



Learn about LEARNING

Give your students the power to take control over their education—teach them to learn *how to learn!* Read more about the principles of metacognition.

BY INES C. BAUTISTA



Have you ever stopped to think about *how* you read? Try reading this: **Aoccdnrng to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mtttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the only iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.**

Isn't that amazing? This paragraph has been circulating through e-mail for quite a while, but each time I read it, I'm surprised at how little I know about my own reading processes. If you're like me, you probably haven't paused to analyze how your mind works as you read. But imagine how much more control you'll have over the way you read—or do anything for that matter—if you knew how your mind worked.

Metacognition: Empowered Learning

This is the idea behind “metacognition.” If you can think about how you learn, you'll be able to better control it. Be aware of how you read and learn, then use this to your advantage.

Imagine transferring this kind of power to your students. If they knew how their minds worked while studying, wouldn't they be better equipped to learn? Teaching students to reflect on their thinking and reading processes puts them in charge. They will be able to identify their weaknesses *and* find ways to correct these and enrich their knowledge. Also, the responsibility of learning will be in their hands instead of solely weighing on the teachers' shoulders. Students, instead of feeling frustrated because they can't understand what they're reading, won't just stare dumbly into space. They will be able to do something about it on their own.

Metacognition Strategies:

Equip your pupils with these skills so that they can learn to learn.

- **Inferencing** – making predictions and forming conclusions from information given in the story.
- **Identifying important information** – not all details are relevant. Students must learn to find and focus on what's important.
- **Monitoring** – as they read, students should be aware of what they do and don't understand. It is best that they check themselves after every paragraph of a story.
- **Generating questions** – as they monitor themselves, they must be able to come up with their own questions about the story. This will show their active comprehension.
- **Summarizing** – students must be able to give a general idea of what a story is about after reading it.
- **Making connections** – as the students read, they will be able to relate the story to their own experiences or those of others. This will prove that they fully understood the story.

Metacognition, noun
Awareness and understanding one's thinking and cognitive processes; thinking about thinking.

"Meta" is the Greek word for after or beyond. "Cognition" comes from the Latin "cognitio," which means knowing.

The goal of metacognitive learning is to encourage students to adopt an *attitude of purpose and inquiry*. They will be proactive in searching for answers to questions that come up as they study. In the end, you will have students who will want to learn more and who will actually take control of this need. Sounds too good to be true? Let's try it out!

Be Aware

The first step to metacognitive learning is to make your students think about how they learn. Be clear about your objectives from the start.

1. Looking Inside

Ask your pupils to reflect on how they read. Ask them to read a simple story then answer the following questions (you might even want to answer these questions yourself):

- How do I read?
- What do I do when I can't understand something?
- What kind of reader am I?

2. Sharing Ideas

Have them tell the class what they have discovered about themselves. You can ask them to present this in a fun, creative way like through a drawing or a skit. Then, you can discuss the questions as a class.

3. Probing Deeper

After your students are paying more attention to how they read, tell them that you want them to investigate further by answering these:

- How can you tell that you were able to understand what you read?
- What can you do to make sure that you understand what you're reading?

Reading Time

This step might be time consuming because you'll need to make questions for every part of the story, but the rewards will be worth it!

ASK AWAY!

Do your discussion questions actually help your students properly understand a work of literature? Here are questions that will effectively guide your students through a story.

LEAD THEM ON

- Notice important story elements like setting, characters, and relationships. Draw attention to specific parts that will become relevant later on in the story. For example, you can ask pupils to underline a quality of the character that was emphasized in the text, or to sketch how the setting looks.
- Does the story include a flashback (like someone recalling a childhood memory) or a leap forward in time (if years pass and the characters are now much older than when the story began)? Ask your students what happened or if they noticed these changes. Then ask them why they think the story needed the time change. Were they confused by the sequence of events? Or did the time change help them understand the story better? Always remember to ask them why they think so.

PEER INTO A CRYSTAL BALL

- Ask your students to make some predictions...
- At the beginning of the story: what do you think the conflict is? Who do you think is the good guy/bad guy?
 - Right before the climax: what do you think will happen next? Make a prediction.
 - Before the resolution. How will the story end? Do your earlier predictions still hold or have they changed now that you've read more of the story?

