

PIXIE AND LOOKING FOR MEANING: INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL TO ACCOMPANY "PIXIE"

Matthew Lipman's Pixie
Montclair, New Jersey: First Mountain Foundation
1981 98 pages \$8.00

Matthew Lipman's and Ann Margaret Sharp's Looking for Meaning: Instructional Manual to Accompany "Pixie"
Lanham, Maryland: United Press of America
1982 390 pages \$37.50

Pixie, written by Matthew Lipman and edited by Theresa Smith, is a story designed to inspire elementary school students (approximately third grade reading level) to develop inquiring minds and philosophical reasoning abilities. The accompanying manual, Looking for Meaning by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, is an extensive and thorough program guide to help the teacher lead students in recognizing and understanding the many relationships portrayed in the Pixie text. Not only do the program designers present scenarios for introducing and understanding relationships such as metaphors, similes and analogies, but they also urge the users to develop their own abilities toward clearer, more creative thinking and recognition of ambiguities and relationships and to express themselves more clearly in written and oral presentations.

As the main character Pixie is a lovable, inquisitive, enthusiastic student who incessantly verbalizes her ideas to classmates, her teacher and family. She actively involves the reader in her dialogue as she asks: "How would you feel?" "What do you think?" "How old am I? The same age you are." Finding the solutions to Pixie's fellow story characters. Her narrative, "which is really the story of how my story happened or what happened to make my story happen," is accompanied by Looking for Meaning, the chapter-by-chapter support material that guides the discussion. Lipman and Sharp's manual helps the reader answer such philosophical inquiries as "What's real--only what we can touch? Are relationships real? Is there a right or wrong answer to every question?"

The questioning atmosphere throughout the text envelopes Pixie's classmates as she continues to involve all those within earshot in her relentless questions. Pixie's classmates grow in assertiveness as they recognize, understand and venture to give newly formed, reasoned opinions. The most timid student, Brain, evolves slowly from a non-speaking class member into one who feels secure enough to voice his opinions, first to Pixie and her teacher in private and finally to the entire class during a puppet show, the last episode in the Pixie text.

In conjunction with the problem solving techniques used to satisfy Pixie, this format also shows the change in attitudes and abilities developing within the characters themselves and their sensitivities as they recognize relationships with each other, the world and their own thoughts. Likewise the student using this program has an opportunity to parallel her/his understandings of relationships and sensitivities to others, using Pixie and her experiences as a model.

The text, discussion guides and exercises emphasize an ever-widening development of an atmosphere in which curiosity, creativity and differences are not only accepted but nurtured. Answers are not quickly forthcoming and in some instances left to the reader. Inaccuracies in statements are allowed, hopefully to be detected by the reader. Struggle, sometimes painful, appears as a common component of truly philosophical

thinking.

Just as Pixie and her classmates grow in their ability to communicate more clearly, form opinions after reasoned thought and recognize ambiguities, differences and relationships, the class exposed to this program should likewise develop these attributes. The growth in self-assurance as exemplified by Brian is an obvious model for the student who lacks the ability to express opinions to the entire class. The naturally curious student has a confident model in Pixie.

The learning from guided discussions and shared inquiry employed by Mr. Mulligan, Pixie's teacher, also serves as a model for classroom behavior in which respect for and sensitivity to fellow classmates are not compromised. His methods encourage student involvement as he unobtrusively guides by allowing time for thought and discussion. The students are allowed to wrestle with ideas without his expertise in answering. Discussion, argument and delayed responses to puzzling questions are allowed to simmer and gain momentum as more students feel secure enough to voice their ideas. Often Mr. Mulligan seems to be viewed by his students as a participant rather than a mentor. The unthreatening atmosphere allows for the incubation of curiosity. Thus the natural inquisitiveness of children is allowed to be expressed in a respectful atmosphere. Classmates view classmates' questions and opinions as valid and worthy of investigation.

Ambitiously used, this program could be employed daily in the elementary classroom. Discussion and shared inquiry evolve automatically from short readings in the text. Although divided into chapters, Pixie contains enough material in a single paragraph to sustain lengthy discussion and excite complex questions. Therefore this program would need to be interwoven with other classroom demands. Total absorption of this program could be possible if used for the entire language arts curriculum. Plentiful writing opportunities, comprehension sharpening and oral discussion are available within the program to develop higher level thinking skills and articulate expressive skills. A traditional language arts program would be greatly enhanced by the materials presented in Pixie and Looking for Meaning. However, to depend solely on this program for all vocabulary building and reading experiences, if reading is considered part of the language arts curriculum, would be ignoring the necessity that your readers and thinkers be given as wide a variety of reading experiences as possible. With the skills learned through the Pixie program, ultimately the students will transfer that wealth of new understanding, analytical thinking, recognition of relationships, acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity, revived curiosity and problem solving techniques to other areas across the curriculum.

Although written as a mid-elementary level, the Pixie program could easily be used for students of higher reading levels. At the higher levels the reading itself would do little to extend abilities, but the accompanying discussions and exercises would be sufficient to warrant its use. These same materials at a lower reading level could also be justified if the teacher used the text as material to be read to the students. The accompanying discussions and exercises could be used to excite curiosity and develop understanding within the ability of the age level. No matter how this program can be fitted into the elementary curriculum on a daily basis, weekly, etc., the opportunities to develop student thinking at a higher level and to strengthen self-assurance warrant Pixie's use.

Linda Ruch Knight