WHAT HARRY DISCOVERED: A REVIEW OF HARRY STOTTLEMEIER'S DISCOVERY

"It probably wouldn't have happened if Harry hadn't fallen asleep in science class that day." So begins the novel Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery. "It" refers to Harry's embarrassing himself by giving a stupid answer to his science teacher's question about comets. But we are all lucky Harry fell asleep that day, or at least that his mind wandered off, because if he hadn't who knows whether the novel would have been written, or whether today we would have the PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN program of Matthew Lipman, of which Harry is the pilot novel that started the program.

The book is not about one discovery, but many: In the novel, Harry and his classmates discover for themselves a multitude of the principles and heuristics of good thinking. A nice feature of the book is that the friends discover the percepts in the course of their everyday thinking, so that student readers--mostly children in the upper elementary or lower middle school grades--immediately see both how thinking skills can be applied in everyday life, and how they can be inferred from everyday life occurrence. This feature of the book, and of the entire PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN program, is an important one, because so many thinking skills programs today are divorced from contract with the real world. In a number of cases, they amount to little more than disguised test-preparation courses. Harry is also a well-written, entertaining book. Students will enjoy reading about Harry and they will be motivated to learn about good thinking.

It is impossible to list all the thinking skills to which children will be exposed through reading the book. An example of one of the skills is the non-reversibility of statements of affirmative universal quantification. Thus, Harry comes to understand that he had been falsely assuming that because all planets revolve about the sun, therefore everything that revolves about the sun must be a planet. In Harry's words, "All planets revolve around sun, therefore everything that revolves about the sun must be a planet." In Harry's words, "All planets revolve about the sun, but not everything that revolves about the sun is a planet." So Harry can generalize that "A sentence can't be reversed. If you put the last part of a sentence first, it'll no longer be true." But Harry soon discovers that he has overgeneralized: Whereas one cannot reverse universal affirmatives, one can reverse universal negatives. It is actually his friend Lisa who points out to him that if no submarines are kangaroo, then it is also the case that no kangaroos are submarines. And on it goes.

Each chapter of Harry involves several important leading ideas. The teacher's manual provides wide-ranging information for how to work with the students, as well as specific exercises for each of the leading ideas. The student activities call upon a number of different kinds of skills, including project work, writing brief papers, solving exercises, and class discussion. As a result, the course is not biased toward a particular type of teacher, namely, one who thinks for him or herself. This is not a program for the teacher who wants to be told exactly what to do and how to do it. The using the teacher as a role model, which is as things should be in a course on thinking. It is a waste of time to have a course on thinking taught by a non-thinking teacher, because the students will role-model what the teacher does, not what he or she says.

Normally, Harry would be most effectively used in separate course on thinking or philosophy. It could also be used as part of another curriculum, such as reading or language arts, but the resources that need to be devoted to the program are of a magnitude that makes a separate course highly desirable. Teachers need to be throughly trained, and other teachers in a school not teaching the course need to be made aware of what is happening in the course, lest they undermine it by teaching in a way that discourages the very thinking skills PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN, in general, and

Harry, in particular, conveys to the students.

This program is among less than a handful of really first-class programs for teaching thinking to children. Moreover, the combination of the Harry novel with other novels in the series allows continuity across grade levels from early elementary school. There have been a number of evaluations of the program, mostly through studies of the effects of using Harry, and the results are generally positive. Thus, a user is likely to get improvements in student thinking skills through the use of Harry.

Users of the novel (or the entire program) ought to be made aware of a few constraints. For one, the program cannot be used without a major commitment of resources. It is not for those who want quick and easy results. For another, the program is highly verbal, in this respect, the opposite of Reuven Feuerstein's INSTRUMENTAL ENRICHMENT. Children with deficient verbal skills may have difficulty with the reading, and hence not be able to get past the words and sentences to the thinking skills involved. The program is also very teacher-sensitive, unlike, say, Edward DeBono's CoRT. An authoritatian or mindless teacher should not attempt to teach PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN. Finally, the program is excellent in teaching the thinking skills that derive from the philosophical tradition. But it is probably not the program to develop creative imagination or figural or spatial skills. In other words, the program is incomplete with respect to the full range of thinking skills one might teach.

With any program such as this, there is a bottom line. For this reviewer, the bottom line is that if she had a child in school who had the opportunity to participate in a thinking skills program, of the programs currently available, this would be her program of choice.

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