

PIXIE: Classroom Discussions following Exercises in the Pixie Manual

At the first session, the name Pixie was used as an opener. "The difference between her name and the real name her parents gave her." Discussion plan *Names* was used. All the children felt their names were very important to them. Many had nicknames that I didn't even know about. For example, Trindell was Timmy. Funny though, all through the year I have called him Trindell. I must be the old-fashioned, stiff-as-a-poker teacher in me. Some students in the group would be willing to buy a new name but only a first name. They would never change their last name. A boy with a very feminine first name - Jamie - wanted to change his name legally to Louie (*not* Louis). They reasoned that buying a name is O.K. because movie stars do it. But, it was pointed out that you couldn't take a name belonging to a famous person. That identity was already used. For example, Michael Jackson's name was his; no one else could take it.

Discussion Plan *Stories* was very successful. The children revealed a great deal of knowledge about stories. It was much more than I expected. They identified real and fiction in literature very quickly. Real meant true stories about people, animals, things of the past that happened, accidents, war, and "things that go wrong in nature." A real story can be bad. Bad things can happen to good people. Then the story is not good. Everyone wanted good endings! (Happy is good.)

Fiction was described as stories about unicorns, space creatures, talking animals, and fairy tales. If animals talked in the story, it could not be real because no animal can talk. Then Michael said, "What about a parrot? A story about a talking parrot can be real." Emily answered, "Yes, but a parrot only says words that are repeated to him. He can't think in words." I thought this discussion was incredibly interesting. Favorite stories that everyone loved best were about animals. Next favorites classified as true and good were Bible stories - David and Goliath, the decision of King Solomon when two mothers claimed the baby, and Joseph and the coat of many colors.

At the same time, a story in the Holt reader was very relevant. It was an autobiographical sketch, "Until I Was Ten" by David McCord. The story was a perfect illustration of what is true and real. Then in the Magic Court reader we read a French fairy tale, "Roses and Diamonds." We compared and contrasted the things that were real with the things that were make believe.

Going along with the Discussion Plan - Growth and Developing Abilities I correlated activities about growing up mentally, emotionally, socially, and physically. They saw growth as being able to be better at doing things. They saw that they could implement change in themselves by controlling their feelings, treating others the way they wanted to be treated, and using their minds.

To stress that clear thinking and clear writing go hand in hand, I used the plan, "Does Everything Have a Story?" The students wrote very good compositions about their families. Surprisingly, I received a terrific story, "Does your desk have a story?" Trindell wrote a two page story titled. "The Desk That Went to California."

What is in a zoo? This was well done. Very productive. Students used good reasoning to give well-thought out answers.

Associations - Excellent session involving two Pixie groups. This is a good activity for days before a holiday, wintery days, and hot June days. I must remember this. It was spoiled because Wkenna got personal. When it was her turn, her word was elephant and she said, "Aferdita", the name of a very heavy classmate whose feelings were very hurt by Wkenna's flippancy. The other children playing the game were really shocked by Wkenna's insensitivity. I was very disappointed in Wkenna. I will try it again and see if she can control her anger and be less personal.

Friends - This was very meaningful. I used part of this discussion in the newspaper story I wrote for the *Bergen Evening Record*. That's how much I was impressed.

Good discussions came from plans on pages 23 and 24 of the manual. I adapted a good citizenship lesson from "Do we own our bodies?" We own our books only for one year. Then other children must use them. How do we take care of our books? Respect for books is nothing like it was when I went to school. We held books as almost sacred. Today, most children don't have these values. Books are handled very roughly. Two interesting questions came out of the discussion. "Who owns the North Pole?" "Who owns the South Pole?"

Talking - Most thought-provoking. I want to go over this again in greater depth. Perhaps after Easter Vacation-see what develops.

Teakettle - This has become the No. 1 all around activity. I use it as a reward for good behavior. We use spelling words, new vocabulary words, and words with multiple meanings.

Chapter Two

Stories - Would you rather tell a story or listen to a story? The unanimous response was to tell a story which supports the idea that children would rather talk than listen. They also responded that they would rather make up a story. Animal stories again were tops on their list. The little boy who grew up in a forest where he was cared for by deer was the favorite.

Same and different meanings - This exercise was reproduced. Children read silently and selected an answer. Then the meanings were discussed. Each child justified his or her choice.

Likes and dislikes - Interesting to note all the students always like babies. They give several reasons. They love babies! This surprised me greatly. It was tops on their list followed by movies, sundays, and presents. I thought ice cream would be a winner but since we are doing this activity in cold December, I guess this could make a difference. Still, I know I did not care much about babies one way or another when I was a child. I liked dogs better.

