

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 87, Fall 2024

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Gateways is published in spring and fall by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America
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Spring Valley, NY 10977
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Annual individual membership, which includes subscription, is \$50.

Back issues are available for purchase from WECAN, and as free downloads from the Online Waldorf Library at www.waldorflibrary.org.

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Deadlines for Issue 88, Spring 2025:

Articles: January 15, 2025

Advertising: January 15, 2025

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Deanna Richeson is a dedicated student of bio-dynamic gardening and brings this connection to the natural world to young children. She has been an associate early childhood teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor, MI. This cover design is an artistic rendering from her final graduation project from her EC training with Sunbridge Institute.

For the WECAN Calendar of Events, please visit waldorfearlychildhood.org/news-and-events/



From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

In the first lecture Rudolf Steiner gave regarding education, he stated the following:

Two “magic” words indicate how children enter into relationship with their environment. These words are imitation and example. The Greek philosopher Aristotle called human beings the most imitative of creatures. For no age in life is this truer than for the first stage of childhood, before the change of teeth. Children imitate what happens in their physical environment, and in this process of imitation their physical organs are cast in the forms that thus become permanent. “Physical environment” must, however, be understood in the widest sense imaginable. It includes not just what happens around children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment—everything that can be perceived by their senses, that can work on the inner powers of children from the surrounding physical space. This includes all moral and immoral actions, all wise or foolish actions that children see.

~ Rudolf Steiner, *Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science*, 1907

This has been a guiding principle for Waldorf early childhood education since its inception. Yet imitation is not so visible in our children today. Why? What is causing this phenomenon? Have children changed in their sensing capacities, their neurology, their interest in their environment? Has the environment changed? Is it possible to successfully awaken imitative capacity? Why would it be important to do so, rather than directing children with verbal explanations?

The articles in this issue grapple with these questions. You will see that authors share some common emphases, but each writer highlights a point slightly differently. This gives a subtle panorama of how we can think about imitation in our work from different orientations.

The first article, from Anke Scheinfeld, describes nursery-aged children’s imitation that warms the teacher’s heart. These children give encouragement that imitation and example are still alive and well

in an environment where the teacher’s makes their facilitation a conscious goal.

HeyZeus Oak’s article follows with a comprehensive overview of the importance of imitation. If we wanted “talking points” to speak about imitation to others, much could be drawn from his article.

Sharifa Oppenheimer next looks at imitation from a mainstream, research-oriented perspective. Teachers receive many questions that test our knowledge of neurology, and Sharifa provides professional vocabulary and scientific description that will help us answer such questions in a professional way. Thank you, Sharifa, for doing this important research on our behalf.

Warmth is another essential we emphasize in our education. This can mean physical warmth, emotional and soul warmth, warmth of interest, and so on. Dakota Butler explores how warmth is engaged in imitation.

Laurie Clark calls upon our warmth of interest toward the child. Rather than saying a child *won’t* imitate, which already implies an intentional refusal by the child, what can be said objectively is that the child *doesn’t* imitate. Laurie explores different reasons why a child may not be imitating. Responding to some of the possibilities she describes may open up new understanding.

Screens are everywhere we look. Children are bombarded by virtual images and sounds all the time. Yet learning through imitation depends upon the children experiencing a moving, speaking, thinking, live human being. Nancy Blanning’s article reminds us that children need to see *real, intentional work by real people in real time*. Where does this realness live in our classrooms?

We are adding a new section, called **The Many Faces of Waldorf Education**, to feature Waldorf programs that adjust and extend their offerings to serve their communities. This issue includes an announcement that New Amsterdam School in the lower East Side of Manhattan has begun a toddler class for children ages 18-24 months. They have obtained licensing to serve families who badly need quality care for their very young children, a widening of their circle that can be celebrated by all of us.

For the Classroom starts out with Suzanne Down describing the inspiration that worker characters

in storytelling and puppetry bring to imitation, a powerful support for our work.

Next, a vignette from Kristy Lollar's mixed-age classroom: when some conflict was brewing, the teacher's simple, objective suggestion shifted the play to something delightful.

For movement time, a charming "Autumn Story" comes from the new WECAN publication *Dancing Stories* by eurythmist Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt. The woodland creatures abounding in this story give a hint of the book's treasures, which are further described in the book review section.

