

Philosophy For Children

Word of the inauguration of a newsletter on the program in Analytical Thinking that is based in the School of Education at Texas Wesleyan College is indeed welcome. Knowing the energy and expertise of the two administrators of the program, Dean Joe Mitchell and Professor Ronald Reed, I have no doubts that the newsletter will be a success, and I shall look forward to receiving every issue.

Analytical Thinking, of course, is a program that makes use of the curriculum in philosophy for children developed by the IAPC at Montclair State College. But whether called "analytical thinking" or "philosophy for children," the program has the goal of spurring children into being more reflective, more reasonable, and more creative. In no way does it attempt to borrow the intimidating terminology of traditional philosophy as taught in the colleges and universities; instead, it borrows the ideas - of friendship, of fairness, of consistency, of similarity, of difference - which have always intrigued adult philosophers and makes them available to children. In no way does it attempt to indoctrinate - to push a particular philosophy upon defenseless children; instead, by equipping them with a greater understanding of the role of criteria and reasons in reflection and judgement, it helps them defend themselves against the pressures of indoctrination.

How does it do this? The key component of the program is discussion. Children love to talk, so it seems eminently sensible to harness that energy rather than repress it. The first problem

is to discipline the dialogue so that it involves reasoning rather than the mere giving of opinions. Under the guidance of the teacher, the dialogue becomes increasingly thoughtful and analytical. This should not be surprising to us. When do our minds race most excitedly ahead? When do we seem to be thinking of many different things simultaneously, if not in conversation with others, when we must simultaneously choose our words, consider their implications, seize upon the possible responses of others, anticipate objections, and engage in countless other mental acts? It is the discussion which animates children and motivates them to want to contribute their thoughts to their classmates. And when they are animated by the subject under discussion, they will more willingly read more about it and write about it.

The goal of the program - to produce reflective and creative children - is, therefore, accomplished to the extent to which the classroom is converted into a "community of inquiry." As the children in the class begin to adopt the attitudes and skills of those of their classmates who are successful questioners and inquirers, they begin to reflect and inquire themselves. As they become more self-critical and self-corrective, they are better able to exercise self-discipline and self-control.

I am sure that the newsletter being inaugurated by the College of Education at Texas Wesleyan will bring us news of the day-to-day operation of the program in Texas classrooms, and this will in turn encourage others to experiment with this novel approach to pedagogy. I wish the venture every success.

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