Comparisons was very difficult. I could not get this off the ground. This is another activity I will try after Easter vacation.

Treating a person as a person - This was a very worthwhile

discussion as a lesson in ethics. The key thought was to treat others as you want to be treated. Give others courtesy and consideration of their feelings. Rudeness was undesirable. Being recognized as a person themselves was a strong motivator. Children wanted to explore this in greater depth, but time would not permit this, unfortunately.

Ambiguities – I will go back to this later in the year since the meanings were too sophisticated for this group. The meaning of “nice” was successful. Children copied the exercise and picked relevant meanings (p. 50, manual). Expressions using parts of the body – unsuccessful. These children are deficient in using idiomatic expressions or colloquialisms. They have never heard “eye of the storm,” “lip of the cup,” “neck of the bottle,” etc. The only one they knew was, the announcer said, “Let’s give this little girl a great big *hand*.” I have noticed this through the years that I have been teaching in Paterson. These expressions are usually heard in the home or in the neighborhood. I do not think they are part of the Black experience. And, of course, this is the first exposure to children of Spanish backgrounds. I have used many expressions over the years, and all I get is a blank look. I ask, “Haven’t you ever heard that before?” For example, “Keep your nose clean,” “Don’t stick your neck out,” “Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched,” and “You’re putting the cart before the horse.” I could not believe it, but this year these children have *never* heard of the “Three Blind Mice.” I am not pulling the wool over your eyes!

Sharing – an exceptionally successful plan. I was surprised at the depth of thinking uncovered by “Can you share your body?” The answers were inspiring. Yes, give someone a kidney, a transplanted heart. A blood transfusion. Willing your body to science. And, a fun thought, Frankenstein was made out of body parts. Sharing pain amused me, (perhaps that’s warped). Children said, “Yes, you give someone your cold, or the chicken pox.” Or, you and your friend are holding hands as you run. You fall; your friend falls with you and shares pain. Sharing minds-everyone recognized they were sharing minds at that time during the discussion. They brought out the idea that great minds shared with us through their inventions. Thomas Edison and the lights above our heads seemed important at the moment. This activity could have gone on and on bearing fertile fruit. Hoping-very satisfying plan. Again, there just was not enough time to finish. Most exciting comment was the difference between hoping and believing. Izell said he planted some seeds. If he hoped they would grow they may not grow. But if he believed they would grow they would most certainly grow. I thought this was very astute for a ten year old. The deeper meaning of hope was not understood. Most thought of it as “I hope you have a nice trip.” One day they will understand the abstraction if this beautiful word. Trust was well understood.

What difference does it make? Biggest response came from “I chew gum rather than suck on candies when I’m nervous.” Everyone felt that gum chewing increased nervousness. Some knew that excessive sugar, as in candy, could be a cause of hyperactivity. I took the opportunity to reinforce the school policy of not allowing candy or gum in school. They all felt it was a small sacrifice.

I like the mountains rather than the seashore brought about a discussion of the virtues of the beach versus the mountains. I used this as a writing exercise. Tell why you like the mountains better than the seashore and vice-versa. The results were very entertaining as I read them (good logical reasons). The majority preferred the mountains because they could be cool there; they could take walks through the woods; they could swim in a lake; (that was less frightening than the ocean) and it would be quiet and peaceful. The seashore made them think of hot sand to walk through, rough, wild, ocean water and noise.

They agreed that they liked Christmas but not Thanksgiving. When I asked why, Michael said simply, “Because you eat too much.”

No one felt that a lie could smooth anything over. I could tell this subject must have been well covered at home. I never met such honest, forthright kids!

Right and Wrong- Were you ever right when others thought you were wrong? Were you ever wrong when others thought you were right?

Michael: “I thought I did my math examples right only to find out they were wrong.”

Cleon: “I did something right and I was accused of doing it wrong. I felt I was treated unfairly.”

It was important to be right because it could mean being rewarded. Being wrong produced unhappy feelings.

I extended this as a clarification of values for the whole class. I asked, “Is it ever right to break a school rule or a classroom rule? Why and When? What results when a person breaks rules? Does it make a difference?” Most important factors brought out were trusting each other and treating each other kindly.

Chapter Three

In the Holt reader, Level 13, students compared the boy in the story “The Boy Who Wouldn’t Talk” with Brian. In the story Carlos was a Spanish boy who was overwhelmed by the change in his environment from Puerto Rico to New York City as well as the change from Spanish to English -- strong reasons to stop talking. The students brought more understanding to the reading because they had used their reasoning in Pixie.

Imagine, Wonder, Suppose-Very successful. I cannot imagine having this success in Sept. 83. I wonder how they did it? I suppose they are showing nice development.

