

Docia Shares a Story

INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN

Since I am no longer in a classroom every day, I have added other places to my observing-listening list. Markets, department stores, dental and medical offices, airports, restaurants, playgrounds, parks, zoos, banks, buses, libraries, museums, shoe stores, drug stores, and planes provide a wealth of material about how adults talk and interact with young children, carry out routine situations, handle discipline problems, give special attention when needed, and serve as models.



Photograph by Jean Berlfein

Last week, while waiting for a prescription to be filled, I found myself listening to conversations going on between children and mothers in the adjoining toy and game section of the drugstore. The children had one thing in mind — buy something. The parents had the opposite in mind — buy nothing and move out of the section as quickly as possible.

Children said, “I want that one.” “Can I have this one?” “Why can’t I have this?” “Look at this. I don’t have this. Please, please, please.” “I don’t want that. It’s ugly. I want this.”

Parents said, “Not today. Another time.” “It costs too much.” “Put it back.” “I said no and I’m not going to say it again.” “You already have that.” “Don’t even pretend there is something here you want.” “Why don’t you put that down on your birthday wish list?” When I said, “A wish list — what a great idea,” the mother laughed and said, “It wasn’t original. I read it in *Dear Abby*.”

Another incident took place on a plane where my seat mates were a bright, active, verbal, into everything two year old and his mother. It was a late plane so the mother had come well prepared — treats, toys, a cuddly bear, and a soft blanket. She said hopefully, “I’m counting on his sleeping most of the way.” Alas, it was not to be. Everything the mother tried lasted about ten minutes. It wasn’t until 20 minutes before arrival that Randy gave any sign he might be drifting off to dreamland. He slid to the floor, crawled under the seat in front of him, and assumed a sleeping position. The next thing we heard was a startled cry from the woman occupying the seat he was under. It seems he had grabbed the woman’s ankles. Realizing what had happened, she assured Randy and his mother that all was okay. Randy started to scream. His mother tried to comfort him and at the same time get him back on his seat so she could adjust his seat belt. There was a ten minute wait for a gate. Randy, by this time exhausted, fell asleep.

When we left the plane, Randy’s mother had to carry him to the baggage area. It was a long walk. Her face lit up with joy and relief when she saw her husband and was able to put Randy into his outstretched arms. She was so wonderfully patient and caring. I thought she deserved the Purple Heart.

The more I observe, the more keenly aware I am that there is more to young children than is written in child development texts, that children don’t come to school from a vacuum, that children are shaped by experiences other than those they have at school, that everybody benefits when teachers and parents make time to work together.

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