many of their examples were far superior to mine. We were building a community of inquiry. I was now just a member of their community as were they.

About this same time, they began to say that they agreed or disagreed with various statements made by their peers. I encouraged them to restate and I began to see a change. They were restating what another person had said and then giving reasons for their agreement or disagreement. I knew they were really listening to each other. Now, if I could only feel as comfortable as they appeared to be.

After the holidays, we got right back into the swing of things. One day during class we were discussing the child hostage situation that had happened at D. F. W. Airport. Aaron said this was a situation like A. T. when an adult would also feel helpless. I was thrilled to see this carry over into other areas of the curriculum.

I think my students are no longer the naive students that began the year. They no longer accept things at face value. They ask for and even demand reasons from each other, teachers and parents. I know this is a concern. In fact, one of my parents brought to my attention that her son was questioning her decisions. She felt that A. T. was carrying over into their home situation. I asked her if he was using good reasons for his disagreements. She said, "Yes," and that was the problem. The arguments were too good. She was not pleased to see this change. She was having difficulty handling the new added confidence of her son and his new approach to their family discussions. He was becoming too independent in his thinking and he was also using terms like vague and ambiguous in their talks. I had a hard time not feeling smug.

Another instance of carry over of A. T. skills was brought to my attention by one of my team members, Mrs. Ann Reed. She teaches math to most of my language arts students. She told me that my students were better at reasoning and problem-solving than her other math students. She also noted that, in solving logic problems, three out of four students solving these first were A. T. students and two of these had been from my class. She, an Analytic Teaching teacher, attributed their improvement in problem-solving to my A. T. classes. It certainly gave me an elated feeling and the reinforcement that I needed at that time.

During another session, we talked about doing things we might not want to do, but must do because of a job description. One student brought up the point of being on a safety patrol. They all found this to be a difficult job. It was especially hard to turn in your friends when you were a safety patrol person. This led to a discussion of a fight by a safety patrol person while on duty. This was a lively exchange. I knew

when these questions came up that this was no ordinary discussion. Whose definition of fighting were we using? What is fighting? These are the questions that were being bounced back and forth.

A few days before spring break, I was teaching an English lesson on fact and opinion to my class. It also happened to be the class that my principal chose to come in to observe and to evaluate my teaching performance. I was nervous and very concerned. Every time I got to an example to explain fact or opinion, all hands flew up. They began giving different possibilities for many of my examples. I thought to myself, "this is what my goals had been, but not now!" The sleeping giant had now awakened. Their reasons were extraordinary. Moreover, I wondered how I ever made it through the lesson. My principal later talked about the higher cognitive level that the class was conducted from and about the communication exchange between my students. She was amazed with the points that were made in justifying their answers. It was worth a number of E. Q.'s on my evaluation.

The carry over now in all areas of language arts is unbelievable. We no longer have regular reading discussions. They now find things of interest to discuss from our basal. It is their job to come up with the questions to answer. One child remarked that we had the "before A. T. discussions and that now we have the after A. T. discussions." They have noticed the change in the way I conduct our reading lessons and they heartily approve.

Finally, I asked my students to write a composition of opinion detailing their feelings about A. T. I want to share a few comments that sum up their opinions.

- Rob:** "I think A. T. was fun because you really have to think about what you say. It has really improved my thinking."
- Lauren:** "I think A. T. has helped me in my everyday school work. It lets you know about everybody's background."
- Leah:** "It makes me see things differently and it helps me back up what I say with good reasons."
- Tuesday:** "I liked hearing others' opinions. Sometimes when someone else said something different, it made me change my mind or think of other reasons."
- Joe:** "It made me think before answering."
- Jimmy:** "I have things to talk about with my parents."

In summary, I feel that Analytic Teaching has helped to develop some worthwhile listening skills in myself and my students. I think their added self-confidence is evident and their growth in critical thinking skills shows in their ability to express themselves more clearly both verbally and in written composition. The time spent has been worthwhile and I look forward to a new A. T. group in the fall.

Gail Baldwin

Footnotes

1. Lipman, Matthew. *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. Upper Montclair, N.J.: The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 1982.
2. Lipman, M., Sharp, A.M. and Oscanyan, F.S. *Philosophical Inquiry: Instructional Manual to Accompany Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, 2nd ed. Upper Montclair, N.J.: IAPC, 1979.