Swelling Up!

“I’m proud of you!” I hear this from my mother and friends from time to time. I’m not really sure I grasp the meaning. My mother is referring to me being a volunteer here in Ecuador. But many people volunteer in retirement! I just happen to be doing it a little farther from home.

So why is my mother proud of me? I’m just teaching squirmy preschoolers a few words in English. My mom volunteers just as generously, but I don’t tell her I’m proud of her. So what does it mean to be proud?

I may have actually stumbled on it. I was in the classroom preparing for the lesson, when one of my 4-year-old students came in and said in English, “Good morning. How are you?” I told him I was fine and asked how he was, and he said, “I’m fine.” We worked on those phrases back in November and December but had moved on to the names of fruit. This greeting wasn’t in the most recent lessons.

I swelled up! He actually remembered the greeting in English.

That same afternoon we were preparing for a celebration of the brand new office for the community women’s group. Someone brought a cake with strawberries for decoration. The room was filled with the women preschool teachers. I asked them what the decorations were called in English. No one remembered. Then, one of my students came in so I asked him the same question. I did give a little hint: “str........” to which he replied, “Strawberries!” Maybe the work we do on words and short expressions are sticking with a few of the children. And maybe I now know what it means to be proud.

Marilyn Cooper, a member of United Christian Church, Austin, Texas, serves in Ecuador with the Ecumenical Foundation for Integral Development, Training and Education (FEDICE). She is working in Christian Education with FEDICE and the Association of Indigenous Evangelical Churches of Imbabura.

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