

Kio and Gus: Looking Back

When I began teaching at Dunn Elementary School, I was intrigued by two teachers who were implementing Analytic Teaching in the classroom. I was truly fortunate since my own son happened to be in the fifth grade class. His comments at home showed his enthusiasm for the program, and I knew I wanted to know more about it.

I decided to begin work on my graduate degree last summer, and the course in Analytic Teaching seemed a likely place to begin. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and I needed little encouragement to apply for permission to do a practicum in my own third grade class.

Since my principal had previous experience with Analytic Teaching in other classrooms, she was more than willing to support my efforts and purchase the manual and books for *Kio and Gus*. My teammates were wonderful, and I know that my job would not have been as pleasant if they had not been such a positive force surrounding me. In addition, I appreciated the support of the other teachers in the building who were doing an Analytic Teaching practicum.

My schedule was perfect for dividing my language arts class into two groups. Half of the group went to P.E. and Music for fifty minutes every day, while the other half remained for reading. I could easily work in thirty minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays for Analytic Teaching.

The classes are ability grouped for math and language arts, so my class is generally average to high-average. Several ethnic groups are represented. I have black, white, and even children from India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. There were approximately fifteen in each group, but the number tended to shift with schedule changes and students enrolling and leaving the school.

The children were thrilled to be in the class, and they were fascinated at the thought of being visited by the professors from Wesleyan. At first they wondered if the "doctors" were going to examine them like a physician. They were anxious for each visit. I can honestly say that the observer's presence made no distinct difference in their behavior and reactions. The students were allowed to sit on the floor in a circle on the carpet. I always tried to wear something appropriate, so that I could sit with them on the floor and be a real part of the group. I also made the effort not to have a manual in front of me in order to avoid the role of the person with the "right" answers. After much discussion, the students decided to call our special sessions "Thinking Class". The group agreed upon the usual rules of common courtesy:

- 1) Raise your hand to be recognized.
- 2) Don't speak when someone else is speaking.
- 3) Don't wave your hand wildly to be called on when someone is speaking. (This one was difficult to enforce.)
- 4) Don't criticize others' answers.

GETTING STARTED

We held our first session on October first. To get the students used to the format, I began by using some games from a book called *Mind Joggers* by S. S. Preshene. Our first games were brainstorming with categories and going around the circle naming something such as house pets or sports. I was careful to include items that the students could successfully answer, so that they would build confidence to attempt questions in the future. Students were also allowed to pass if they desired. They began to experience some critical thinking in the game we called Mismatch. I gave a list of items, and they would pick which one did not fit in that category. They often came up with different criteria for a category. For instance, within the list of canary, dog, kitten and cow, they said first that canaries fly and the others don't. After that, another student suggested that canaries have only two legs and all the others have four. They proceeded to determine all the characteristics of a bird. I often used these types of games to initiate a session. They were, for the most part, very successful except sometimes it was difficult to cut them off.

We read the introduction to *Kio and Gus* and spent the class discussing the cover and whether or not Kio and Gus were human. The group at first suggested that Kio and Gus must be human because they spoke and talked like humans, and they referred to relatives such as a grandfather. Students then commented that in stories they had read in the past animals often talked and had families. There was not enough evidence to provide the answer. The students did gain further insight by use of the suggestion in the manual of determining who was the speaker in each episode. I followed this recommendation throughout the year. It helped the students understand the selection better to identify the speaker in each section of the story.

CHAPTER ONE

The students had great difficulty in coming to the conclusion that Gus was a girl. They had to be reminded periodically who was Gus, and who was Kio. It did help them to decide by determining who was the speaker. The names of the horse, Tchaikovsky, and the whale, Leviathan, were not really mastered as far

as pronunciation until much later. The group did begin to recognize them as the animals in the story, and what part they played.

The exercise on the cat in the poem proved to be a good topic for discussion. Most students jumped to the conclusion that four legs would most certainly be faster than two. I reminded them that turtles have four legs but are not considered fast. They decided to re-examine their position and one student suggested speed could not be directly related to the number of legs since fish could swim and birds could fly faster than some four-legged animals could run. They pointed out how their lives would be different if they were on four legs instead of two. (We would walk and eat differently and surely our furniture, homes and cars would be designed to reflect our need for alternate styles.)

