



Helpless in a helpful way...

I observed an elementary school teacher engage her students. The students were looking at multiple ways the number 12 could be represented: arrays, multiplication, repeated addition. "Goodness," she said in a helpless tone, "How do I know if I have 12 items?"

As the children explained their methods, she would listen and ask more questions. As the students "helped" the teacher, understanding grew in the class as one candle might light the next. Not only was the room aglow with understanding of multiple models, the young mathematicians were on fire to know and share more!

Recently, I came across an old wood working tool of my grandfather's. He, a carpenter, would have me, a hapless pre-teen, cut a piece of wood for him to place into a project he would be working on. Making himself busy with some other task in the shop, I would be left intently working at this poor piece of wood until there was a product. My cuts were not so good but he would insist that I do them. We would measure my work. He'd ask me if it fit properly and if I could see a way that it could be done better.

At the time it took a lot of patience on my part because often I would return to the saw to improve on the cut several times!! Finally producing the correct cut, I would proudly present it to him and it would become a piece of the cabinet.

Only now do I realize that **he** was the patient one, he could have been done much more quickly with the cabinet without my help! But I was the product he was building ... much more so than the cabinet.

It occurs to me, more and more as I grow older, that it is often a blessing to be engaged in productive struggle. To be honest, when I am in the midst of the struggle, I don't much like it! However, I am ultimately better for it.

How lucky are we to have people in our lives who are helpless in a helpful way?

Happy Maths,
(Go Braves!)
Peter



"My first grade teacher, Mrs. Peabody, will be handing out detention slips to anyone who talks during my presentation."