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AUTHOR	Rud, Anthony G., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the work of the Consortium for the Development of Thinking for Learning (CDTL), a committee under the auspices of the University of North Carolina that sought to introduce inservice programs in critical thinking and philosophy for children into the schools of North Carolina through a statewide network of inservice offerings. The paper describes the work of the committee, discusses the role of narrative in teaching for thinking, and comments upon the consortium's work with the National Center for the Paideia Program at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. (Author)

Teaching Thinking for Learning: North Carolina's Statewide Effort

Anthony G. Rua Jr.

The North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching

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I Introduction

I shall begin my presentation to you this morning in a somewhat unusual way, by apologizing. I have just spent a good deal of time sifting through a mountain of material related to the teaching of thinking. Numerous conferences have been convened (and forests consumed) in the past decade to spread theories, programs, and curricular packages on how to improve thinking. The vocabulary itself is staggering. A common enough complaint among school administrators and teachers, when stalked by legion "thinking skills" inservice presenters, is "Is this just another thing to add to my already harried day ?"

Furthermore, you may ask, how might all this be relevant to a conference of "professional" philosophers? Its relevance is indicated in the question I just quoted to you. I need not remind this audience that reflection and dialogue are at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. Nor is it necessary to belabor the fact, obvious to even the most casual and middlebrow reader of newspapers, that education today is in the midst of a massive change. There is evidence available that students do not know very much (Hirsch, 1987), nor are they able to use what knowledge they do have to reason, construct arguments, identify assumptions, and so on: in short, to think (Lipman et al, 1980). Philosophy contains at its heart a sustained examination of what thinking and reasoning is. In the rush to the "basics," with emphasis upon imparting pellets of information and rudimentary skills to students, the powerful and intimate relation between philosophy and education, with us since Socrates, has been concealed. If we are to have students who learn, retain what they know, and use it, then these also must be thoughtful students. The reflection and dialogue at the heart of philosophy is not something more to add to a school day, but is its neglected armature.

II Our Effort in North Carolina

The purpose of this paper is to describe the state wide effort being undertaken in North Carolina to enhance the teaching of thinking in the public schools. I will give a brief description of the state umbrella organization charged with this task. I will then present the rationale for this work. I shall spend

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This paper describes the work of the Consortium for the Development of Thinking for Learning (CDTL), a committee under the auspices of the University of North Carolina that sought to introduce inservice programs in critical thinking and philosophy for children into the schools of North Carolina through a statewide network of inservice offerings. The author describes the work of the committee, discusses the role of narrative in teaching for thinking, and comments upon the consortium's work with the National Center for the Paideia Program at UNC-Chapel Hill.

some time talking about a regional characteristic of thought and discourse that I believe must be taken into account when constructing a program in the South for the enhancement of thinking. Finally, I shall discuss the overall philosophical value of such work, with particular reference to my own work with the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). Whereas our effort is just beginning, I would be most appreciative on any comments on the organization, process, and evaluation of our program.

The Consortium for the Development of Thinking for Learning (CDTL) is an umbrella organization of educational organizations in North Carolina formed in 1986 and charged with the task of developing means of improving students' thinking and aiding teachers in this task. Membership in CDTL reveals a broad group of institutions involved in public instruction: The University of North Carolina, NC Department of Public Instruction, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Office of Rural Education at Western Carolina University, Rural Education Institute in the School of Education at East Carolina University, UNC Center for Public Television, UNC Mathematics and Science Network, Public School Forum of North Carolina, and the NC Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. CDTL is composed of several committees, as follows: 1) a steering committee; 2) working committees for curriculum, delivery, production, and research and evaluation; and 3) an advisory committee. These committees are comprised of representatives from the member organizations as well as teachers, principals, and curriculum specialists representing the eight educational regions in the state, and other interested organizations and community representatives.

The purpose of CDTL is to design, develop, and produce a program that will introduce educators to current concepts regarding the teaching of thinking and that will help educators expand their techniques and strategies for the enhancement of students' thinking. The name "Consortium for the Development of Thinking for Learning" most accurately reflects the nature of the project. Ours is a collaborative effort to provide support for educators to enhance the thinking of students both in and out of school.

What are some of the underlying tenets of our group? We believe that a fundamental goal of education is the development the ability to think. Thinking is that reflective activity that results in life-long learning and the capacity to bring not only skills, but an attitude and passion that Harvey Siegel, in reference to what he calls the "critical spirit" of the critical thinker (1987), says must be brought to bear upon new or unique situations as they arise. It may be a wearisome truism in this year of the bicentennial of the Constitution that the ability to think and reason is of vital importance to the continued development of a democratic society, and that we must prepare students for the demands of the "information age." Beyond this admittedly well worn territory is our belief that it is only

through an emphasis upon thinking, with an enhancement of skills through practice and coaching within the lively context of ideas and subject content, that learning can best occur. We are committed to paying close attention to the interests of students and their teachers, and to making their learning lively and interesting.

