

ANALYTICAL THINKING AND GIFTED STUDENTS

In June, 1980, Texas Wesleyan College hosted twenty-four students of above-average intelligence (ages 10-12) at a two-week seminar in cooperation with the Gifted Students Institute and funded by the Fleming Foundation. The students spent two weeks living in a dormitory on campus and studying intensively Analytical Thinking for Children. The text Lisa by Matthew Lipman was used. A study in ethics and logic, the text was designed for use with children of junior high level (ages 12-14), but was chosen for these younger children because of their advanced intellectual potential. Under the direction of Dr. Ronald Reed, Director of The Program For The Advancement Of Analytical Thinking For Children at Wesleyan, nine teachers worked in study groups daily with the children, using the teacher's manual which accompanies Lisa. Six of the teachers were novices at doing philosophy with children. Three, including myself, were experienced either by having been involved in pilot programs of Analytical Thinking in the Fort Worth Independent School System or by having been trained in the Analytical Thinking course at Texas Wesleyan College. The children were grouped with one experienced and two novice teachers in groups of eight, with Dr. Reed overseeing the seminar by rotating from group to group.

Another teacher and I were among the four adults responsible for the children in the dormitory after the hours of the study sessions. One child came from North Carolina, two others from as far as Laredo and Houston, Texas, while the rest were from areas

within a two-hour drive of Fort Worth. The children were taken on field trips to area tourist attractions in the afternoon and evening hours.

I had studied Analytical Thinking at Texas Wesleyan College, had observed the pilot program in the Ft. Worth system and was delighted to have an opportunity to take part in the program myself. There were many frustrations in trying to do with the children in two weeks what is ideally intended to be done over a semester's or a year's time. Because of the limited time, we often kept the children at sessions doing philosophy for as long as three hours. Often children and/or teachers were tired. Certainly the novice teachers of Analytical Thinking felt sometimes ill-prepared after only a week's training to tackle such large ideas as "What is truth?" "How does one decide the priority of values?" "Is there such a thing as free will?" etc. There were, however, dynamic, offsetting rewards. The children responded enthusiastically not only to examining ethical questions, but to trying their hands at logic as well. It is my view that children of all ages are capable of doing philosophy and looking at ethical questions; they do so daily with or without some adult guidance toward more reasonable approaches to those ideas. These children of exceptional intelligence were especially exciting to work with, as they could quickly grasp ideas and work with the vocabulary of ethics and logic in a very mature way.

In addition to working in study groups in a rather formal fashion, the children then incorporated the ideas they had encountered into creative skits which illustrated the logic and

ethics they had studied in Lisa. The skits were written, designed and acted out by the children and video-taped at the television facilities of the college. At the end of the seminar their parents and friends viewed the surprisingly professional tapes at a closing ceremony.

The teachers met for a week after the children's departures to evaluate the program and their experiences with gifted children and Analytical Thinking.

The objective of the program was to give children a concise introduction into the business of thinking more reasonably and analytically, and I am confident that objective was met.

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