



## When Good Boys Go Bad and Bad Boys Go Good

A room full of eleven year old boys. What pops into your head when you hear those words?

Here are some thoughts of one of the Linaca Public School teachers about her class. Hooligans. Completely out of control. Failures. Incurrable. Bad examples. Suspended. On the brink of expulsion.

And here is what I thought about a room full of 11-year-old boys in our center a couple of weeks ago. Pranksters. Maintaining control. Leaders. Teachable. Full of beans but not uncorrectable. Enthusiastic and always ready for more.

The accounts above of two groups of 11-

year-old boys could not possibly be in sharper contrast. The public school teacher's nightmare scenario bears little resemblance to the 11-year-olds I observed in our center, calmly doing their homework. Yet they are one in the same.

Several weeks ago the public school teacher threw these boys out of class and asked our center teachers to straighten them out or they would all be permanently expelled. Something seemed very amiss from the report the teacher gave to what I witness every month with these same kids.

So, what accounts for the dramatic difference in demeanor between the rogues that bedevil their 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and the normal antics of pre-pubescent little rascals at our center?

Sitting down with the group of buggers, I picked their brains about what was going on. Were they really as bad as their teacher reported to our staff? Quite cheerfully, they admitted it was true. Thanking them for their honesty, while letting them know this was nothing to be so proud of, we began to search out the reasons for their daily wildings.

From what I could gather, the teacher's class was interminably boring. This is no surprise given the curriculum that Honduran Public Schools foist upon their students. I remember sitting in on a 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Art Class in Linaca a few years back. They were studying Impressionism. Now that impressed me! Until I realized that the teacher was reading

from something that sounded like an encyclopedia.

Her lecture went something like this –

*“Characteristics of Impressionist paintings include relatively small, thin, yet visible brush strokes; open; emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities; common, ordinary subject matter; the inclusion of movement as a crucial element of human perception and experience; and unusual visual angles...”*

The children were scribbling notes as fast as their little fingers would fly. The teacher never looked up, droning on in a monotone that would have either put me to sleep or driven me straight up the wall into my own personal wilding. Nowhere in the room was there a book, much less a picture of Impressionist art! Dictating the phone book would have been just as educational and likely more interesting.

That was horrifying to say the least, until I went next door into the sewing class, where the same scene was repeated. Dictation, dictation, dictation. Nowhere was a needle, a piece of thread, a pattern nor God forbid a real sewing machine!

Remembering this foray into the world of Honduran education, the probing continued. “So you are bored out of your minds at school. But why is it, that doing that same ridiculous homework, you are able to behave here in the center?”

Before another young boy is lost to bad examples of leadership, we sense ever more keenly our opportunity to take these wonderful children and make them into leaders for good – in our center, in their schools, and one day in their country.



“Because we like it here,” was about the best response they could come up with at the time. Upon digging deeper, it all goes back to the L word discussed in our last newsletter and so many others. These kids feel loved and cared for in our center.

They love and respect our teachers because our teachers love and respect them. It is one of the first things we teach all of the kids who come to be with us. We ask them what is their purpose in life. Few, if any, have ever had a response the first time they are asked this fundamental question.

So I asked the boys what our purpose is. They answered, “Our purpose is to learn to love God and others as we love ourselves.” Then the light bulb went on – the boys got it. They admitted they had no love for their public school teacher. Their focus needed to shift. The boys should treat that teacher the way they wanted to be treated – whether they thought she deserved it or not...

In any group of people, on average, about 10% will rise to the top as leaders. But in this group of boys, the ratio was quite different. A good 60% of these boys have leadership potential. I asked them if they

thought of themselves as leaders. They weren’t quite sure, but they all wanted to be one. “OK, great! So do you want to be good leaders or bad leaders – because people will follow a leader whether they are doing good things or bad things.”

Up to that point the boys had all been leaning on the table with their faces really close to mine as we talked. After telling them that, they all got very somber and sat back in their seats. Some of their mouths dropped open. It had not occurred to them that they were in fact leaders until the question was posed. Further, they had never thought about being a bad leader and having people follow their bad examples.

Expecting them to act like little imps and pull my leg with an answer about being bad, not one of them did. It was then I realized *the tyranny of low expectations* had grabbed me once again. It was sad that I had not thought more of the reasoning power of these young boys, or their ability to be serious. They actually processed the information and answered with sincerity.

Each said he wanted to be a leader for good. Then they got rather stoked about the idea that they could actually be leaders for good. Telling them how proud I was of their decision, they seemed pretty pleased with themselves.

A bit later in the day I announced to this group that I was looking to expand my family and asked them how many of them wanted to be my boys. Again they surprised me. Not only did every hand shoot up but they ran for a clean piece of paper so that each one of my new sons’ entire name could be noted. They hovered over me like kids who were about to get a Christmas present, squealing with delight and bumping fists as each name was recorded. The picture on the front page of the newsletter are the boys after their “adoption”.

All of this happened on a Friday. Upon

returning to the center the following Monday, the little clan was back in the library at the center working diligently. Asking where “my new sons” were and how they were behaving in school, I was swarmed with hugs and a torrent of stories. It turned out that the boys had an exceptional day in school and each one had earned a very high grade!

Of course, our team was all thrilled at this news. But we are not naive. These boys are going to need a lot of follow up and reinforcement to stay the course. Yet what a great encouragement it is to see the difference love, attention and solid instruction can make.

While we have an over-abundant crop of female leaders, not surprising given the matriarchal society Honduras has become, we have far less male leaders under our purview. Much of this is due to illegal immigration on the part of the men to find jobs in the United States. But most of this has to do with the breakdown of the family unit in Honduras. The few boys that do have fathers in their lives, have seen a rather dreadful example of what it means to be a man, much less a responsible father.



Before another young boy is lost to bad examples of leadership, we sense ever more keenly our opportunity to take these wonderful children and make them into leaders for good - in our center, in their schools, and one day in their country. Together, we have the opportunity to help make that happen every day.

#### SO CLOSE TO FINISHING THE MATCHING GRANT!

We are so close to finishing the \$20,000 matching grant for the children’s center. To get another we must finish this one! Our most pressing needs are funds to run the center and our teen scholarships \$50 per month, per teen. This covers bus service, uniforms, books, and matriculation fees. In return our teens give 10 hours of service a week, tutoring children in the center, and doing a variety of community projects services. The example of our teens inspire so many in and outside of Honduras.

#### A NOTE ABOUT DESIGNATED GIVING

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