Stacie Warren shares her structure for creating an engaging circle time, incorporating a predictable form of alternation between vigorous movement and quieter moments. She sees the children imitating these elements in their play.

New recipes for our practical work of cooking are always welcome. Erica Milone has been working for years to create gluten-free recipes that all can enjoy *and* which can be cooked indoors or over the campfire in an outdoor program. This Gluten-Free Bread is delicious and crusty, and eating it becomes a deed of social inclusion, as everyone can eat and celebrate with the same food.

Rebecca Ruof has worked with nursery children for years. She encourages us to take simple things and do them slowly, revealing how the most simple and seemingly mundane activity can be raised to a memorable, even magical moment.

Every once in a while, every classroom benefits from a good tromping. An inspired tromp, "Rommelgood's Tromping Song," comes from *Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves*, the final volume of the Ellersiek hand gesture games, which is full of fun and playful images and movements that children love to imitate.

Publication News announces four new WECAN Publications:

Nurturing the Senses: The Importance of Authentic Sensory Experiences in Early Childhood

This is an essential resource for all early childhood teachers that connects current mainstream vocabulary and descriptions with the anthroposophical understanding of the senses.

Becoming and Belonging from the WECAN Research Group looks at the ways Waldorf education supports healthy social/emotional development in young children. This stimulating resource encourages us to bring conscious intention to cultivating healthy social life in our world.

Dancing Stories is a treasure chest of new imaginations to bring to circle—and perhaps to puppetry as well.

Walking With Our Children, second edition, expands the first edition to include parenting columns written for *LILIPOH* through the pandemic time and afterward. Pre-pandemic challenges have been intensified, and new challenges have erupted. The review in this issue lists some of the new topics that have been added.

The call for submissions on IMITATION brought a wealth of articles, more than this issue could hold. More contributions will come in the spring issue, which will consider the partnership between imitation and play, another childhood "essential." Until then, we send good wishes that the contents in this issue will open up new ideas and insights to help the children fulfill their growth into full humanhood with imitation as their guiding companion.

May we all be well, be awake to the wonders of life, and be kind. ♦

Announcement of New Co-Editor Anjum Mir

It is a pleasure to announce that Anjum Mir is invited by the WECAN board to join the *Gateways* staff as Co-Editor with Nancy Blanning. Anjum brings with her a wealth of experience and insight into Waldorf early childhood education, as well as professional writing and editing expertise.

Anjum was born in Srinagar, Kashmir, and emigrated with her family to the US as a toddler. She discovered the work of Rudolf Steiner while earning

an education degree at the University of Texas, after having already received a BS in Journalism and Cultural Anthropology from Boston University. She worked as editor of two small journals in Boston and Indianapolis post-graduation before pursuing the education degree. At UT, she was researching pedagogical approaches that are not parochial, but which acknowledge that every child also has a spiritual essence. Waldorf education met these criteria.

Having taught in a variety of settings for over 27 years, her focus has been on early childhood. She received her certificate in Early Childhood Education from West Coast Institute in British Columbia and holds a certificate in Simplicity Parenting. At the Westside Waldorf School in Los Angeles, CA, where she is currently School Co-Coordinator, she has led Parent and Child classes, facilitated regular parent education and enrichment opportunities, and a weekly

community crafting circle, and has given morning child development talks. She serves in the wider Waldorf community as WECAN board member and on the Birth-to-Three committee, mentor, lecturer, and family consultant. Her experience with being a member of a Muslim family in the Waldorf community gives her unique insight into issues of diversity and inclusion.

Welcome to Anjum. ♦

INVITATION FOR SUBMISSIONS

for **Gateways** ISSUE 88
SPRING 2025

PLAY & IMITATION *How do we understand the value of imitation in our time?*

“Play is where imitation comes to life. Picture children playing house, taking on roles as parents, teachers, or even heroes. Through play, they internalize and creatively explore behaviors and scenarios they observe in their environment. This form of play is essential for developing their formative forces. Play provides children with opportunities to practice and internalize their social environment that they observe, fostering creativity and emotional intelligence.

Children naturally possess the motivation for inclusivity, and play is their motivator. If their play is facilitated well, they often desire to include children who are culturally and physically different from them. Additionally, play that involves cooperative activities and role-playing scenarios related to fairness and kindness can further instill values of empathy and understanding in children.”