The topic on cats provided an opportunity for the class to have its first debate. The question I gave the two opposing groups was which makes a better pet, a dog or cat? They were successful, and I felt this was a real breakthrough for the group as a whole. I say this for several reasons. First, the groups worked well with each other on an independent basis. They really listened to one another and wanted to contribute. Secondly, they came up with sound reasons for their arguments. Finally, they permitted their spokesperson to speak for them without interruption.

Some of the reasons for having a dog were:

- 1) Barking makes for good security
- 2) Dogs tend to stay in an enclosed yard more easily (cats tend to jump fences)
- 3) Size of the dog can vary greatly upon desires of the owner
- 4) Dogs are more "trainable" (examples given were seeing-eye dogs and guard dogs)

Some of the reasons for having a cat were:

- 1) They don't bark and disturb others
- 2) Cats tend to take care of themselves
- 3) They can be litterbox trained for convenience
- 4) They do not grow as large as many dogs
- 5) They will not destroy shrubs and plants like many large dogs

The students left the group very excited and still on friendly terms. The debate was wonderful for their first attempt.

We then went on to the activity regarding impersonating. After some questions and responses, several in the group determined that you could make believe you are a lion but not really act as if you are a lion, since you can act as if you are another person but not an animal. They supported this by saying that a

person could mistake you for another person but not an animal.

The use of the pronoun "my" showed students wonderful examples of how words are used in various contexts. The students better understood how "my" could be used to show a relationship versus showing a possession, and that sometimes it could mean both. In the case of *my* country, the discussion centered around the issue that "my" could show origin such as a place of birth, and furthermore, we really cannot say we own our country – it is a shared experience. The idea that you could own an animal, and refer to it as "my" came under question since an animal has certain individual characteristics and personality traits. Owning a pet could be different than owning an object such as a toy. The students then decided that referring to *my* pet could be similar to a reference such as *my* uncle.

The exercise on work and play made the students aware that a person's point of view can make the difference in the two terms. Students discovered that they usually associate the term "work" with their particular parent's profession, or a task they did not like to do. They came to understand that work could be interpreted as play and vice versa, depending on your attitude. Examples given were art, cooking, and gardening. They had seen several personal examples of people enjoying certain activities, and other people doing the same activities under great duress. The students definitely associated play with pleasure and work with something dull, hard or boring. They did recognize the possibility of play becoming "worklike" under certain circumstances.

In the section of Chapter One where Kio speaks of his mother, Hope, the children were slightly confused. They knew that Kio's mother must be dead or his parents divorced, because everyone must have a mother to be born. One student felt that the name Hope was significant because it implied that Kio "hoped" for a mother.

We moved directly into a discussion on inconsistencies. It was fascinating that students felt there are few valid excuses for not doing homework, unlike their responses when confronted on a daily basis. Furthermore, they said that the words "excuse" and "reason" were not interchangeable. The word "reason" inferred something good, and "excuses" were usually weak. ("I forgot my book." "I didn't have time.")

Since we used categorizing on several occasions, I used an exercise I found on my own to begin a session. I had several imaginary animal drawings that I passed around to each member of the group. The requirements were that the animals be grouped according to common characteristics which we established at the beginning. I allowed students to stray from the traits we had picked, and they began

identifying them by known animals such as “the bird”, the one “like a lizard”, or “ladybug”.

I did stress at the end that the categories could have varied depending on the guidelines established. Interaction was good in the group, but I had one new student, Marcus, who had problems socializing with the others and presented quite a challenge. He constantly raised his hand demanding recognition, and he inched his way forward until he was sitting in the center of the circle. His actions infuriated the rest of the group, and they let him know he was not playing by the rules. He presented such problems until he moved shortly after Christmas.

CHAPTER TWO

We began the chapter by discussing that it is indirectly revealed in the story that Gus is blind, and that this leads to her frustration over the word “beautiful”.

For a better understanding of the word, we used the exercise in the manual for categorizing words into the three areas of synonyms, antonyms, and somewhere in-between. I made a giant drawing of three concentric circles. (I used the example drawing from the manual.) I then wrote the various words on tagboard and passed one to each member of the group to place on the correct space in the circles. We used this method again for words such as wet, stupid, clear and before.

