

# **Pixie In Everman**

## **Introduction**

This practicum was conducted with third graders at Ray Elementary School in the Everman School District. The program began with twenty-eight students and finished with twenty-four students. At the end of the year there were eleven girls and thirteen boys participating. Three ethnic groups were represented — Caucasian, Black American, and Mexican American. Two students were in a special program for learning disabilities, and one student was in the gifted and talented program.

The class was conducted for two twenty-minute sessions each week. The material used was *Pixie* and the accompanying manual.

Before the first session the class was given the pre-test in three parts. Later I explained to them that we would be participating in a special program to help us become better thinkers, and that on occasion we would have visitors to observe us. Our basic rules were to raise our hand to speak, listen to others, give a reason for our answer, and not use any “put downs.”

## **Chapter One**

For our first session we moved our desks into a square position. I read the first page of *Pixie* to them. Responses to the question, “What do you know about Pixie from this story?” were good. Shannon said Pixie felt more grown-up than last year, LeAndrea thought Pixie’s remark about vinegar and ice cream was silly, and several children agreed with the comment that Pixie was a funny name. Chris thought Pixie was a boy but no one in the group supported his idea. David argued that Pixie was a girl because only girls can do the splits. Andrew responded that boys can do splits too. Since we were moving away from the original question, we decided to say Pixie was a girl for the time being.

I was pleased with the initial interest and participation. The size of the group presents a discipline problem.

### *Stories*

Several children responded to the question, “How do make believe stories begin?” with: A long time ago, Once upon a time, Once, In the far-away land. Everyone agreed that all stories had beginnings and middles but not always an end. The movie, “The Never-Ending Story” was an exception mentioned. On telling the difference between good stories and stories that aren’t good, Shannon said violence made bad stories. If bad things happened in the story, the children felt it was not a good story. The discussion of stories was not restricted to books only but included movies and television programs. It was brought out that ratings for movies was another way to tell a good story. During this discussion Richy began his response with, “I agree with Melissa...” This was an opportunity for me to encourage agreement and disagreement with each other. I cautioned them to agree or disagree with the statements made and not just with the person. Two good examples mentioned of stories about people

dreaming were “The Wizard of Oz” and “The Never-Ending Story.”

### *Names*

Interest was high initially in this session. The children were eager to share their nicknames and family names. I was surprised how many children used “put-down” names such as stupid and dummy when they talked to themselves. Most of those responding to the question, “If they had a different name would they be a different person?” felt they would be the same because they would talk and do the same things. Melissa felt if her name was LeAndrea she’d be different because she liked that name better. Everyone agreed they would not like to be without a name.

After three sessions some children were not as cooperative in the group. The square formation was not working well with the group size.

### *Growth and Developing Abilities*

Because of continued disruptions by some students I decided to divide the class into two groups, A-O, P-W. The groups would alternate being in the discussion circle. Those not participating that session would have something to do at their seats. The smaller grouping allowed for more participation and better concentration on the topic.

No one said he could feel himself growing but many responded to knowing they were growing. Examples given were the outgrowing of clothes, the measuring in inches, and being able to ride bikes easier. There was much agreement that growth meant they would be able to do more things, bigger things, and better things such as stay up late, drive, and make their own decisions. David was the only one to offer an example of an instance where growth would not be better. He wouldn’t be able to take a short cut home under a fence!

### *Do We Own Our Bodies?*

The class was participating in the discussions on an alternate basis now. It was helpful to divide the class. During the pre-holiday season the group not in discussion was given a holiday fun sheet. This did not encourage participation. I decided to type up the questions I’d be using in discussion and handed them out to the inactive group to answer with pencil. The group was encouraged to give reasons for yes or no answers and most did.

The discussion on ownership was general and not exciting. Most of the children agreed that they owned their books because they bought them, and their beds and homes because they used them. School and personal items differed because of the name stamped on them. The question of ownership of the sun, moon, stars, and earth was settled with the statement that God made them and owned them.

## **Chapter Two**

To begin chapter two we again discussed *Stories*. The group was equally divided on their choice of telling or listening to stories. More preferred to make up their own story and most liked stories about animals best. This session was not very stimulating.