Quoted from the article by HeyZeus Oak in this issue

Nothing warms the heart of the early childhood teacher more than to see the children involved in spontaneous, imaginative, imitative play. Offering children the space for such play is one of the “Essentials” of Waldorf early childhood education. Looking to the description above:

- **What do we understand play to be?**
- **Why is it so important?**
- **How do we help the children get there?**
- **What elements in the environment invite and stimulate play?**
- **What examples of outer activity invite play?**
- **Where do stories come in? Circle times? Combinations thereof?**

Gateways invites submissions that consider these questions for the Spring 2025 issue. Please share your thoughtful considerations, further questions, and successful examples of satisfying play and how these evolved. Include a short bio of yourself, including the age-group you work with and where you work, and anything else that is relevant to your submission (5-6 sentences.)

PLEASE SEND SUBMISSIONS TO gatewayscollection@gmail.com BY JANUARY 10, 2025

For clarification and discussion about submission ideas, please send your question to gatewayscollection@gmail.com.

Focus—Imitation

Imitation: Divine Treasure on Our Path of Becoming Human

~ Anke Scheinfeld

“Children are incredible imitators. Mimicry paves the way to their further development. Imitation is the start of the cultural process of becoming human.”

~ Markus Paulus

It is a sunny Tuesday morning in late spring. Here in Manhattan’s East Village, little children enter their nursery classroom, where I am their teacher. They take off their shoes, put on their slippers, wash their hands, and say goodbye to their caregivers. With enthusiasm, they each bring a little bag to the communal table where one of their teachers is already at work. In each bag is their special offering, a vegetable of their choosing. On this morning, celery, yams, broccoli, corn, carrots, fennel, mushrooms, and herbs are shared. The children find a place at the table and join in preparing our morning meal of vegetable soup. Peeling, chopping, and slicing are all done with paring knives and peelers. Everyone knows what to do. Soon, the room is filled with the delicious aroma of simmering soup. The children then move freely from work to play. In the play area, houses are built and furnished. Meals are prepared in the play kitchen as well, and tables are set for everyone to join at mealtime. The mood is lively yet peaceful, until a playhouse wall crumbles with a blaring noise, and one friend’s foot is injured by a falling block. Caring friends rush to the rescue with a glass of water, an ice pack, and arnica cream. By springtime, the flow of the morning has been well established. The children feel confident and relaxed and are open to the unfolding world around them.

“Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.”

~ James Baldwin

Do the children still imitate? Is this capacity still present in our time? Early childhood educators

are observing a change in the way children engage with their world. In my classroom, I have observed children relate to the world in more extreme ways than before: some with great hesitation and precocious self consciousness and others with fearless engagement that lacks attention, displaying incomplete maturation of sensory and motor skills. Why are our children no longer imitating us? What are children now experiencing in their environment, and how does this influence their development? What do we know about their capacity to imitate and its importance in their healthy growth?

“Imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery – it’s the sincerest form of learning.”

~ George Bernard Shaw

Imitation is widely acknowledged as a key aspect of learning. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle regarded imitation as a distinctive aspect of human nature, humans being the most imitative of all creatures. Researchers in the fields of experimental child psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, and neuroscience are exploring underlying mechanisms of imitation, and investigating whether imitation is innate or acquired. In these studies, the term “imitation” refers to the ability to learn to perform an action and the way to achieve it by reproducing both observed goals and gestures. Many questions are still unanswered, but the consensus is that imitation is a crucial learning mechanism in humans that allows for the rapid transfer of knowledge between individuals, especially in early childhood. It was also discovered that the caregiver plays a key role in the process of imitation. Some researchers even found evidence that imitation in toddlers is increased when caregivers imitate the toddler. It is not yet understood if specific brain regions or neurons are responsible for the capacity to imitate.

“The world one sees with one’s physical eyes is

the outside of what one saw previously from within. Imitation is an instinctive urge for the child in all activities, a continuation of the child's experience in the spiritual world; it is through imitation that the child develops an initial relation to the spiritual world in the physical world."

~ Rudolf Steiner

Rudolf Steiner spoke repeatedly of imitation, especially in his lectures on education and developmental psychology. He emphasized the crucial role imitation plays in learning during the first seven years of life. Steiner also spoke of the origin of imitation in pre-earthly experience. Contemplating imitation as a continuation in the physical world of the child's prior experience in the spiritual world is a means of opening oneself to a deeper understanding of imitation. Arising naturally out of contemplating these theories is the question: what kind of environment do young children need to optimize their ability to imitate?