TIME OUT

Isolate a difficult, confusing, or pivotal part of the story and ask your students:

- What were you thinking or wondering at this point?
- Do you have any questions about this part of the story? Write them down.
- Do you agree or disagree with the decision of the character?
- Do you approve of what happened?
- Do you think it's logical?

RUNNING COMMENTARY

Throughout the story, ask your students to identify what they find difficult. For example:

- Figurative language. Talk about the deeper meaning of figure of speech in the text.
- Unclear pronoun references. To whom does "he" or "she" refer in particular?
- Dialogue with no specified speakers. Who said that?
- Cultural or historical references. Do some research to understand the context of the story.
- Unfamiliar words. Check out their meanings in the dictionary!

AFTER READING

At the end of the story, ask your students:

- What was the most confusing part of the story?
- How did you deal with the confusing parts?
- How did you resolve your difficulties?

For Advanced or older Students:

Once your students are already breezing through stories with full comprehension, you can have *them* ask the questions!

- Ask your advanced students to pretend they are teachers.
- Give them a story to discuss with the class. They must create questions that they feel are important to ask and discuss, and insert these at certain points of the story.
- Have your students explain why they think these are important questions, and how they will help others understand the story.
- You can give the questions written by your advanced students to your weaker students for enrichment.



1. Interrupted Reading

It is important to interrupt the reading process every now and then with a question when you feel that your students must pause and think about what they had just read. Focus your questions on what they must remember about the story to understand the rest of it. Tip: Ask a question about the text after every paragraph. You can also ask if they understood it or not. Then they must explain why.

2. Free Writing

Give your students text to read on a sheet of white paper. Allow them to write or draw their answers all over the sheet. This will guide them if they have to return to something they need clarified later on. Writing or drawing also reinforces comprehension.

3. Open Discussion

In class, discuss their questions right after reading the text. As the class answers the questions together, be sensitive to possible wrong answers. Give suggestions on what they could do if they had difficulty with certain parts. Focus on how they created meaning from the story, not on the story itself yet.

4. The Next Level

After you and your students have covered all the assigned questions about the text or story, you can proceed to interpretation and application questions. Take the discussion to a deeper level with questions like “if you were the character, what would you have done?” or “why do you think the character made a decision like that?”