Animals in the Zoo-Displayed good knowledge of what belongs in a zoo and what does not.

Accepting help and asking for help. All adamantly declared they should not let anyone copy their homework, or let a friend copy from their paper. Still, I notice a lot of this was going on, covertly, among friends. They do not actually believe they were cheating on classwork. They see it as explaining how to do the work to a friend who is having difficulty “catching on.” The saying goes, two heads are better than one, and who is to dispute it if learning is taking place.

I personally objected to the exercise Getting Even. I just did not like the concept. Too many people have made getting even a passion. *When is something false*- I observed growth

of reasoning ability in this exercise. Good thinking taking place.

We are not making contact with analogies-just hitting the surface just the easy ones that do not take too much probing. Part 11, which were antonyms, caught on.

What the word mind means- Excellent rapport. Each child did well. *Having brothers, sisters, and other relatives*. A rich area. We could spend hours on this. Most felt it was better to be the youngest child because the youngest child gets the most in gifts and attention. Older children have to watch the younger children; they have to do more chores, and they get fewer gifts.

Opinions were split down the middle as far as having all brothers or all sisters. Most thought it would be best if all were the same sex. Except Robin who said, "Half of each would be the best because the boys can clean the yard, shovel the snow, and help the father with his car. The girls can help Mother cleaning, cooking and watching the younger children."

Can a mother be younger than her children? Fun answers. Izell said, "Yes, if the mother was born in leap year."

Emily said, "Yes, if the mother lies about her age. Like if she's really forty and says she's twenty-nine."

All thought it was possible to have a secret twin. They were thinking in terms of a look-alike or mirror image, not a biological twin.

Holidays- First session we talked about the holidays. Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, Father's Day. Hanukkah, and Easter gave very low responses. Students did not know what Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, or Hanukkah meant in terms of a holiday. They wondered what you do on Father's Day. Easter was really a disappointment. They knew nothing of the religious significance of Easter. I am going to work on these holidays and add a few more as a language arts project. I cannot believe how little they know about such events. The only holiday they could talk about knowledgeably was Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday. So it is up to the school to do more teaching for student awareness about holidays. I am going to make a big issue about the remaining holidays such as Easter, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Father's Day. We must do more classroom activities. With the emphasis on basic skills in the classroom. less time is appropriated for enrichment activities, but holidays certainly merit attention.

Chapter Four

Staring- When can you stare at something without being rude? I like the words appropriate and not appropriate. I use them a lot when channeling certain behaviors of the students.

The opinions were: You may stare at a beautiful painting for a long time. You may stare at the model who posed for the painting-but not too long-ten minutes is too long.

It is O.K. to stare at an animal in the zoo especially if you've never seen one of its kind before.

It is O.K. to stare at a baby for as long as you want. I am surprised at how much these kids love babies.

It is not O.K. to stare at a person who is old and wrinkled and ninety-one unless you tell the person you never saw any-

one who was that old before; and you tell the old person you like him.

Being Alone- Time spent alone, having one's privacy was very valuable. There are places you do not want anyone to intrude, the bathroom especially. But, being alone can cause a lot of fear. You hear strange noises; you think somebody is trying to break in to try to harm you. Most of the children were afraid to be left alone.

They all agreed that it was all right for Pixie to want to be alone to cry.

Comparisons- Very easy. I extended it to a class language lesson. Then, to an art lesson where the student drew two pictures such as tall and taller. As a social studies lesson, we discussed a comparison of the North and South just before the Civil War. A lesson in the Holt reading workbook worked along with the theme of comparing. Students had to classify animals according to the number of legs: as two legged, four legged, and having no legs.

Completing Comparisons - Comparisons and comparatives comparatives, superlatives and relationships became written assignments. Students had a firm grasp on these exercises.

Reasons and excuses, Students were very exacting and precise as to whether or not a reason was good. They recognize excuses immediately as compared to reason.

Must stories always be based on first-hand experience? - Most successful language arts projects of the year. Out of twenty-six students, twenty wrote excellent stories. Greatest number selected to write about Leo the Lion; second preference - The Sun Boy; third - The prince and the daffodil, two each of Mimi the maple tree and Misty, the cloud who could not cry. I made a book of copies in case anyone is interested. The stories were read orally by the students to their classmates. I made a bulletin board display.

Dr. Redpath modeled two groups - Mrs. Thomas and mine using same and different meanings. Children were very positive in their responses.

Relationships-- Students made relationships in the classroom such as window shade to window, chalk to blackboard, book to desk, pages to book, eraser to pencil, switch to light, coats to wardrobe, etc.