### *Alike and Not Alike*

There was very little substance to this discussion until we reached the comparison of two fingerprints from the same person. Even though the class had been fingerprinted a few days before and knew the purpose was for identification, they believed fingerprints would change because of growth. The session on *Likes and Dislikes* was helpful in encouraging each person to tell why he liked or disliked his choice. They were quite definite in their choice and most of their reasons were logical. Cats were liked because they were soft and cuddly and disliked because they caused allergies, scratched, and made messes.

### *Vocabulary*

We did this exercise as a whole group and it did not go well. They seemed to be uninterested although there were responses to the examples.

### *Sharing*

We had a good discussion on this topic. Several children used their own situations to prove two people can share the same room. Ways to share a book included reading together, loaning a book to a friend, and telling about a book. At first the group did not feel two people could share the same body until Richy mentioned transplants. This was a new idea and most agreed this was a way of sharing. It was brought out that ideas could be shared by telling, writing, and painting. Friends could be shared after they were introduced.

### *What Difference Does It Make?*

Our discussion was shortened by disruptions from the non-participating group. Even though they had a typed copy to complete, they distracted the discussion group. This continues to be a problem. We did cover half of the examples. Eating a donut at breakfast instead of a muffin made no difference but not brushing one's teeth before going to school did. Yuck, bad breath! Going ice skating instead of doing homework might get you in big trouble with parents and teachers. Playing with Adam on his jungle gym rather than with Glenn who wants to go sledding was O.K. if no one's feelings were hurt.

## **Chapter Three**

There have been gradual changes in our discussions. Responses are not as unrelated as they were in the beginning. More children are listening to the answers, agreeing or disagreeing, and adding on to someone else's response. There is less rambling and better concentration on the topic.

### *Contrasts*

This session elicited more responses than the previous one. Andrew and Louis agreed that you didn't have to be sad to be happy. Then Shawna and Richy brought up family experiences of death and said that was sadness and you couldn't be happy all the time. Could the whole world be red? Shaun's answer was definitely no but Barry said it could be painted. Amanda pointed out that you couldn't paint the oceans. No one mentioned the need for green plants. I find I miss opportunities to extend the discussions but have made

notes for next year. Most of the group was in agreement that you have to make mistakes in math to do better. They felt it was part of learning unless you were a genius.

### *Silence*

Super session — good participation by the discussion group and the in-seat group worked quietly. The first question referred to pictures telling us something. Melissa said pictures do tell us things especially with bright colors. Several agreed and used a recent article on painting in our reader as an example. David pointed out that silent movies tell a story. Shannon felt noise and sound meant the same thing by definition because both were not silent. Kevin said in music sound was nice to listen to and noise was rock music. Much support to this idea and many examples were mentioned. Their parents seemed to find a difference too. No one felt silence and peace meant the same. David said peace on earth was different than silence. Kevin said people might want to speak and yet remain silent if they were afraid of what people would think about them. Silence can be full of hate if it follows an argument, silence can be full of love if you see someone after a long time, and silence can be beautiful if it follows seeing something truly beautiful. This session seemed to pull the group together and it was a lively discussion.

### *Talking and Communication*

No one believed animals talk in the sense that people do but everyone had an example of their pet communicating. A baby can tell you what it wants if it can say a few words but otherwise you have to guess. Much agreement that we don't talk the same way to everybody. There's a difference in how we talk to friends our own age and adults.

### *Private Feelings*

At first most agreed that no one could know your feelings better than you do. Shannon disagreed with the statement and felt that someone who lived with you a long time might know your feelings well. There was little response to the question, "How do you know what you think and feel?" but most felt it was easy to know what others think and feel because of their actions, expressions, and what they say. When asked if they could always predict the actions of a person they know well, they said sometimes and sometimes not. Melissa told of the time her sister drew on a wall. She thought her mother would spank her sister but she didn't. They were not too curious in what another child thinks and feels. Most felt they could tell what an animal thought and felt by its expressions and actions. Everyone agreed that an author should tell the private feelings of a character in his story because then the character seemed alive and the reader knew them better.

More listening is taking place and the children are continuing to agree and disagree with one another's statements. There are still a few children in each group who have not participated. At times I have directed the question to them but the response is either yes or no with no follow up. Will continue to encourage everyone to join in the discussion.

