

Fishin' with Charlie

The sun was warm and the fish were biting on a recent Saturday afternoon. My husband and I took our three-year-old grandson Charlie to a local pond to drown some worms.

The outing was magical. Fishing with Charlie reminded me about how compelled children are for their own learning. Not a moment was lost as he plunged himself into this opportunity (although thankfully not the pond). In my mind, I began to tick off all that Charlie learned on that simple adventure.

Motor skills: Charlie spent much of the afternoon clambering up and down the bank. He figured out how to use tree roots to gain purchase on an otherwise slippery slope. He honed his fine motor skills by turning the reel on his fishing rod. In fact, he loved this exercise so much that we were pretty much constantly casting and reeling in all afternoon.

Language: Charlie learned some new words he had never heard before, starting with “hook,” “line,” and “sinker.” He learned about whispering and using his softer voice so as to not scare the fish. And we listened together to the splashes and quacks of the pond’s residents.

Respect for nature: Charlie learned appreciation for life in many of its forms including the neighboring ducks and the value of each fish’s life as we caught and gently released each one. He learned that worms aren’t really gross and that fish scales have a lovely, smooth feel.

Patience: Like all fishermen, Charlie faced the humbling reality that we had to wait for the fish to bite. Neither he nor we could make it happen any faster. His having to wait was not a disciplinary measure on our part, but rather simply a taste of how the world works.

And while all of this learning is critical, it pales in comparison to what he learned from spending time with adults who love him on a quiet, peaceful afternoon.

Charlie wasn’t the only one learning. His grandpa and I learned something really important, too. In this affluent age, grownups often show their love to children by spending money on them. We buy clothes and lessons and tickets and technology and classes in an attempt to give our children and grandchildren every advantage.

And yet, the gift of a shared experience gives children those things without the need to spend money. Our time together forms the building material for our loving relationships—the real heritage children carry into their futures.

So will we stop buying things for our grandchildren? Certainly not. But we will remember that one of our best afternoons ever was supplied by a three-dollar tub of worms and some eager bluegill.