

How Analytical Thinking for Children
Came to Texas Wesleyan

One of the highest abilities of a human mind is to think critically and analytically about the world of ideas and to monitor our own processes of thought. This ability is certainly an important basic skill that the schools need to develop. But how? There have been many programs that have had only limited success. Yet we at Wesleyan felt for some time that there must be a way to help our teacher education students develop the ability to teach children the processes of analytical thinking.

The obvious place to look was the field of philosophy. It once was true in the western world that most teachers had a firm grounding in philosophy. Perhaps we should try to recapture a part of that tradition. It was with a great sense of excitement, then, that we learned of the work of Dr. Matthew Lipman. Dr. Lipman had developed and tested a program called "Philosophy for Children" and had been training teachers to implement this.

After investigation, we at Wesleyan felt the program contained great promise. It seemed to us that the benefits of this kind of educational experience would not be confined to the course or subject in which it was taught but would have profound impact on the total teaching-learning endeavor.

A proposal was drawn and presented to the Fleming Foundation, and Mr. and Mrs. Howard Walsh, the foundation's benefactors, generously funded a three year trial of Analytical Thinking for

Children. This was the title by which we identified the program here. The college then approached the Fort Worth Independent District with a proposal to operate a pilot program in two elementary schools to be taught by Dr. Ronald Reed, assistant professor of Education and Philosophy. Dr. Reed would also offer a year-long seminar for teachers at those two schools. The schools chosen were Meadowbrook Elementary School and David K. Sellars Elementary School. The principals and faculty at these schools were very enthusiastic and supportive of the program. The evaluation of the first year of the program has been very positive.

During the second year of the program, a new teacher seminar group has been formed. The teachers who had the seminar the first year are busy implementing the program in their own classes. A formal evaluation has begun, and in subsequent newsletters we will report its results.

Our hopes for Analytical Thinking and Analytical Teaching rest not just on its impact on individual school children, important as this may be. By introducing the idea in our teacher-preparation program and in our new Master of Arts in Education degree, we expect to make an impact on the total instructional style of the teacher. In this way we not only provide the teacher with a valuable instructional tool, but assist the teacher in becoming more reflective and analytical about his total teaching activities. Analytical Thinking and Teaching can then have a ripple effect as it moves through a school or a school system.

Having tried the program with gifted students, heterogeneous groups and children with behavioral problems, we continue to

search for other places to try it. Currently we are exploring implementation in a bilingual-multicultural setting. We look forward to continued expansion.

Joe E. Mitchell