

## 2008 UF COE Writing Contest Entry

*(This is one of 27 entries submitted in the College's recent writing contest on the topic of "What's Good in Education?". Visit the [writing contest home page](#) for links to other entries, including the winning one.)*

# WHAT'S GOOD IN EDUCATION?

## *Paper finger rings with a marker smiley face*

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**A**t the beginning of the school year, in a "normal" gifted classroom of predominantly intellectual, academically aggressive, and somewhat opinionated and outspoken thinkers, the shy and more introverted children sit back and observe their surroundings, only offering an answer or opinion occasionally, or when called upon. This was true for J.C., one of my third-grade gifted students, until about three months into the academic year.

It was a Tuesday morning in November, my co-teacher and I were approached during our 20 minute indoor recess period (we have building construction happening on school grounds) by a pair of smiling eyes, hidden behind a thick pair of eyeglasses. J.C. sauntered up to us in a newly confident fashion and stuck out his right index finger.

"Look", he offered us, "this is my friend and he's happy".

Peering down on his tiny digit was a pink scrap of construction paper that he saved from our pop-up book project of The Secret Garden. Two tiny slits were cut at the edges of the paper and then carefully joined, wrapped around his little finger. Delicately displayed on the top of this bright "ring" were two black dots for eyes and a short upturned dash to form a smile. My colleague and eye looked at each other quizzically, but knew that J.C. was finally feeling comfortable and in his element in our class.

It is now February. I haven't noticed a self-made happy ring on J.C.'s finger since November. I remark to myself that J.C. has been out with several medical absences over this past month alone. He seems more withdrawn than usual and is not

completing class assignments. In sync with my recent observations, his mother asks for a teacher conference and explains...

"J.C. could be your typically diagnosed Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) student case but for one thing, he battles with an additional medical problem. Because of the medicine needed to control the ADD, J.C.'s pituitary gland is malfunctioning and he has not grown this school year. The doctors here in America can't seem to find something to work for him and I don't want to keep him in the hospitals any longer than necessary at his age. I will try to take him back to Venezuela over the summer to not miss anymore school and see what other doctors recommend. It just doesn't seem fair."

Her eyes well up. We conclude our meeting. I mentally decide that support, encouragement, and understanding will be present in his school environment as much as possible.

A month has passed. J.C.'s ability to tend to his responsibilities as a student, as well as managing his daily medical issues, deems my feelings of compassion and empathy appropriate.

Tuesday, March 4, recess period. I look up from the tedious papers that I am grading because of the odd feeling that someone is staring at me, it's J.C. He is twisting something blue around his finger. He directs his stare at the smiley face paper ring made of a folded up Post-it and then up again at me. I don't say anything, just smile...

This is what's still good in education.

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[Back to Writing Contest home page](#)