Part-Whole Relationships- Children said, "If pages are part of a book then. . . If children are part of a class then. . . If crayons are part of a box of crayons then . . ." They transferred the ideas to analogies. Pencil is to paper as crayons are to a box of crayons. If an eraser is part of a pencil then a page is a part of a book. This exercise took a great deal of time and practice before the comparisons became easier.

Figuring Things Out- The children did well but got stuck on "which is colder, water or iron?" They thought that could not be figured out.

Figuring things out for yourself- They wanted to figure everything out. They would seek the answers to all the questions except "How to play the card game Rummy." They wanted someone to show them. They never heard of a U.F.O.

Space and Time Relationships- The group made sentences using the space and time relationship words. They did this handily.

Mind and Analogy- I spent much time trying to work with

the samples in the exercise. It was difficult, like pulling teeth I could not get the idea across to them. They tried very hard but looked blank in response to my prompting. I will have to come back to the exercise on p. 156, 157, and 158.

I found chapter 5 difficult. I could not get the responses I had hoped for. The students were not giving me the attention I needed. This could be a result of the C.A.T. Our schedule was disturbed. The second week was makeup week. This was followed by an emergency flood day. Students were looking forward to Easter vacation. These events may have caused the lack of concentration.

Writing about Pixie and her Alarm Clock- Their sentences displayed good thinking. The girls had not plugged it in at the store to try it out. The alarm did not work. They should have tried it out. Maybe the old clock face lit up at night and the new one did not glow in the dark.

What goes to Sleep- I was surprised at Trindell. He said "the sun went to sleep." I could not believe he said it. He is one of my brightest students. "Yes," he repeated, "when it goes down at night, it does go to sleep." Trindell's mind has been focused on Little League Baseball lately. Cleon, one of the less-gifted students, was very sharp and told him the scientific facts of the earth's rotation. Cleon is gifted in this respect-he can achieve a lot of thinking through talking.

Colors- Again Cleon convinced the group that darkness is the absence of light, causing most things to look like they have no color. Put the light on and you see the color again. They were sure the color does not leave the object at night. They thought snow looks shiny and white even in the dark.

Pixie's Shoes- one of the best sessions in a long time. Many good points were brought out.

1. All four of Pixie's shoes are the same size-Variied opinions but most felt that one pair would be larger than the other.
2. Two of Pixie's shoes are slightly larger than the other two.
3. They could be the same style but most likely were not.
4. They could be the same color but the girls thought not. They want different colors like red, blue, black, brown, and white.
5. They thought the new shoes probably cost more. Everything cost more. Could not tell if Pixie wore sneakers but she probably did. All the shoes did not have to be leather. There is no way to tell.

Analogies in Grammar- They got stuck on "oxen". What are oxen? They did not know. Rooves did not sound right but they did not know. I explained it was an exception to the rule of making plurals of words ending in "f".

Constructing Similes- I was very impressed with their choices. I found them very expressive for such young children.

A young tree in a storm is like
a lonely boy in a dark house.
a lonely baby crying in a lonely crib.

A Christmas without presents is like
a class without any children.
a school without books.
Michael Jackson not being able to sing.

The first star in the evening sky is like
the first person on earth.
the first adventure of light.
a lonely star.
a star without friends.

Rating Analogies- This was a lot of fun. Most judgements were reasonable. One baffled me; they gave a very high rating to "Drinking warm milk in the dark is like eating fish in the snow." I could not understand this. Perhaps memories of infancy when a nursing bottle of warm milk in the dark was very comforting. They thought of Eskimos eating fish in the snow. They thought of looking at fish laying in chipped ice in the supermarket. Because both images gave them great personal satisfaction, they could not see that the statement was not analagous. This kind of thinking is just what we want to eliminate; it is distorted and illogical thinking dependent on emotional gratification.

Analogies that went with "Children without money is like a lake without fish" were made up. The two I liked best were, "Children without money is like pizza without cheese" and "like a hotdog without a roll."

There have been so many wonderful exchanges of ideas among the children. I am reminded of Art Linkletter's book, *Kids Say the Darndest Things*. There is so much humor in what they say.

I will spend the month of June doing exercises from the Review section following Chapter Six. I will use the ones that can be utilized by the whole class since every child has taken part in the program.

Philosophy for Children has been a successful venture, possibly the best thing I have done in all the years I have been teaching. It has been a lot of extra work for me but well worth the effort. I regret that the program was not made a part of the curriculum beginning with first grade and progressing through all the grades. The merits of such a program are unquestionable. Students need this valuable method of stimulating their analytical and critical thinking skills. They need to use logic to solve problems in school and in their daily living.

Annette Berrian