

A Manner of Speaking

by Bonnie Neugebauer

Pedro bounced around the classroom, a cheshire grin stretching his face. He popped under the table, lay over the seat of a chair, ricocheted back to the block corner. As the other children worked and played nearby, Pedro bounced.

It was circle time and each child was asked to select a book, then find a space on the rug and enjoy their book while the group assembled. Pedro peeked, squirmed, smiled, and did not choose a book. As Alida settled down to read a book to the whole group, she pulled Pedro into her lap. How in the world, I wondered, was she going to get Pedro to listen? I felt for this small child with so much energy. As a stranger in the classroom I worried about what impact it might have on everyone to bring him into the group.

Pedro was in motion again, so Alida called to him, "Pedro, come and listen to the story." Pedro did not appear to have heard her as he crawled under the table and poked his head around the rungs of the chair. "Margarita," she called and a look passed between the two teachers. Margarita began talking as she took Pedro by the hand, snapped on his art apron, and led him to the small water table.

She squirted soap into the water and encouraged Pedro to make suds. A plastic duck in her hand was gently covered with suds, and she demonstrated how to blow away the bubbles to find the duck. Margarita spoke slowly, softly, and constantly as she drew Pedro into this peaceful game. As I watched, Pedro relaxed. It was as though all that pent up energy melted away and he could focus. Nearby, children listened to the story; Pablo was joined to them by sound and proximity, but he was not forced to march to the same drummer. Eventually a second child was pulled into the interaction and for many long minutes, almost half an hour, Pablo and his play partner were absorbed in water play and learning.

Beautiful.