"In raising children, we need to continuously keep in mind how we can best create the most favorable environment for their imitative behavior. Everything done in the past regarding imitation must become more and more conscious and more and more consciously connected with the future."

~ Rudolf Steiner

This inspires us to repeatedly consider the environment we create in our classrooms. Understood in its widest possible sense, environment here includes physical, temporal, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual aspects. In my own case, the first step on my path was to pause! This is easier said than done because I am busy with classroom preparations, moving with the children through daily, weekly and seasonal rhythms, and cleaning up after dismissal. When I stay attuned to the children, though, they awaken me to their true needs. I try to pay close attention to situations where the children are unable to enter into the morning flow. When I recognize old patterns no longer work, new ways come to me naturally and as if from nowhere.

I learned that my unrushed presence and the



Play inspired by meaningful domestic work. Photo courtesy of Anke Scheinfeld

quality of my being provided the essential starting point in cultivating a classroom environment filled with etheric forces. Young children have individual needs at each stage of development, yet they all need nurturing care, a gentle unfolding of the day, authentic adult presence, meaningful activities, and manageable expectations.

I wondered how I could satisfy their needs in a natural and selfless way. Carefully planning rhythmic, daily and seasonal activities, and circles and transitions were already part of my preparatory work, but more was

required. I found that if I allowed myself to experience a mood of timelessness, the children could experience it through me. I stopped wearing a watch and instead followed my inner clock, developing an inner sense for the rhythmic flow of the day. At times, I allow the children the luxury of extra free play, and then move more swiftly through other parts of the morning. This cultivation of an inner clock brought a flowing rhythm to our days. The children entered into this timeless flow, moving into a state of relaxed focus in their play or work. The children not only started imitating more activities of the adults, but also their mindful inner attitude. Domestic activities cultivate this etheric atmosphere through rhythmical, repetitive, meaningful, and comprehensible tasks. They create a form within which children can explore freely.

Another requisite for imitation is attention. The ability to be joyfully attentive to my work while also attuned to my surroundings needed cultivation. I contemplated a “point and periphery” meditation, exploring it not only intellectually but artistically through drawing, painting, sculpting, and in movement. I practiced experiencing myself simultaneously as center and periphery, while authentically staying present in my work. I realized that activities I enjoyed, and that came naturally to me in the presence of children, drew the children to me. They then desired to do the same things. I gave myself the task of bringing the same joyful presence to the activities that I had usually performed more systematically. I was delighted to see that, with a change in my attitude, the children’s attitude also changed. Sweeping the floor, washing laundry, and cleaning dishes became new favorites for all.

Changing the approach to activities that I performed quickly by myself, because I thought they were too difficult for children, was the next step. Setting up for painting was one such task. I placed the painting boards, glass jars, paints, brushes, and painting cloth within reach of the children and began to set the table. The children were immediately interested and delighted that they could participate in pouring water and paint into little jars and setup painting boards for all. There was a clear order to the process and the children helped each other. They earnestly cooperated and even cleaned up the accidental spills of water or paint. Soon, I had enthusiastic and capable helpers who proudly experienced competency and ownership of this task. Painting became more meaningful and

clean-up afterwards was carried out by our young helpers as well. Integrating all aspects of an activity like painting, by allowing children to participate in the whole process, strengthened the etheric atmosphere. The children experienced meaning in doing, on a physical rather than intellectual level.

Guided by the children themselves, I learned more through these experiences, and wondered what barriers to imitation they encounter as they pass from one developmental stage to the next. If we consider that imitation is a treasure children bring with them at birth, we adults are the guardians of this treasure. We control and care for the environment into which they enter with open hearts and full of truth. We honor this trust bestowed upon us by striving to be more mindful of time, space, form, and relationships. Children are born into a world that is constantly changing. As we remember our own experiences as young children a portal opens, leading to a deeper understanding of the consciousness of the young child.