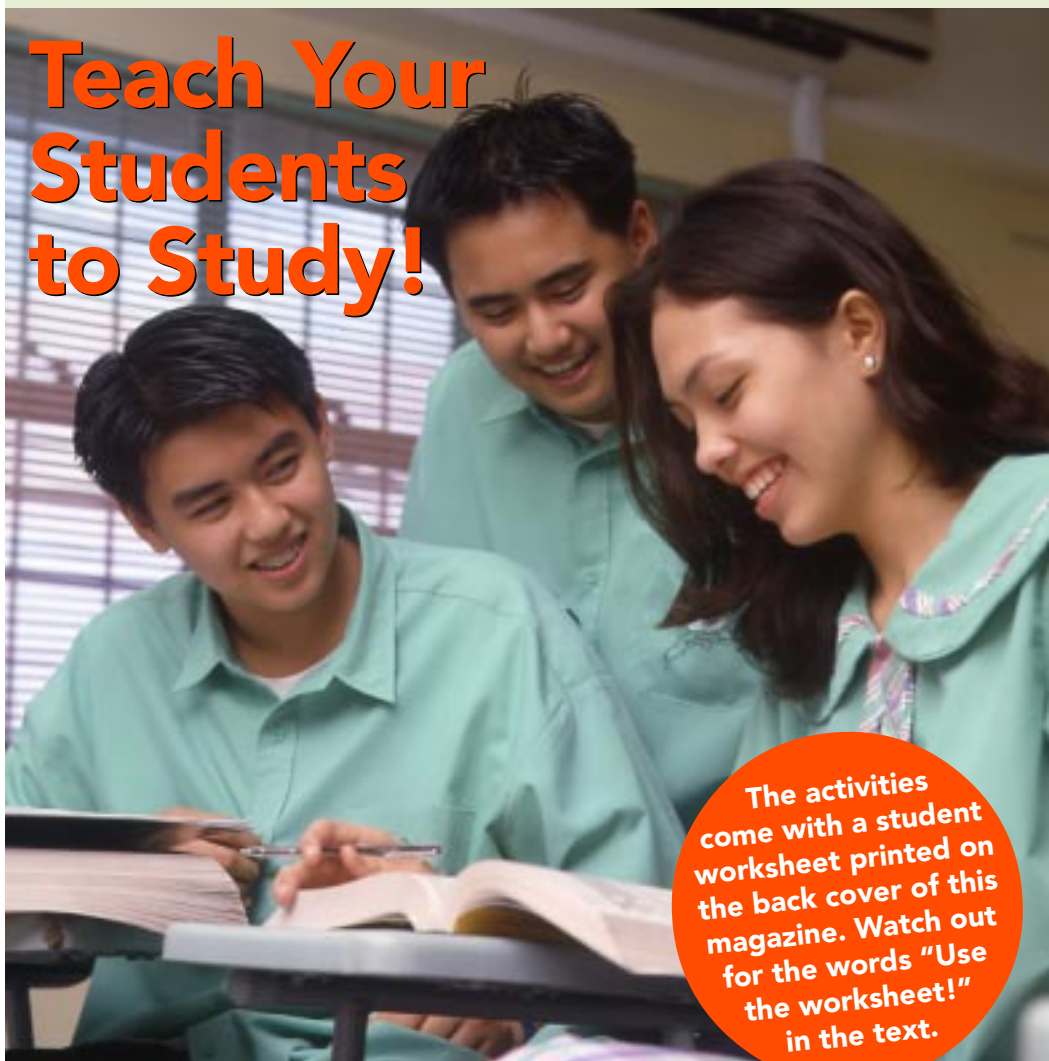
5. Keeping Tabs

Have the students make a list of the questions and activities that helped them understand what they read. Collect these because they will help you tune in to what worked and what didn't. ★

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Teach Your Students to Study!



The activities come with a student worksheet printed on the back cover of this magazine. Watch out for the words “Use the worksheet!” in the text.

A child's success in school is also about proper study skills. Introduce your class to prioritizing, goal-setting, time management, and motivation.

BY INES C. BAUTISTA

We teach our students how to divide and subtract, explain what causes rain, and identify the subject and predicate in a sentence...but ironically, we aren't required to teach them the most important skill they need to do well in school—how to study. Many teachers just assume that their students

know what to do. If you think about it, it's a bit unfair that they are given all the other skills they need save for the one skill that will enable them to master everything else. But you can be that teacher who will change their lives forever. Here are the essential study skills every student needs to master—and how you can equip your students with them.

Go for the Goal

Children don't usually understand the concept of priorities. They just want to play, eat, and maybe do their homework. Make them aware that they must rank their activities in order of importance, depending on what they want to achieve.

1. Ask your students to think of what they do outside school, such as playing, chores, watching TV, homework. They should record these in the “My Activities” table. *Use the worksheet!*

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2. They should fill in the two columns (“What I want to do” and “What I have to do”) with the different activities that occupy them throughout the day.

3. Then, have them rank their activities from most important (ranked number one) to the least important.

4. Now ask them why they ranked their different after-school activities this way. If they were to choose, what would they prioritize first? You may discuss their answers in class or talk to them individually. Be prepared for some students prioritizing play or TV!

5. Ask them to foresee the consequences of not prioritizing some of the more important activities on their “What I have to do” list.

6. Once they’ve understood the importance of consequences and the reason for proper priorities, ask them to set their goals for the month and for the weeks of the month. *Use the worksheet!*

7. Have them make a copy for you. Ask them to tack their list on their bedroom wall or on the cover of their notebook so they will always be reminded of what they have decided to accomplish.

8. Use your copy to check up on them to see if they are working towards their goals.

Take Your Time

No matter how good the goals of your students are, they may have difficulty accomplishing them because of poor time management. Here’s how you can help them out.

