

## Learn As You Play, Play As You Learn

Being born into a family of irrepressibly animated individuals definitely has its perks. My colorful, fun-filled childhood revolved around the idea of “play” as a learning tool. What made it even more special was that grandparents, parents, tias and titos, and cousins were all involved. My experiences as a child growing up with the Aldaba-Lims have enriched my memory bank from which I have been able to withdraw and share with a group of children at Explorations Preschool.

I remember the tea parties at Tita Nina’s. My cousins and I would select the tea set, prepare ham-and-cheese sandwiches, and spread out my cousin Tanya’s Barbie dolls on the dining table. After eating, we would either swim or run around the garden whenever the sprinkler was turned on. After a quick shower, we would have merienda followed by playing “Let’s Pretend.” We would transform the TV room into a castle or a jungle and each of us would assume the role of prince/princess or explorer/big game hunter. Many times some of our tias or titos would crawl into our makeshift playhouse and play alongside us. It’s amazing how we managed to play “pretend” sans the toys and gadgets today’s generation of children depend on.

There was never a dull moment at the dining table during Sunday lunches. Those occasions provided everyone, both young and old, an excellent abdominal work-out because of all the laughter, rolling on the floor, and engaging in all manner of sit-ups, and crunches.

Christmas was an especially joyful celebration of merriment and good cheer. My three aunts (Cheche, Nina, and Patty) would dance to the strains of “Oh we’re going to a hukilau, huki, huki, huki, huki, hukilau” much to our amusement and delight. Not to be outdone, consenting male members of the family (Bertie, Louie, and Ricky) had everyone in stitches singing and acting out the words of “I’m A Little Teapot.” It’s not only kids who know how to have fun after all.

Looking back at these fond memories brought a smile to my face as I participated in the brainstorming session for the first ever Playgroup at Explorations Preschool in which I am a teacher. Our team of four was encouraged to look beyond the modern materials provided in our classrooms in order to appreciate what we once did as children. My own childhood experiences served me well as a playgroup provider for our nine preschoolers.

Forgetting the use of imported or teacher-made materials was a challenge we were ready to face. Leaving behind the structured method of imparting math, literacy, and science was our new goal. I soon realized that the simple things I did with my family could be replicated into simple but creative activities for our preschoolers.

For five days, Aiza, Mark, Mocs and I were free to explore the cabinets of our teachers’ lounge which contained the hidden treasures of our past. We unearthed pistachio shells, colorful rice grains, straws, buttons, feathers, clothespins, tetra packs and tissue paper rolls. These materials reminded me of my preschool art days when I was free to make anything with the objects set before me. We laid out board games and an array of paintbrushes, paint, sponges and glue.

Sand, water play materials, and smocks were also made available. A tent was set up by the book area so that kids could walk in and out, dragging the materials they needed from one place to another. Pots, pans, rolling pins and cupcake molds were stacked in one corner of the room with clay ready to be molded on the side.

Once the children set foot in their classroom, we allowed them the freedom to choose where they wanted to go and which materials to use. The older students enjoyed jumping over and walking under the garter which their teachers once used for the game "10, 20". We made sure to have highlights for each outdoors session. We played hide and seek, created a treasure hunt with stuffed toys and made humongous bubbles with the water table.

The crowd-pleaser and hands-down favorite for both children and teachers alike was the "Water day" held in Explorations quaint garden. A kiddie swimming pool was sprawled on the grass with buckets, sponges, and spray bottles laid out everywhere. We all enjoyed splashing water on each other and helping the grass grow at the same time.

For five short days, I re-lived my happy childhood. Each day, I was tickled pink by the nostalgia of a once happy preschooler today blessed with the gift of sharing with her students her very own experiences of happy, fun-filled hours of playing and learning.

The Playgroup inspired me not only as a teacher but also as a cousin, a tita, and a future mother. As a child, I was taught that there is a time to work and a time to play. And the child in me remembers that we must all be able to laugh, savor the moment, and nurture the experiences of one's happy childhood.