



Living With the Child

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Note — the situations here described took place in Sta. Barbara, Iloilo under Superintendent Jose Aguilar, whose invitation made these experiences possible.—Author

OFTEN TEACHERS HAVE asked, "What is an experience unit?" "How does one begin?" Many a teacher today, secure in the tradition of his forbears in the teaching profession finds it a very upsetting experience when told by his superiors that he must now use "integration."

Perhaps it would be wiser if we could just drop that word from our academic vocabulary and say instead "Let us just try *living* with children through the most vital experiences we can share with them and see if we and the children will not learn much more about the world we live in and will not also develop the values, the skills, appreciations, and the understandings most needed to help us get along with the people and things that populate this world!

In March 1952 I left my city teaching to spend two weeks in the country and fell heir to a fifth grade classroom of some 47 boys and girls ranging in age from ten to sixteen with the average age around twelve years. I knew nothing about the individual children present. As always, when I face a group of children whom I have never seen before, I was ap-

prehensive. Supposing we could find no common interest? Supposing I should blunder and arouse hostility, or worse still, generate boredom. The anxiety I feel when facing a group of children for the first time generally wears off as soon as things "get going" but I had never been with children in the "province" before and I felt a greater anxiety than usual.

The children were seated at their two seater desks when I entered the room. They looked stiff and proper and seemed very silent. There was a friendly curiosity however that gave me hope.

I took one look at the heavy ugly classroom desks, the "standards" for oral and silent reading framed on either side of the blackboard, at the a b c to z alphabet above and then I looked back at the children.

Real children, alive, flesh-and-blood-Children.—Seeing, hearing and feeling children!

—And then I sat down on the floor, the nice clean floor of that grade V class room and beckoned the children to join me. Down they came pressing in and close together to me. It was hot but they seemed to like being close so I

said, "I've got a song to sing. I've got a terrible voice, but I won't mind if you don't. I love to sing. If you like my song, you can sing it too." Then I sang, "*It could be a wonderful world.*"

I guess they must have like the song because by the time I started to sing it for the second time they were already beginning to pick up the tune with a word here and there and by the fourth round they all seemed to know the three verses and chorus.

I had never seen children learn it that fast before and I expressed my pleasure. One boy had been eating time with such "gusto," I asked him to come and sit by me, so he could lead. He said he didn't know how to sing. "Yes, but you know how to beat time, you don't have to *sing*." He came and then in a low voice asked "what's the time signature?" I looked blank. "Is that important? We'd better ask the others." We did consult the class and one girl said, "It must be $3/4$." We beat out the time and $3/4$ seemed right.

So it was that Santiago who couldn't carry a tune became the leader of our chorus.

When we had finished our song, I chatted with them for a while to discover what they were then working on in school. It seemed that they were trying to find ways of beautifying their homes and had brought to school that day materials for framing the pictures they had collected. (Most of the children had cut the dried stalk of the sugar cane blossom to be used for frames.)

They had evidently discussed a few principles about their work with their teacher previously and

were about ready to go on with the work itself. The picture which they framed would be hung in homes.

While they were talking I kept looking at the empty walls of the classroom, empty except for those "standards" on either side of the blackboard and that alphabet runner. Daring all, I began. "It's nice to have beautiful homes, but just look at this school home we have. We have to live here too, I guess maybe if we could find a way to do something about our room we could also find lots of ways to add to the beauty of our homes. Suppose we look around for a little while and see what we could do here."

"That's how it started. We took down those sacred Standards first of all. After all who can enjoy reading when he has to sit straight in his chair and hold his book in one hand *SO* with the other hand free to turn the pages *SO*. Watch a child when he gets his favorite comic book or a fairy tale. It is more than likely that you will find him lying on the floor, tummy down or in an arm chair with his legs over the arms, or on the porch step elbows on knees with the book between his feet! The child's body settles into its most comfortable position for long but moves in strange ways and poses before he finishes his story. So it was that we were able to enjoy reading periods in school, too!

Before the two weeks were up many changes had come and many learnings had gone on. One of the sweetest outcomes was the statement of Roberto, who when criticizing the hanging of a picture said, "You are hanging that at the "eye level" of an adult but this room belongs to *children*."