1. Tell your students that over the course of three days, they will need to observe themselves and how they spend their time from waking up to going to bed. They should record their activities in a time log. *Use the worksheet!*

2. Ask your students the following questions:

- What did you spend the most time on? Why?
- How much time did you spend on your “What I want to do” activities versus your “What I have to do” activities?
- How many hours do you sleep?
- Did you learn anything new about how you use your time?
- Is there anything you’d like to change about how you use your time?
- What’s the best way to achieve your goals given how you use your time?

3. Discuss the answers with your students. Some may be too personal and will need your attention and guidance. If you don’t have time to talk to each student, write suggestions on their papers and only see those whose answers sound problematic.

Just Do It!

A motivated student is a brilliant student. It doesn’t matter if she is smart. As long as she’s driven, she’ll get there. Help them find that drive!

1. Ask each student to write down their favorite subject and say what they love about it.

2. They should then do the same thing with their least favorite subject.

3. Ask them what they notice about the reasons they have given. Are they internally motivated (like a personal interest: “I love numbers”, or “I enjoy stories”) or externally motivated (“I really like/dislike my teacher”)?

4. Tell them you want them to bring fun and interest into all their subjects. They should answer these:

- What do I think is fun?
- When do I get excited about learning? (Do not accept “Never” as an answer. Even if it’s just something as trivial as “I enjoy the games we play in class,” they must provide a proper answer.)

All students need study space. Help them make the most of what they have.



● What do I enjoy about school?

● How can I make learning fun?

5. The last question is the most important one. Have them apply it to their least favorite subject. How can they turn their attitude toward that subject around?

6. Make sure that they add their solutions to their list of goals.

My Study Space

Even if your students are equipped with the proper study skills, they still need a place where they can put these to the test. Here’s how they can make the most of what they have.

1. Visualize. Ask your students to close their eyes and imagine themselves studying. Have them pay attention to what’s going on around them. Where are they? Is it noisy? What thoughts and feelings go through their minds as they study? Ask them to change something in the environment to make studying easier. What did they change? Is it working? How are they feeling now? Keep questioning. Once you feel they’ve reached their ideal studying environment, ask them to remember it after they have opened their eyes.

2. They should now draw or describe that environment and list down the changes they made. Are these changes

possible? What can they do to achieve a better studying environment?

3. Did they have to change how they felt? Were their problems internal (attitude, feelings, hunger) or external (TV, noisy parents or siblings)? How can they solve these?

4. Once again, discuss their answers. If some students aren’t able to study at home, discuss it with their parents.

Attention, Everybody!