For the most part, we have purposely stayed away from the terms "teaching thinking" and "thinking skills" (despite the condensed title of this talk that appears in the program) because we have seen each term become open to misinterpretation. In an effort to garner political support for a statewide program on the enhancement of thinking, we have had to walk a fine line. We have had to pay attention to dark, although ultimately controllable forces of the religious right that raise the question of whether the enhancement of thinking has any place whatsoever in the schools. What is more insidious to our effort is the invitation to school and teacher bashing that the term "teaching thinking" occasions. The term may suggest that students cannot think, and an equally negative corollary that teachers cannot think either. We reject this absurd assertion as unworthy of serious consideration. Some level of thought occurs at all times. Our project is the **enhancement** of thinking, where students have the opportunity to further develop and apply the abilities they already have. We have also found out that the term "teaching thinking" suggests to some people that we are promoting a certain method and content. Again, for political and educational reasons, we have not promoted a particular program over another.

The term "thinking skills" was initially avoided since there was strong objection in our group that it suggested that thinking can be broken down into separate and fragmented bits. Though terms such as memory, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation may be used to describe the major emphasis of a learning activity, it is difficult to imagine an activity in which one of these categories could be used to the exclusion of all others. We have now come to realize that if our effort is to be successful in the many different areas and circumstances we find in our state, we must concentrate upon certain skills, particularly informal logic, for certain groups at the same time as we stress the synthetic and multifaceted qualities of thinking.

Certainly, there has been a great deal of work done already in the area of teaching thinking. There are many fine programs in existence, and CDTL intends to draw from the best of them. It is not the intent of CDTL to "re-create the wheel." However, preliminary review by the Curriculum, Delivery, and Evaluation and Research Committees suggests that many existing programs tend to emphasize one aspect of students' thinking-either critical, creative, or social. The Consortium's initial position is that these aspects do not actually exist in isolation and should be addressed in an integrated manner. In this regard, certain more recent definitions of critical thinking will prove very valuable

to our group. Robert Ennis's definition of critical thinking as "reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and do" (Ennis, 1985, p. 45) combines many of the elements of what we would like to stress in our work. Here, thinking is at once critical, creative, social, and practical. Lipman's approach to thinking through philosophical novels (1980) is very attractive to our group because of the powerful and integrated perspective that the discipline of philosophy provides for all of those engaged in the learning process: students, teachers, and parents.

A further assumption of our group is that the project must have sufficient input from teachers, and that teachers be made to feel that they have ownership of the project. This accords with what has been done in other programs for the teaching of thinking (Lipman et al, 1980), namely that teachers not be coerced into accepting the program, but that they be allowed to determine the direction of the program, and find that it indeed enhances their teaching experience. The staff development program of CDTL emphasizes the ownership of the program by the educators, rather than a top-down mandate that each unit must institute program X. We believe that the staff development program should include modules of written materials, video tapes, and participant interaction. The modules should be constructed so that educators may select those they feel best meet their needs and interests. The modules should present a variety of models, programs, and strategies for the enhancement of students' thinking. They should be developed to emphasize appropriate strategies for various grade levels, various subject areas, and the varying needs of students. Among the opportunities for participant interactions should be sharing, critiques, and a peer support structure. Emphasis should be given to providing opportunities for educators to assess their own teaching strategies, experience various approaches to the development of thinking for learning, and provide feedback for the improvement of the staff development program.

III The South and "Narrative Sequencing"

Even though the development of thinking for learning is a national project, I am particularly attuned to the needs of our region, having recently moved there from the Northeast. I have found, in my work with K-12 teachers, that what linguists have called "narrative sequencing" (Lindfors, 1987, p. 407) is an important aspect of the discourse of most of these Southerners. Smitherman, in describing the characteristics of "black English," has also given a description of what is very common in the South in general:

"Black English speakers will render their general, abstract observations about life, love, people in the form of a concrete narrative...This meandering away from the 'point' takes the listener on episodic journeys and over tributary rhetorical routes, but like the flow of nature's rivers and streams, it all eventually leads back to the source...The story element is so

strong in black communicative dynamics that it pervades general everyday conversation. An ordinary inquiry is likely to elicit an extended narrative response where the abstract point or general message will be couched in concrete story form." (Smitherman, 1977, pp. 147, 148, 161).

Added to this linguistic characteristic is the fact that politeness is still taken as a virtue in the region, particularly among our teachers, where politeness often is just deference to authority (read male) figures. Thus it is not considered polite to argue and marshal evidence in an abrasive manner, particularly if one does not first preface and lard the tough sinews of an argument with folksy anecdotes.