I introduced the exercise on “fairness” by reminding the group that Gus was angry because she felt it wasn’t fair that she couldn’t see herself like her mother could. We began our search for a definition of “fair”. Of course, they first thought that “fair” was treating everyone the same. That was until I told the story of the bag of candy and the classroom. They did agree that “fair” could mean treating people differently when circumstances demanded. They thought it was fair for teachers to vary assignments and expectations depending on differing ability levels of students. This was an occasion when I sent them back to their seats with a written assignment to describe a specific situation where they believed unequal treatment was fair, or a situation when they felt they had been treated unfairly, and what could be changed to make it fair. Some examples given were gifts, when age might dictate a need for unequal treatment, or an illness that might make a child’s needs different.

When we came to the exercise on animals’ rights, we began by discussing what did we mean by “rights”. Could it merely mean the right to live, or did it imply more? And what happens when we put the rights of animals up against the rights of man; whose rights should prevail? The question of using animals for experimentation in medical research caused quite a

stir within the group because they decided it was difficult to draw the line. Mice and rats might be okay to use, but what about dogs, cats and monkeys? The elephant at the Ft. Worth Zoo had just killed his trainer. This was a perfect opportunity to tie in our discussion of animals’ rights. The class was divided right down the middle on the question of whether or not the elephant should be killed for his actions. The half of the class saying that the elephant should be killed reasoned that if he had killed once, no more human lives should be risked. The other half said that the trainer was partially at fault. He must have done something to frighten the elephant and that the elephant should not be punished for simply reacting as any wild animal would.

In Chapter Two, Episode Two, line twenty, one girl in the group was not certain what the phrase “the stuff Mama puts behind her ears when you and she go out together” meant. When it was explained, another girl asked if only women wear perfume, and men wear something called cologne. The discussion that followed centered around hairstyles and clothing. I reminded them that trends come and go, and that a few years ago men would not have considered using items such as hairspray or getting permanents. The students varied greatly on where they would draw the line between clothing, cosmetics and the two sexes. The consensus was that no line could be drawn. The group assignment was to bring to the next class a job description, and designate it as only for males or females. In addition, they were to be prepared to give reasons and defend their positions.

During the next class meeting, we went around the circle and had each member read his or her selection. Several boys indicated that women were not suited for professional football because of their size and the physical abuse involved. After questioning, several conclusions emerged:

- 1) Some women do have the size and strength required to play
- 2) Some men play football who are smaller and lighter than the average football player
- 3) Women should be allowed to play if they’re willing to risk the physical abuse

Similar ideas were derived concerning women in combat:

- 1) Size was not always an important factor – sometimes smaller was better
- 2) Certain skills could be more important than size in time of war

The group admitted that their attitude had changed somewhat because of the discussion within

our class. They decided that motherhood and fatherhood were biologically based and really did not fall into the category under discussion. The students were quick to understand that our concepts of male and female roles are changing because of specific examples seen in their own particular households. I was especially pleased with this topic because I was able to see the students questioning one another's ideas without attacking or making fun of the person.

Students loved the exercise on analogies. They did a nice job of following the analogies in the manual and making up some of their own. This exercise relates well to our reading curriculum since analogies are introduced as a reading skill. The exercise relating colors such as red to blood, mean and mad, and watching a fire added to the children's understanding of how such relationships are formed and why figurative language plays such an important role in literature.

The distinction found between ignorance and stupidity was significant. Ignorance implies a lack of opportunity to gain access to knowledge. A child could be ignorant of the danger of fire. Stupidity is, more often than not, a type of insult. Stupidity indicates that a person may have knowledge of the consequences, but proceeds with his actions in spite of the knowledge. Although I failed to emphasize from the beginning that you would not call someone ignorant because of the stigma attached to the word, I made certain this was understood at the next session.

CHAPTER THREE

We were not able to get very far into Chapter Three, but we did read all of it and did some of the exercises.