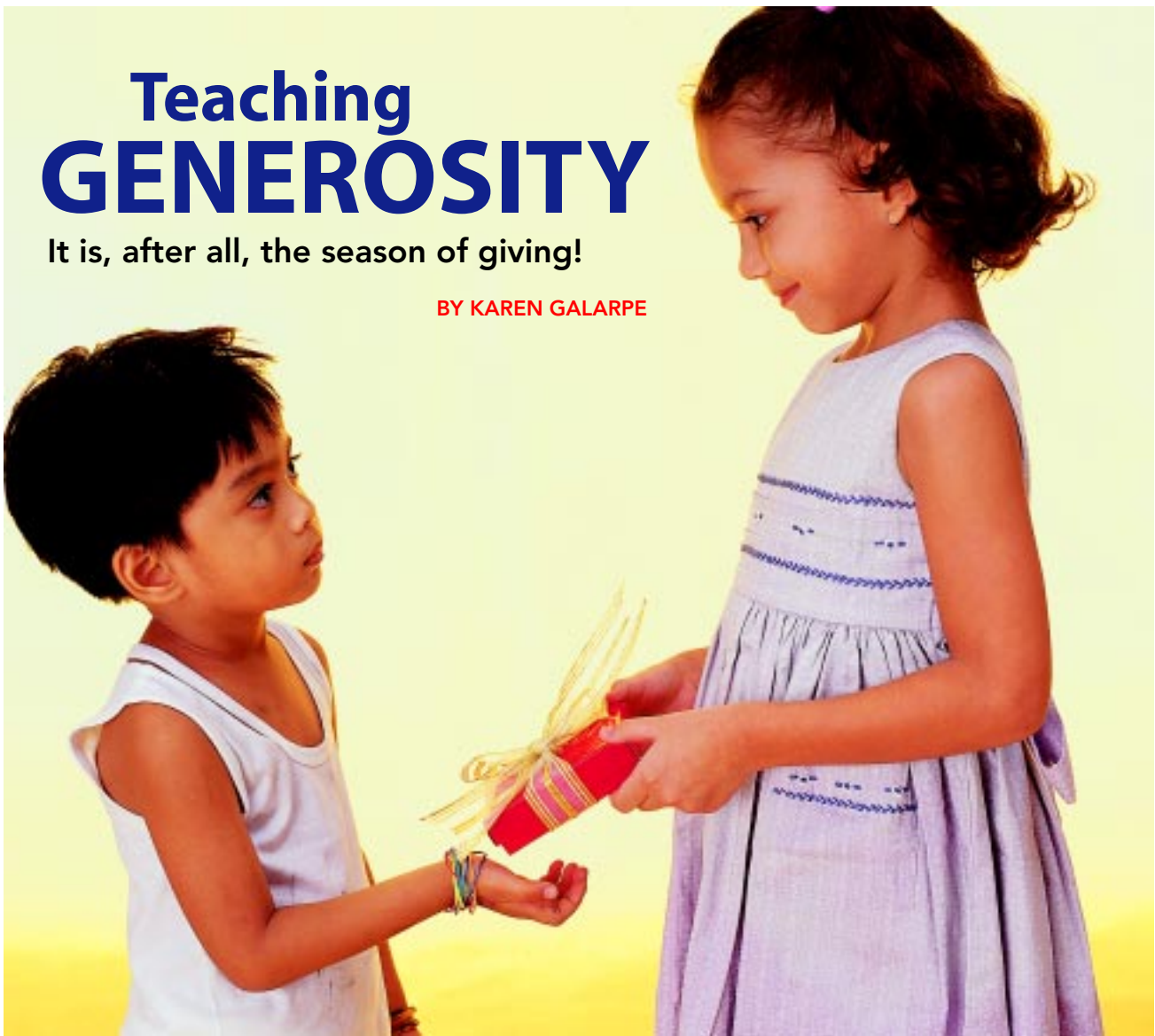
After you have taught your students the study skills they need, they can make posters on the study skill that helped them most. Put these up in your classroom or even in other classrooms. These tips can help other students as well. This is the fun part, because you finally get to see your hard work pay off! ★



Teaching GENEROSITY

It is, after all, the season of giving!

BY KAREN GALARPE



Last week, while paying for some items at the store, I readied my coin purse for my P2 contribution to the Bantay Bata coin bank near the cash register. But my nine-year-old son beat me to the draw. He got the money, dropped it in the can and smiled at me. As we were coming out of a restaurant, a street child came up to us with palm outstretched. My son immediately fished in his pocket for P2, the change from his *baon* that day, and again beat me to the draw.

I wish I could say I taught him generosity by sitting down with him, explaining the concept and showing ways he could be generous. But it was just something he learned on his own.

It made me think, though:

wouldn't our communities be better places if more children were taught to practice generosity?

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GENEROUS

Fr. Nicanor F. Lalog, teacher-administrator of the Immaculate Conception School for Boys in Malolos, Bulacan, cites the Bible story of the poor widow in the Temple who gave only one coin, but was considered by Jesus the most generous because it was all she had. Fr. Lalog says, "Generosity is our ability to share or give whatever we have, be it material goods or time or talent, or even our very selves, to others who are in need." He adds that generosity is *more than* the act of giving and shar-

ing. "It is recognition of the fact that whatever wealth or blessings we have in this life is a gift from God that has to be shared with others."

Wayne Dosick, a rabbi and the author of *Golden Rules: The Ten Ethical Values Parents Need to Teach Their Children*, adds that a child needs "to see a world bigger than himself." Instead of reprimanding stinginess, he says, you can instead remind them to constantly be aware of those beside them. If there's shoving or *singitan* in a line, or if there aren't enough resources for everyone in class, tell students to think of their classmates instead of resorting to "every kid for himself or herself."