One morning the children were discussing reports that were being made in the class and a leader of one of the groups threw out a question to the group then reporting. After some consultation the leader of the reporting group stated that they were sorry but no one of her group knew the answer, whereupon the other group leader answered the question herself. The animosity could be felt and seen in the look on the children's faces. The group leader stood and said very pointedly, "Why did you ask the question if you already knew the answer!" The embarrassment on the other child's face could also be seen and felt. Here was a chance to get at the beauty of school and home which was more than the decoration on the walls but which was in the spirit of the members who lived in that home. So we stopped for a while to think about what had happened and out of the discussion came some new objectives for us to work on.

Beauty in the home also meant happiness of members. Since Febe's information was of much help to the group, it was good that she or any other member of the class should contribute all they could even if they were not involved immediately in the reporting. Why then was our good group feeling disturbed? The children decided that it was the intent of the "questioner" that was important. Did Febe want to put down Linda and her group and show that she and others knew more? Was it to see who was "best" in the class? The old competitive motive in classroom recitation was rearing its ugly head to break the fellowship of cooperative and helpful living. So it came about that the children

decided it would be good for a leader to ask if there were any other suggestions or information that could bring light on the subject under discussion. Furthermore, if any class member had other information that they thought might be of interest to the class they could also contribute their idea by saying, "I have also heard, or read or seen..." Thus consideration for each other in a new understanding of the beauty of cooperative group feeling and living.

Beautifying the room didn't take up our whole day everyday. Many other things were going on at the same time. In an interest inventory all the children had revealed an interest to find out more about the earth they lived on. They revealed wonderings about many of the natural phenomena of their everyday lives.

Where did the earth come from?

What are the planets?

What make the clouds and rain?

What makes wind?

Why do we not fall off the earth?

What causes earthquakes?

What makes the lightning and thunder?

What causes seasons?

What is water?

There were no books available in the school, so we had to try and figure out where we could find the answers. One child suggested the High school library, another, the library of a college in a nearby city and the teacher knew of a USIS center in that same city. Since the children had no way of getting this material, I offered to get the materials together and the next morning came to school with several bundles of books, chosen

not only for the purpose of answering the above, but also to stimulate other kinds of reading as well. There were story books, biographies, fairy tales, and poetry. The books were chosen for *varying* levels of reading ability.

When the children saw me get off the jeepney with the load they ran forward to help. Their eagerness was unmistakable. While the room committee was setting up the room, the library committee set out to arrange the books. The rest of us discussed how we would manage the use of the books considering the small library space we had and the large number of children. At first it was suggested that we line up and get the books one by one, but we decided that would mean a waste of time considering the wide variety of topics we had to look for. Then they suggested I could give them the book for their assignment but most of the children were quick to oppose that suggestion. They were eager to do their own choosing and get a chance to go over more of the books. Another suggested that the library committee arrange the books in such a way that story books could be placed in one corner and the science and other reference books in another place and then group leaders could choose a committee to work with them in finding the books they needed. There were still a few who did not take to this suggestion, however. Finally, they agreed. "We will all go and get the books we want, but we will take turns and not shove or push." "This won over the entire group and that was actually what happened. They all moved toward the library corner but they conducted themselves in helpful ways. Their *feelings* were *good*, therefore in acting as they felt,

they were helpful toward each other. The group feeling was good because individuals were accepting their responsibility as members of a group.

The entire morning was spent in reading and discussing their reading informally with their friends.

The beginnings of reports were taking shape in these "conversations," so that some two days later when actual reports were made they were truly a product of the thinking of the group at work.

During this period, I, as the teacher, went about helping as I was needed. Sometimes I found too difficult material in the hands of the child so I helped him find something more suitable. I noted that others were not as interested in reading the science materials as in reading the story books, which was all right too! They were *reading* in an absorbed manner. Time enough for the other information when reporting went on.

Rogelio discovered, in his reading, an experiment that would help explain the ideas of his group and asked if he could work it out. That was a wonderful suggestion since it would be difficult to understand "the movement of the earth around the sun and the relation of this movement to day and night and the seasons" in terms of words alone. The demonstration would help. His group agreed to bring the necessary materials and to practice so that the group would be able to understand their explanations.

The group working on planets were to make a paper maché relief to scale to show more clearly the relationship of sizes and distances of the planets. When the arithmetic involved stumped them

they asked for Lorenzo, a member of another group to come and help them work out their problem, "because he is the best in arithmetic." Cirilo who had a harder time with reading was excellent in the mechanical problems involved so he was also asked to help.