My childhood memories are filled with sensory experiences. These are often memories of special smells associated with experiences in nature or at home. I can recall how my heart started to beat faster when I smelled the odor of fresh cow dung, anticipating the cows running out of the forest towards the meadow. I felt happy and safe when smelling the meat roasting in my grandmother’s oven, looking forward to a delicious meal shared with grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Gazing into the starry heaven on a cold winter night while in the warm embrace of my mother brought a paradox of sensations, the enormity and closeness of the universe. My senses were nurtured in childhood. I was fortunate to have the freedom to explore the world while still protected by the culture and society into which I was born.

Is there still a protective sheath for our young children today, within which they can mature their senses and will themselves into this world? The harshness of our culture today tears at this sheath, and it is our charge to repair it. Community and nature are still the essential elements of renewal, as they were during my childhood. Children feel homeless in our material world overloaded with sensory stimuli, which is pushing them faster and faster into an intellect-dominated culture they are not ready for. But they still can find a home in everything spiritual. They bring with them a capacity for wonder and awe. They want to guide us to give them what they need to engage with

the material world. I am continuously learning to listen to their message and to see them for who they are.

“Through others we become ourselves.”

~ Lev S. Vygotsky

It is inspiring as much as it is a relief to observe that, as children are born into our modern world, they still bring the treasure of imitation with them, guiding us to create for them the most nurturing environment. Cultivating a sense of timelessness, together with balancing in-breath and out-breath, activity and rest, form and freedom, detail and whole, honors the child's need to stay in a flow state with the world. This state is neither being asleep or awake. Steiner refers to it as dream consciousness.

Children need to meet the real world in a way that greets their capacities at each developmental stage. The real world is beautiful and challenging at the same

time. Pain is real and so is joy. Childhood is the time to grow into this complex and paradoxical world step by step. We can be guides on the children's path. We need the courage to slow down, pause, and take time for observation, contemplation, and learning. ♦

Dr. Anke Scheinfeld is teacher of children aged 3-6 years in the Linden Class at New Amsterdam School in the East Village of NYC. She has been a Waldorf early childhood educator for nearly two decades. She received her MA in Early Childhood Waldorf Education from Sunbridge Institute. Prior to teaching, Anke worked as a physician and researcher in Germany, Great Britain, and the USA. An astute observer, she describes the joy of witnessing natural imitation of young children as they delight in the exploration of their world.

Tiny Echoes: The Silent Symphony of Childhood Imitation

~ HeyZeus Oak

Imitation is a silent, illuminating beacon that gently guides the unfolding journey of every child, shaping their world with unseen brilliance. Consider the small moments: a toddler watching their parent cook, a child mimicking their teacher's kind tone, or a young one copying a sibling's playful gestures. These everyday interactions significantly impact a child's life forces, as children learn by observing, absorbing, and acting out what they experience. For adults, it's not simply what we say to the child that matters, but what we do in their presence.

The role of adults in this process is immense. As children imitate not only what they see but also the inner attitudes and feelings of those around them, adults must be conscious of their actions. Our manner and attitude toward the world, and our inner attitudes, are perceived by the child and have a significant effect. Educators and caregivers must embody the qualities they wish to instill in children. Through their observations, children integrate these social expressions into their own being, highlighting the profound influence that adults have on the incarnation of the young child.

Understanding and assessing imitation in children can be complex. Often, educators look for direct and immediate imitation, but children's imitation can be delayed and not as easily observable. Children might replicate an action or behavior days after observing it or imitate something for days. The influence of adults is both far-reaching and profound, often manifesting in ways that are not immediately apparent.

In today's noisy world, children's ability to imitate is frequently interrupted. The constant presence of background noise from dishwashers, leaf blowers, automobiles, and other machinery can interfere with more meaningful imitative activities that penetrate the child's soul life. If we allow a child's spiritual life to be neglected, the spirit will still enter them, but it may be through problematic pathways, such as digestion. A child may not imitate songs when their environment is filled with mechanical sounds. How does that child's soul learn to express itself? What are the consequences of spiritual “indigestion” and impeded self-expression? Such questions could be relevant to many of the common challenges educators face today. If a child doesn't engage in sufficient meaningful imitation, it

contributes to many challenges later in life, including restlessness and poor concentration.

Through imitation, children not only learn to walk and speak, but also begin to develop a sense of morality and ethics. The environment in which a child grows must be rich in worthy examples, as this forms the basis of their moral development. Children mirror the intentions and attitudes of the adults they observe, making it vital for caregivers to act consciously and responsibly.