It is important, Fr. Lalog says, for generosity to be practiced in society

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“Teachers are the best persons to teach generosity because they literally live it out.”

because “it makes us more human and more humane. Without much generosity, chaos and disorder will result.” Without generosity, no one will help others. No one will share what he learns. There will be less love to go around. No one will prosper.

TEACHERS’ ROLE

While it is good if parents teach this virtue to their children, teaching generosity cannot be left to parents alone. Most parents work, and the sad fact is, “so few parents really spend much time with their kids,” notes Fr. Lalog. And since teachers are around the children more, it makes sense to teach it in the classroom and weave it in the daily lessons.

Besides, “Teachers are the best persons to teach generosity because they literally live it out,” adds Fr. Lalog. “They give all, not just a piece of themselves for the nation.” Teachers do not demand additional pay whenever they repeat a lesson for the class or tutor a slow learner. They serve without complaining during elections. “Teachers teach not because of money but because they simply give back to the children what God gave them,” adds Fr. Lalog.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO TEACH IT

Here are some of the ways you can teach generosity to your pupils, most of which have been shared by Fr. Lalog

and Ruth Ruivivar, principal of GCF International Christian School:

Stories

- Relate your own experiences as teachers. Nothing beats firsthand info. Who knows, you might even inspire someone to be a teacher someday.
- Tell stories about the lives of saints and heroes that show generosity.
- Share or even enact the fable of the greedy boy who saw a jar filled with candies. The mouth of the jar was just big enough for his hand to go through. He tried to get as many candies as possible, but his hand was too full of candies, it became stuck in the jar. The only way he could get the candies out was to take only a few at a time.

Discussions

- Talk about the origin of Christmas and its true meaning with your class. Ask students to share their own opinions and what they like most about Christmas.
- Hold a debate or discussion about what’s better: giving or receiving gifts, and why.
- Discuss the benefits of generosity. How does everyone profit (whether practically, emotionally, or spiritually)

from giving of themselves?

- Have a round table discussion on being stingy or *kuripot*. Ask students to talk about times they didn’t want to share what they had, why, and how they felt. There may be a psychological reason for stinginess apart from greed. A child who experiences a loss, for example, may want everything else in his life (including material possessions) to stay as is.

Actions

- Encourage your students to bring some of their old toys and clothes this Christmas to share with less fortunate classmates or school community neighbors.
- Make the lesson on generosity more concrete. One GCF teacher asked children to bring one particular dish each—one student brought pancake, another one brought hotdog, etc. That teacher divided each dish equally so each child had a piece of everything. “The lesson learned was that when you share, you end up with more. Each child had more than one type of dish at the end,” says Principal Ruivivar.
- Gratitude and generosity go hand in hand. Hold an activity that will allow students to reflect on all the blessings in life, and how they can share these blessings and express their gratitude for them.
- Involve the kids in volunteer projects that will allow them to share their time and talents with the community, such as gardening, school clean-up, mural painting, tutoring, feeding programs, and other activities that will benefit everyone. ★

GIVING IN A TIME OF CRISIS

With the Philippines in financial crisis, it’s important to see that even small, personal acts of generosity play a role in national progress. Giving individuals make good citizens and inspire others to do the same. The most effective teachers, government officials, and other public servants consistently put other people first. Conversely, it’s often personal greed that can be found at the heart of the largest and most scandalous corruption cases.

How can a person be generous towards society and the people who are part of it? By being content with what he has, says Fr. Nicanor Lalog of the Immaculate Conception School for Boys in Malolos, Bulacan. “When a person is contented with what he has, he automatically becomes grateful, and being generous becomes easier,” he explains. “There are still other people around who need to live also,” Fr. Lalog adds.

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Karen Galarpe is a consulting editor of *Smart Parenting Magazine* and a columnist of *Good Housekeeping*. She just gave up her previous position as editor-in-chief of *Smart Parenting* to spend more time with her grade school son.