



# The Art of Seeing the Child: A Journey to the Very Innermost Being

By Didi Ananda Anuraga

*I knew Boy was naughty and annoying to everyone, to children and teachers, and that he stole money and that he didn't seem to care about or respect other's feelings. He was branded a difficult student, disturbing the children in the class room and defying rules and regulations. I had experienced him myself when a year earlier I had taught English to his class. I was well aware of his behavior and I had already asked myself why, but I would come to find out that I had not asked deeply enough.*

I just completed NHE 111: Descriptive Inquiry: The Art of Knowing the Child, facilitated by Professor Kathleen Kesson through the new Neohumanist College at Ashville. The purpose of the course, my sixth class in the Teacher Preparation program, was to make a child more visible over several weeks of observations in a variety of settings. I was eager to start this course in the hope of finding out more about Boy.

The first week the observation was aimed at noticing a chosen child's physical presence. I noticed the sloped shoulders of Boy, his slightly forward bent posture and how small he looked among other children. At the end of my first week of observations I concluded with telling myself: "What if I, as I continue to observe him, 'make believe' that he is a very beautiful, funny, playful good little boy that my heart desires to keep close?"

As the weeks passed the boy became more and more near and dear to me. Observing his temperament, I found that he had a quite choleric, extroverted nature that made it difficult for him to see others. He obviously needed persistent, patient guidance to help him calm down and learn to feel other's needs, but he lacked this guidance in an academic environment where connections did not go deeper than rewards and punishment.

When observing his relationships and connections with others I saw a lonely boy who only knew how to connect with others through bullying and annoying. The relationship he had with adults was that of asking them for money and sweets. Boy lived at a children's home, having been abandoned by his mother at four months, and later also by his grandma who raised him for his first 6 years. Everyone along his little life had failed in their duty to show him that there is love and that for someone, he was their dearest gift and their treasure. Despite the lack of affection in his life, I soon learned of his ability to connect with animals when he gave his bed and blanket to the cat while he himself slept on the floor beside the mattress. He was kind to the dogs as well and easily gave them hugs.



Observing his interests made it clear to me that he struggled with focusing. No activity seemed to catch his interest for very long. Boy was on a childhood mission of seeking provisions for unfulfilled needs and it made him restless. Boy was interested in marbles and could play with them alone. One day I opened a cartoon with little Krishna of Vrindavan for him to watch. He soon got entranced with little Krishna. Something grew in him and he spent hours drawing pictures, one after the other.

When it came to observing his thinking and learning processes, it was obvious that he didn't learn well academically. He couldn't read and write yet nor had he learned to understand and communicate with others. It seemed to me that Boy had formed the mental schema of a hostile world where he had not been welcomed, but where he so desperately wanted to belong.

The final observation was to look at Boy's art. In his drawing "The Family" he drew mum, dad and three children where he himself was the tiniest child furthest away from the others. Later he told me that he actually was the child between the mum and dad and I thought "Yes, take your rightful place



Boy. It is your birthright.” In his next drawing, “The Ocean,” he had placed himself as a tiny stick figure at the bottom of the ocean with poisoned snakes coming his way. He had earlier told me that he was afraid of snakes. After watching the cartoon movie of Little Krishna, he became Krishna in his next drawing and placed himself on the top of the hill while the mighty snake bowed down to him. (To conquer the mighty snake who brought havoc on the village of Vrindavan was one of little Krishna’s childhood victories). Other drawings he made were one of Jesus, then Buddha and several pictures with children happily playing together. In Boy’s art, I saw no signs of violence, aggression or evil. Just the opposite, his pictures showed a fearful boy who lacked confidence but possessed a hidden resilience to overcome his obstacles and find his way to belonging and feeling a sense of self-worth.



Neohumanist teachers have an important responsibility to guide students on their journeys of self-development and personal evolution. To do this requires genuine attunement to their inner nature. I have learned that understanding the deeper nature of the child requires patience, careful observation and thoughtful reflection on the observational “data” we gather. In my experience intuition begins by sincerely wanting to know the child. By observing, interacting and diving into our own feelings to connect with the child, our intuition evolves. Our awareness of how the deeper child thinks and feels emerges, and in better understanding the essence of the child, we might become more effective teachers and guides for the children in our care.

---