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Looking for an answer to what education is all about, I explored an educational system outside the US. I chose a public elementary school in Nassau, the Bahamas, after reading about its approach to education. After several phone calls, I was accepted to observe and participate for a day at the Gerald Cash Primary School in Flamingo Gardens.

Upon my arrival, I was greeted with warmth and openheartedness by Principal Lorraine Lightbourne who introduced me to Tracy Jones, whose second-grade class I would be observing. Ms. Lightbourne and Ms. Jones had many questions about our educational system. We shared what we found works best with children.

I observed the children at the Cash School using many of the same reading materials as in this country, but some things are different. When I entered Ms. Jones' classroom of 27 children, they all respectfully stood in their cheerful red-and-white-plaid uniforms and said together, "Good Morning Professor Cohen." Their welcoming smiles made me feel instantly at home. Handwriting is taught using a traditional, DeNelian method. Dates are written with the day first, followed by the month and year (e.g., 30 June 2004).

What makes the schools in the Bahamas particularly distinctive is their incorporation of song and dance in most lessons. Grammar, learning about nouns and adjectives, is taught this way. First, the class worked collaboratively to spell words. Answers were given in full sentences, both verbally and in writing. After the children repeated definitions of different parts of speech, they stood up and turned to a partner. They then crisscrossed their hands to dance and sing a song that incorporated the grammar lesson. The words are developed by the teacher. To the tune of Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush, children sang about adjectives being "describing words" that define nouns.

To reinforce the grammar lesson, Ms. Jones used some visualization techniques. She asked the class to imagine they were in Disney World. Using the voices of Mickey and Minnie Mouse, she would say such things as "We saw big trees," or "It is a sunny day in Disney World." She would then ask the children to identify the adjective and nouns in each sentence. The children laughed and enjoyed every moment of the lesson, which they viewed more as a game. Then they would

An Outstanding Approach To Learning



Tracy Jones' second-grade class at the Gerald Cash Primary School, Nassau, the Bahamas.

dance with a partner and sing the answer to questions such as "What is an adjective?"

Dancing and singing reinforced learning not only in grammar, but also in math, social studies, and science. In math, rap music was used for learning the times tables. It was exciting for me to see a method employed that I had previously written about in a paper titled "Children Learn with Color and Expression."

Children looked forward to learning new songs and were excited about coming to school. Ms. Jones explained that children learn kinesthetically, through such sensory experiences as singing and dancing. The simple kinetic act of having children clap for each other when their papers are stamped with a star fosters self-esteem, the key to learning.

Computer learning is also employed at the school. Ms. Jones would write a sentence that was projected onto a board. Children would come up, in turn, to underline the adjective and circle the noun in the sentence. This provided a visual and tactile approach to learning. Cultural experiences, such as class visits to local museums and zoos, provided children with opportunities to write about their experiences.

Art and its integration into academic areas is a part of the curriculum. Children are also encouraged to explore diverse topics for as long as their interest continues, sometimes over a period of several months, to increase their awareness and creativity.

Another philosophy of the school is allowing children the opportunity to experience nature. A practical application of

this could be seen when they visited the school pond, made by parents and children. Children were encouraged to ask questions about the fish (who frequently hid under the rocks in the pond), to write poetry about what they saw, and to take the time to observe and meditate.

At a graduate-level methods course I am currently teaching at the C.W. Post Campus, Long Island University, I have been sharing my Cash School experiences with my students, many of whom are teachers. Several have started using the song-and-dance approach in their classrooms. They found that their children are more eager to learn and that those who previously lacked an interest in learning have developed a desire to learn and sing a new song. Improved test scores validated the new song-and-dance approach.

After my return from the Bahamas, a pen pal program was established between Ms. Jones' class and Sandra Kaufman's second-grade class at Great Neck's J.F. Kennedy School. Letters written by the children in Ms. Kaufman's class are now on their way to the Cash School answering the many questions asked about American schools. The Kennedy children are eagerly awaiting replies from the Bahamas.

My experience at the Cash School proved to me that the song-and-dance approach is an outstanding one that fosters the love of learning. It reinforced my belief that song and music offer a wonderful approach to learning with enjoyment and enthusiasm. My hope is that this teaching method will become an integral part of American education.