### *Accepting Help and Asking for Help*

The group had very definite opinions on these questions. At first most felt you should not help a classmate think up

a topic: for a project or let them see a project you were working on because they'd get a better grade than they'd deserve. When asked if they had ever received such help from parents or friends, most said yes and then qualified their first statement with maybe it would be O.K. sometimes. Most would be willing to explain how to do a project and would let a best friend copy a paper if they had a good reason such as being sick or losing their work. I was most surprised by their response to the question of an aunt selling candy at work for a student to win a contest. No one felt this was wrong or unfair to the others in the contest.

#### *Having Brothers, Sisters, and Other Relatives*

There was no consensus on best position in the family. Oldest children can do more, middle children can play with older or younger children, and youngest children get more toys. Most wanted brothers and sisters but if you could have only one it's best to have what you are. There were mixed opinions on being an only child. Those who had brothers and sisters thought you'd get more things if you were an only child but the "only" children missed having someone to play with all the time. The idea of a year-old baby being someone's uncle was not strange because Chris and Diana had nieces a year or so younger. This discussion encouraged more children to respond.

## **Chapter Four**

Because of continued problems with a divided group, I decided to hold discussions again with the entire class. Everyone remained in his own seat. The quality of our discussions continues to improve.

#### *On Being Alone*

There was general agreement that there were times people wanted to be alone. If you were sad, or mad, or tired you might want to be alone. No one pointed out any difference between wanting to be alone and wanting privacy. Everyone could recall a time they wanted to be alone to cry, but most felt they did not want to be alone to laugh or be happy. Several children thought the best thing about being alone was being able to think better. The worse thing about being alone was that it was too quiet.

#### *Comparisons and Standards*

This discussion plan stimulated the class. There would be no way to judge the size of the first house because there would be no other house to compare it to. Does everything new later become old? was answered with a yes, yet when given a situation of a new TV in a box for ten years, the group was divided as to whether the TV was new or old. Could Pixie ever become older than Miranda? The immediate answer was no. Then Chris said yes, if Miranda died. A lengthy discussion followed as to whether age continued to be counted after death. Some felt it did if it was a member of your family or an important person like George Washington. I continue to be amazed with the turn of our discussions at times.

#### *Excuses and Reasons*

There have been more responses since the whole class is included. Was surprised that Richard answered today.

This was a good exercise to choose an answer and give a reason for the choice. More children are beginning to see exceptions to situations and qualify their answers. Saying you didn't do your homework because your brother took you to the movies does not sound like a good reason. But if your brother doesn't live here and is visiting for only a short time it might be a good reason. Not being able to clean your room on Saturday because of a play rehearsal might be a good reason if you have an important part and that's the only day they can rehearse. Chris mentioned some answers may be reasons and some excuses. This is an idea to explore in another lesson.

#### *When Is It Appropriate to Ask Questions?*

The class liked this exercise. They understood the word appropriate and had very definite opinions. It is not appropriate to ask your mother's new friend how old she is! There was a difference of opinion about asking your grandfather what was in his desk. Some felt that was O.K. because it was family and others felt it was impolite to ask anyone that question.

It has become automatic for many children to follow their answer with a reason. There has been a carry-over to other subjects as well.

## **Conclusion**

While this was a year of trial and error, it was also a year of growth. The discussions in the beginning were merely a presentation of individual viewpoints. During the final two months the discussions became exchanges of ideas related to the topic and often brought forth new ideas to consider.

My goals for the year were to develop a community of inquiry and to help the children think better and express their thoughts more clearly. By the end of the year we were meeting these objectives. There was not participation by the entire group but perhaps this is an unrealistic goal. About half the class participated regularly in each session, a fourth of the class participated occasionally, and there maining fourth participated rarely if at all.

In future sessions I will make some changes. Discipline was a problem the entire year and it may be better to begin with the formal setting of a classroom and move to a more informal setting as we progress with discussion development. I plan to continue introducing a new topic each session but will be more selective on lead questions so we have the opportunity to explore each idea more fully. The goals for this year will continue to be the goals of the program. My personal goal is to develop better listening skills and the ability to note and expand the ideas of the class.

I liked using Analytic Teaching in my classroom and I look forward to another year with a new class and new ideas.

*Marilyn Tweddale*