Some of the children had discovered other things while reading on their problem. They discovered that one could build up a museum based on collections of various materials taken from nature. In one book were pictures of a wonderful collection of colored rocks. We had been planning a walk to the river one afternoon after school, but now we had another reason for going! We could go exploring for specimens for our museum! We added that to our plans for the next day, so that we could prepare what we would take with us when we went out on what was now to be a Field Trip!

One afternoon period when it was time for the children to leave for their physical education class they asked why we couldn't have our own "physical Education." There didn't seem to be any reason why we shouldn't, so, we planned for that too. Playing games was one way. Then I saw the bamboo vase Wenceslao had been working on and I remembered the free rhythms I had seen performed in the Rizal Stadium and I thought of the Kindergarten children's responses and wondered if these ten and twelve year olds would also respond without inhibition. I picked up the bamboo vase and a stick and beat out rhythms — the great steps of giant marching across the earth, the tiny flying steps of fairies, and the uneven secretive movements

of the elves among the bamboo groves. The children responded with hay laughter and full, free rhythmic movements and begged for those rhythms again and again. Those were children who had written once about their fears. Giants, fairies, witches had been first on their lists. This was a chance to play out their fears in rhythm. Having themselves, become giants and elves and fairies took away some of the fear.

Then we wove a story about a little girl lost in the forest with the giants in close pursuit and how the elves hid her in their thicket and then called the fairies to speed her through the air home and how the little lame girl walked again and grew to love the "little people" of mountain and river bank. The children danced and acted out the story with the aid of the bamboo vase." Some time later Roberto made a little poem called "Fairies"

*When you meet a fairy
Do not run away
She will not hurt you
She only wants to play.*

Often when we needed a rest from work or when the afternoon was too hot for activities, we sat under the shade of a tree in the school yard and read fairy tales. One day as I closed the book from which I had been reading I said. "You can make up stories and poems, too, you know. Tonight before you sleep while you lie watching the stars outside your window see what stories and poems will come to you and tomorrow you can tell them to us while we sit here under the tree."

Surely enough, the next afternoon, Santiago began with first, "The Singing Elf," followed by "The Cat's Wonder."

The Singing Elf

*One morning I heard a little elf
singing
When I'm so frightened, I jumped
out of bed
Down in the garden to hear
The little elf singing.
But she ran so fast when she heard
a noise from me
When I heard my mother calling
that breakfast is ready for me.*

The Cat's Wonder

*This is —
the cat that wonders
Every morning
Sitting in a tree to wonder
If where the man is going on.
One Friday morning
She followed the man,
She noticed that the man was go-
ing to market
So she never wondered again.*

The day we went on the field trip to the river, we carried cans, jars, baskets, bolos, and even a pick! We found insects, leaves of fruit trees showing signs of disease, shrimp, fish, crabs, shells and a marvelously varied collection of colored rocks. It was all new territory to me so the children told me the names of trees, they pointed out wild shrubs that were poisonous or scratchy. Some of their stories sounded like a mixture of fact and fancy. Being a "City Teacher" I was inclined to be skeptical. However, I now confess. Noel warned me not to pick an interesting dried flower because inside was a tiny insect that would burrow into my skin and it would be very itchy. I smiled, and picked the flower saying I wasn't afraid. Now some three weeks after that trip I am still scratching a wide area on one arm that still holds a tinge of the red area that city doctors say

was some sort of a fungus. All I can say is, I wish that small insect would stop burrowing!

We had been trying out our new information about, clouds, rain and soil as we walked along. When I stumbled as we were crossing a dried up rice field, Roberto steadied me and said, "This is the surface of the Philippines very rough to walk on." Here was a new kind of appreciation. Francisco looked up and identified the clouds as "Cirrus" and finally as we lazied on the bank of the river and watched the more energetic members of our group building marvelously artistic sand castles for the "giants and fairies," children began throwing out lines here and there which were poetry again both in the appreciation expressed and in the rhythm of the expression.