There are several ways in which one could approach this fact of life in the South when one attempts to engage in the development of thinking for learning: one could be ever vigilant toward any attempt to illustrate a point with an extended anecdote, and answer it with something like "I am not asking for an example of this point, please just give me the argument!" or "try not to be personal when you are making your claim that x is y, please just rely on the evidence at hand." I have seen this happen in North Carolina with chilling effect. More often than not, people in the South turn away from the scrappy, pugnacious rationality exemplified by Mortimer Adler and others. At its most disheartening, they see such practice as being just bad manners. What I have attempted to do, in devising programs for teachers, is to work with this "pre-Cartesian" or "pre-Socratic" mode of thought and build from it, while also letting people know that being excessively polite and deferential is not necessary, as long as one's argument, however embellished, is valid. Such an effort involves a great deal more listening by the teacher or mentor to detect the thread of an argument, and the realization that anecdotes about one's extended family in Yancey County does indeed have relevance to the speaker's main point. The speaker is making an argument in a round about way. Perhaps my reading and love of Montaigne helps me in this unfamiliar task. Montaigne's was an allusive intellect, of a kind that exasperates many philosophers. A wide variety of classical and contemporary references find their way into one of his essays, much as seemingly irrelevant anecdotes and stories find their way into an "argument" Southern style.

However, Northerners of all kinds, myself included, have found their way to try to enhance the development of thinking for learning in the South. Running parallel to the work of the Consortium has been the efforts of Mortimer Adler and his Paideia associates in the schools of North Carolina. With its highly centralized education system, North Carolina has begun to adopt some of the practices advocated by Adler over the past five years, and Adler himself has made a number of well-publicized trips to our state. Quite a few schools in the state have implemented the "Wednesday revolution," where time each Wednesday morning is set aside for seminars at each grade level, and a conference given recently at the Principals' Executive Program in

Chapel Hill offered over one hundred school principals a rigorous course in seminar teaching. That conference ended with each principal planning how he or she may implement Adler's ideas.

Because a key member of CDTL is also a Paideia associate who produced a series of videotapes on seminar teaching for the Encyclopedia Britannica, the contact between Adler's own work and ours in CDTL has been intimate. Adler shared his essay "The Latest Educational Manic: Critical Thinking," with our planning group prior to its publication in Education Week (9/17/86, under the title "Why 'Critical Thinking' Programs Won't Work"). It is safe to say that many of Adler's suggestions are valuable, particularly the need to emphasize thinking as a context and information dependent activity (cf. Hirsch, 1987) but that his broadside against critical thinking has been, to use Husserl's term, bracketed by our group. Elsewhere Adler has asserted that the enhanced ability to think and reason garnered by a student in one of his seminars on a "great book" cannot be measured. In one sense, Adler is right; a deepened and philosophical understanding of a text, and through it life itself, goes beyond any crude psychometric measures. On the other hand, state educational organizations must be accountable for where their money is spent; in short, Adler notwithstanding, we must often figure out a way to measure what some may assert is the "immeasurable" with the greatest integrity and respect for the program and its participants.

III Measuring the Immeasurable

One of the initial projects of CDTL has been to review the NC Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument (TPAI) in use in many parts of North Carolina. One of the most formidable stumbling blocks to the development of thinking for learning in our state is this instrument, or to be more precise, the rigid administration of it. While the instrument is based upon extensive research (Holdzcom, 1987), many teachers insist that it stifles their performance and hampers creativity. Even more insidious is the comment by some teachers that the emphasis of the instrument is entirely upon observable data, and not at all upon reflection. We are very concerned that this instrument, as currently constructed and administered, is not sufficiently inclusive of teaching thinking for learning activities.

To give a brief example, the instrument judges a teacher as highly proficient if she "conducts lesson or instructional activity at a brisk pace, slowing presentations when necessary for student understanding but avoiding unnecessary slowdowns" (Revised TPAI, 1986-87). Research on student "wait-time" indicates that in order to think and evaluate, people need to be given more time than a "brisk" pace seems to suggest. Such a pace can force a class to race to "cover" the material, and such practice ignores the value of silence, a crucial aspect of thought noted ever since Plato defined thinking as the mind's silent dialogue with itself. In short, the instrument is so

performance oriented that it suggests that all intellectual work occurs in the classroom where the teacher dispenses pellets of information to the students. Any number of presenters at virtually any critical thinking conference will tirelessly point out the old Platonic truth: thinking can best be fostered through the interplay of dialogue and reflection.

In our attempt to modify the influence of the TPAI, the Consortium has already made some beginning efforts to come up with a design for evaluation and the "measurement" of skills. I use these words with trepidation, but with a sense of necessity, for we must be "accountable." We need to state what we expect young people to be able to do and we need to be able to determine if they can do what is expected. Yet we can assume that we do not yet know a great deal about the measurement of efforts to enhance thinking for learning. It is in this difficult situation that the research and evaluation effort must situate itself. I would like to briefly sketch the thought of our group on this task, and then offer some comments (I am indebted to Roy Forbes for the information in this section).