The concept of imitation extends beyond individual development and plays a significant role in the broader context of creating an inclusive pedagogy for all. By curating environments where positive behaviors and attitudes are modeled, we contribute to a more respectful and empathetic society. When children observe and imitate actions that promote kindness, understanding, and respect, they internalize these values and carry them into their interactions with others, which works toward creating inclusive communities.

Children naturally possess the motivation for inclusivity, and play is their motivator. If their play is facilitated well, they often desire to include children who are culturally and physically different from them. Play is where imitation comes to life. Picture children playing house, taking on roles as parents, teachers, or even heroes. Through play, they internalize and creatively explore the behaviors and scenarios they observe in their environment. This form of play is essential for developing their formative forces. Play provides children with opportunities to practice and internalize their social environment that they observe, fostering creativity and emotional intelligence. Additionally, play that involves cooperative activities and role-playing scenarios related to fairness and kindness can further instill values of empathy and understanding in children.

Imitation is not just about copying actions; it's about absorbing the essence of behaviors and attitudes, which is deeply connected to a child's spiritual development. When a child watches an adult meditate

or express gratitude, these moments are soaked in a deeper understanding of life's values.

A child's innate impulse to imitate is a resource for teachers and can be influenced to support a child in processing experiences. However, if a teacher unknowingly presents something that hinders a child's ability to imitate by bringing premature awareness to the child's own sense of self, it can cause harm. For example, when a classroom lacks representation of various skin tones, it impacts children differently. A child of color might feel estranged, while a white child might experience a deep sense of belonging. Since we live in a multicultural, globalized society and have so much to learn from diverse communities, including representations of diversity will support not only a more just world but also richer and more beautiful classrooms.

The role of imitation in early childhood is profound, influencing not only the physical development of children but also their moral and spiritual growth. Adults need to act consciously and responsibly, as their behavior and attitudes serve as the primary models for young children. By creating environments rich in positive examples and opportunities for meaningful engagement, educators and caregivers can support the development of the whole child, nurturing physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Moreover, the influence of imitation extends to developing positive cultural values, where cultures and communities are represented and honored through conscious and responsible actions. ♦

HeyZeus Oak is the owner of *Heart in Hand Preschool*, a small in-home preschool in Portland, OR. He previously taught outdoor kindergarten at *Shining Star Waldorf School* and received his Master's degree in Sustainability Education and Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher training at *Sound Circle Center*.

Imitation as the Foundation of Learning

~ Sharifa Oppenheimer

“We educate the young child only when we base all education and child rearing on the principle of imitation... Up to the change of teeth, a child learns everything through imitation.”

~ Rudolf Steiner

The principle of imitation has been at the root of our work in Waldorf Early Childhood Education since its inception. Imitation is the inherent way all normally developing babies and children begin the journey of learning. It is nature’s way, and is built up into a system of brain structures that make this gift of imitation possible (Rumiati, 2009).

In this twenty-first century world, where access to a deluge of information on any subject is at our fingertips, where the cognitive mind is exalted above innate body-knowing, why is imitation still important? How can such a non-conceptual way of knowing have relevance, and why is imitation still at the center of our work with young children? Let’s look deeply into these questions so we educators can, in full understanding, affirm the primacy of imitation. In this way we can enhance its efficacy in the classroom and help parents also learn to work within imitation’s golden circle.

Why is imitation still important?

The Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders considers imitation skills to be crucial in the early years. “Imitation skills play a critical role in early development and are considered an essential component of social and cognitive development during the first years of life. Indeed, during the two first years of life, children gradually increase their imitative behaviors both in frequency and complexity, along with the development of their cognitive and social abilities. Children imitate their siblings, peers, and parents at every moment to learn new abilities. Imitation is an essential lever for learning of new motor skills and cognitive skills. Besides the role in learning, imitation has an important social function. From the earliest moments, caregivers and infants engage in reciprocal imitation during face-to-face

interactions. Through this choreography of imitating each other’s vocalizations and facial expressions, they will share social interest and affective states, take turns, and build a foundation for the development of complex social skills. Indeed, the literature has amply demonstrated that imitation plays a vital role in the development of social communication” (Pittet, 2022). This is the opening paragraph of a lengthy article that proceeds to describe the monumental difficulty children with autism face due to the inability to imitate. Much attention is focused on ways to help these children learn the art of imitation. This speaks volumes to the necessity of imitation.