It was a beautiful afternoon. The experience is one to be remembered and treasured and was summed up in one of the poems made by the group which they called "Happiness"

*Oh how happy we are
On the bank of the river
Making stories and poems
that seem to say
how happy we are.*

In talking over the experience of the two weeks with the supervisor we both expressed our surprise at the ease with which the children had expressed feelings as well as ideas. They were used to working in groups, to planning, to carrying out plans through work experiences, for this was a Community School. Basically, there was a readiness in these children for good group experience. But why was it that these children had been able to express them-

selves so spontaneously and in such a variety of ways during these two weeks? It was beyond the expectations of the supervisor and it was also far beyond anything I had ever experienced in my ways of teaching in the city. I am not an "experienced" teacher of eleven year olds, my experience in teaching has been with the *very* young. I have worked with elementary teachers but had never before that time taught an elementary grade. How was it that good living had been so easily experienced?

The answer I believe lies in the fact that there were no "pressures." My job did not depend on any efficiency rating. I was there for only two weeks. The attitude of co-teachers in no way could place me on the defensive. They had nothing to fear from me so they were not on the defensive either. Set free within myself for achievement of self-determined goals, I could explore many possibilities without self consciousness. The children too, were freed from imposed action other than that which was determined by the goals they set and these were determined by interests and needs of the group of which they were true members. We were participants in shared experiences which built values, appreciations, understandings and skills necessary for good living. Proof was that *life was good*. (might we all, teachers, supervisors, administrators not do well to explore ways of removing "pressures?")

As the supervisor and I were walking across the school grounds, talking, we were joined by a group of the children who walked along with us. I suggested that perhaps the children might have some of

the answers we were seeking as to what made for a good school experience for them.

These were their statements.

"We do not like cruel teachers."

I asked, "What do you mean by cruel teachers?" Note carefully their reply, for it deals not with physical aspects of cruelty but emotional responses.

"Teachers who get angry easily, especially if we are wrong."

"Teachers who say hurting things."

"Teachers whose eyes flash when they look at us."

"We like our teachers to play with us."

"When we are wrong we wish our teachers would explain things to us."

"We want our teachers to be happy so that we can be happy too."

If happier teachers make for happier children, this poses another problem for administrators. Can we bring to our work consideration and appreciation for each other? Can we in our classrooms stretch mind and spirit to take in all of God and man so that we can all live richer and happier lives? *What is there to stop us?*

Analyzing our "Curriculum experiences" it can be seen that we wrote, we read, we gave reports, we solved problems in arithmetic and with people, we explored, experimented, collected, classified, we sang, we exercised, we drew pictures, we took care of our room, we walked with God in His fields and woods. All "subject areas" were involved, but it was not the

hour that decided this but the need. The amount of time varied depending on how much work needed to be done.

There was reality in content for content was related to the understandings of children, it was meaningful for it was in answer to their own questions and it was effective since it found its reason for being in use.

This was possible because the method allowed full interaction within the group to take place. It provided security through affection and the sense of belongingness, it made it possible for each child to feel a sense of achievement through his contribution to the group through a wide variety of media, it made possible mutual respect and consideration for each other which built a sense of self-

esteem allowing one to give fully even as he was given unto.

We are not building children for a good life *tomorrow*. We are discovering ways of making life good *today*, we are not telling children how to live but we are living with children as we ought to live that individual and social goals can be realized in action.

We learn through experiencing. Generalizing from our learnings we are provided with new insights into the problems we daily face. Setting goals in terms of widest possible social good we discover self fulfillment in these social ends and purposes. The teacher who can make it possible for children to move with confidence out into ever widening areas of experiencing can be sure that integration is taking place. *Try living* with children.



Bafflegabb in the Program of Studies*

H. E. PANABAKER

Teachers in Canada are perplexed as to the manner of attaining certain educational objectives that you cannot place your finger on. Aren't teachers in the Philippines bewildered by the same type of "bafflegabb" in the statement of our educational objectives? There is a difference, however, between the Canadian teacher and the teacher in the Philippines. While the bafflegabbed Canadian teacher raises his arms in surrender and looks into the want ad column for new jobs, the Philippine teacher sticks on, pretending that he is not really bafflegabbed.—
EDITOR.

The most serious occupational disease among Alberta teachers today is frustration. The disease has several causes; but among the most serious is bafflegabb in the program of studies, or, to be more

precise, the curriculum guides.

Bafflegabb has been defined as follows: "Multiloquence characterized by consummate interfusion of circumlocution or periphrasis, inscrutability, incognizability, and

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