An initial assumption of our group is that we need to measure student performance using multiple means for a comprehensive approach to the measurement of thinking for learning. We need to gather data about a wide variety of factors that will help us determine the effectiveness of our program. We have mapped out a three part schema by which relevant information needs to be collected (see Appendix). Contextual measures will provide information about the setting in which the program is operating, and whether student performance varies according to environment. Process evaluation measures will be determined by collecting information from administrators, teachers, and students. The most difficult part of the evaluation will be collecting information on student performance. Let us briefly examine the proposed four part schema for the evaluation of student performance.

Despite problems with norm referenced tests such as the California Achievement Test (CAT), the political situation in our state demands that we not disregard this important measure. In like fashion, we plan to attempt to measure some aspects related to thinking skills that can be captured with a criterion-referenced test. We also will use "process/performance" tests to measure thinking ability. Situations can be simulated where students' problem finding and solving skills can be tested, and where students can be observed as they work in groups to see the level of cooperation.

However, a testing approach that may be the most fertile and worthwhile may be a the evaluation of a product. Products produced by a student, working alone or in a group, should be accumulated in a portfolio. While this may be an old suggestion, it is used successfully by artists in all media, including creative writers. It has the advantage of allowing the student to be evaluated over time, and if combined with the "editing" of

a teacher or evaluator, will force the student to think critically and creatively about this product.

The use of all of ..ese methods of evaluation are necessary to get a grasp of the total picture. We need to know about the environment where these practices occur; we need to be able to assess the teachers and to offer them support as they themselves learn how to enhance their thinking; and finally, we need to fully concentrate on what students are learning, and how we can enhance their capacities. All of this needs to be done within a generally supportive, though somewhat delicate, political situation.

IV The One Small Voice of Philosophy

Finally, I would like to discuss the overall philosophical value of this work I serve as the only professionally trained philosopher on this consortium. My colleagues are largely from the field of education, particularly gifted education, and from various branches of the state education department. Of course they are enormously sophisticated and knowledgeable people; yet, I feel obliged to champion a "philosophical" view in our deliberations. I must voice my concerns out of my abiding loyalty to the discipline that I have chosen to pursue, even as I continue my work in the larger field of education and educational policy. It is a small, but powerful voice that tells me to be wary of the shaky epistemology of a "objective" assessment of the factors that ground the evaluation of the teaching of thinking for learning, and of the shockingly blithe disregard for all of what Dilthey has reminded us of concerning what he called the "human sciences."

My view is grounded by the unremarkable belief that the improvement of thinking at all levels is vital to the maintenance of whatever vestige of democracy we may have in this country. Thinkers from Jefferson to Matthew Lipman and Richard Paul in this country have reminded us that a democracy needs a thoughtful and reflective citizenry. One way to start accomplishing this goal beyond what we are presently doing in North Carolina is to focus attention upon the development of a teacher education curriculum that would stress the importance of reflective and reasoned dialogue, both in the classroom and among colleagues.

This particular view of the philosophy of teaching and the importance of the personal and intellectual renewal of teachers is influenced by my work at a remarkable institution, the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). It is the only state supported institute of its kind in the country. We believe that "teaching as a profession implies mastery not only of performance and procedure, but also content and rationale; the teacher is professional in the use of reasoned judgement rather than the display of prescribed behavior... Through the seminars teachers (are) encouraged to recognize that every field has within itself divergent viewpoints on what

constitutes knowledge, and that education is no exception to this generalization" (Oldendorf, Rinnander, and Rud, 1986). Thus, in explaining the multiple paths to knowledge, participants are also able to develop the skills of analytic thinking as they distinguish among various points of view, assessing each viewpoint's strength and weakness, while at the same time seeing that thinking is a also a synthetic activity embodied in an agent. It is in this context that the "critical spirit" (Siegel, 1987) is encouraged. We strive to model for our teachers a passionate commitment to the lively interchange of ideas. It is a sad commentary on teaching in this country that a number of teachers tell us that our seminars are the only places where they have been taken seriously for what they think, and that we have taken the time to listen and argue with them. This listening to a teacher's voice, and the commitment to reasoned dialogue with that person, is no small part of our work at the center and in the Consortium for the Development of Thinking for Learning.

References

I am indebted to my colleagues in CDTL for their support of my work and for their spirited and reasoned discussions over the past year and a half: Dr. James Gallagher, Kenan Professor of Education, UNC-Chapel Hill; Dr. Patricia Weiss, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, UNC-Chapel Hill; Dr. Roy Forbes, CDTL; and Dr. Barbara Chapman, NC Department of Public Instruction. The content of this paper, and any errors, are my own.

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