The group spent a session on the comparison of the account of the rescue of Kio's grandfather and the story of "Androcles and the Lion". At first, they commented on such characteristics as the length of the stories ("Androcles" is longer), and that the story of the lion and the tailor is more concrete. The tailor saved the lion previously and the lion's reaction in the arena was intentional - he obviously recognized the tailor and spared his life. The students pointed out that we have no such clues in *Kio and Gus* concerning Leviathan. We could speculate on Leviathan's actions, as several students wanted to do, but we cannot be absolutely sure from the story.

The class had difficulty throughout the year pronouncing Leviathan, so we did the exercise about names. The students soon realized that we feel comfortable saying Mickey Mouse, and Smokey the Bear because we are used to hearing those names, but if we introduced a new name like "Barney", we could say either "Barney Bat", or "Barney the Bat". I think

the exercise helped with Leviathan's name because the next time we read it in the story several students were able to pronounce it easily and were more aware of the whale's influence on Kio's grandfather.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCERNS

I was concerned about several aspects involving my Thinking Class throughout the year. One was that my students had a great deal of difficulty reading the story itself. I permitted them to read it aloud, and many times they were more preoccupied with having a turn to read rather than what was in the story. In the future, I will start out by reading aloud myself and let the students follow along in the book. The story became fragmented when too much time passed between readings, which meant we spent some time reviewing the story. I also think it might be beneficial to read several episodes at once to give the story continuity.

The sessions would have been improved if I could have videotaped them to review some of the questions and responses. I did use a tape recorder on various occasions and this was better than nothing. Unfortunately, our school has become overcrowded, and there was simply no place to set up the equipment. A little more privacy would have been wonderful, too.

I often felt inadequate for my task and I am certain that I let the children wander from the focus of the exercise for the sake of participation and interest. Sometimes it was difficult to draw the line between what was relevant and what was not and often we had several silly stories to squelch.

Not everyone participated in the sessions as much as I hoped for and others tried to dominate the conversations. Maintaining a balance is difficult and I am sure there is no such group where everyone participates often and equally.

I wanted to finish the story and there were so many exercises it was difficult to choose the most effective ones since I had no previous experience with this novel. Next year I will go a little faster in the novel and in the manual. The exercises on categorizing words were very effective, but many of the terms were unknown to the children. I didn't want to simply tell the children what they were. On the other hand, I didn't want any misunderstandings either. On one occasion, my problem student, Marcus, insisted on placing his word on an inappropriate spot. In order to attempt to clarify the situation, I allowed other students to offer their reasons for his mistake. Marcus could not be swayed, so I permitted a vote. I immediately realized my mistake and never repeated it. We discussed each word, and usually someone had an idea of what the meaning was. If they did not

understand, I would use it in a sentence and that seemed to help a great deal.

I was always concerned about new students coming into the group. They were, for the most part, very uneasy and never really became active participants.

Time was constantly running out too quickly for Thinking Class. It really needs more than thirty minutes twice a week, but then I would not have time to cover the required reading curriculum. Sometimes the thirty-minute period was too long for some of my third graders to sit still on the floor.

ON A POSITIVE NOTE

The exercises involving analyzing and categorizing various terms had a positive impact on my students' writing skills. Their vocabulary made an observable increase in sentences and paragraphs. In addition, the students were more capable of giving reasons for their answers to questions in the reading stories. Their responses to oral questioning often reflected our discussions in Thinking Class. They were careful to defend their answers with facts presented in the story before any conclusions were stated. Other teachers in my grade level commented that children from my Thinking Class often answered questions in social studies and science from a completely different viewpoint than they expected. In math, the Thinking Class students were usually some of the first to complete problem solving activities.

We did not intend to use our time for personal stories and I certainly tried to limit them. It was obvious, in spite of my efforts, that the students appreciated having an adult really listen to them and a great deal of trust existed. We have so little time in our school day to talk *with* our students instead of talking "at" them.

I have decided after several months of using Analytic Teaching in my class that it is not merely an added dimension in the curriculum, it is an "essential element."

Martha J. Hale

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Lipman, Matthew. *Kio and Gus*. Upper Montclair, N.J.: The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 1982.
- Lipman, M., and Sharp, A. M. *Wondering at the World: Instructional Manual to Accompany Kio and Gus*. Lanham, Maryland and London, England: University Press of America, Inc., 1986.