There are numerous ways to define and understand imitation. We will begin our definition of imitation with the idea that the child “follows the parents with love” and explore the way the unborn child is held within the bio-chemical and electromagnetic field of the pregnant mother (Agarwal, 2023). Two other primary and yet rivaling definitions of imitation also prevail; we can think of them as Nature versus Nurture (Farmer, 2018). The Nativist view sees imitation as an evolutionary development of specific regions of the brain. This train of thought is the “Nature” side of the coin: we imitate because we are hard-wired this way. The Associative Learning theory posits that postnatal learning forges the visual-motor links that support imitation. Here we see the Nurture argument: we imitate because we learn from human and environmental cues how to reproduce what we have seen.

In this exploration of imitation, we will look at a hybrid explanation. We will see how these various learning modalities cooperate and perhaps form a developmental sequence for the human imitative capacity in general.

The biological roots of imitation

The child's brain development in utero occurs at a speed like no other time in life. This rapid growth is accompanied by both great potential and vulnerability. For it is the emotional state of the pregnant mother that, to a large degree, determines the neuro-development of the child (van Den Huevel, 2022). Healthy and happy mothers birth healthy and happy babies (Negussie, 2019). On the other hand, mothers living with stress, violence, malnutrition or ill health tend to birth babies that are pre-term and low birth weight, which can progress later to child behavioral and mental health issues (van Den Huevel, 2022). The fetus learns much in utero: interesting preferences such as liking the music the mother listens to, or preferring her smell to others, or even having familiarity with the taste of the foods she eats (Mennella, 2001). The unborn baby also "learns" and reproduces her mother's biochemistry, emotional states, and response patterns. We can think of this deep mother-child connection as growing the roots of imitation.

After babies are born, they continue to "match" their mother's brainwave patterns: mothers and babies' brains form a single network. Their brains form a "megaweb" in which their brainwaves align. This creates deeper connectivity and empathy; they feel-into each other's state of being and respond accordingly. Yet, this primary connection, this biological imitation, is dependent upon the mother's emotional state. When the mother is well cared-for and healthy, her emotional state tends to be positive. This happiness strengthens hers and baby's brain-to-brain synchrony (Santamaria, 2019).

Not only are the baby and mother's brainwaves synchronized, their hearts also beat as one. This entrainment of the mother and child's heartbeat is enhanced and magnified when the mother turns her whole attention toward the baby. "The heartbeat signal was not always detectable, but it was clearly detectable when the mother tuned-in to her baby. It appears that when the mother places her attention on the baby, that she becomes more sensitive to the subtle electromagnetic signals generated by the infant's heart" (HeartMath Institute, 2008). In fact, studies show that even among adults, when one person's electromagnetic field is stable and coherent, this stability can "call" to another person and help to stabilize and bring their heart rhythms into synchrony (McCraty, 2015). Imagine the potency of

this synchronization between mother and child. This powerful connection can eventually grow to include the father and others within its golden circle (Univ. of Essex, 2024).

Parents, caregivers and teachers can experience the profound power of this heart-stabilization when we attend to our own groundedness and emotional stability, then step toward the child with love. We breathe steadily, listen, and hold the child in this field of love, or our "positive affective state matching" (Morgan, 2023). We can then perceive sensitive responses and actions. Perhaps this is what Rudolf Steiner meant when he said the adult must strive to be worthy of the child's imitation. Science shows us many ways in which the child imitates us "from the inside out," and Steiner encourages us to attend to our own inner work.

As the child grows, this deep bio-psycho-physiological imitation continues, remaining as a root system. The parent or teacher has created a strong foundation by establishing this child-adult brain and heart synchrony, as the adult "leads" by her own inner stability. We can think of the above as the *Nature* aspect of imitation.

"Children learn to imitate by being imitated."

(Markus Paulus, Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich)

Let's now consider the *Nurture* aspect of imitation, or social imitation. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University has researched imitation and the best ways to help educators and parents of young children encourage it. They have codified their discoveries and call this type of parental response "Serve and Return." At its core, Serve and Return is about responsive interactions between children and the people who care for them, and how those interactions help children grow and reach their full potential. They have created a tutorial for parents, called "Five Steps for Brain-Building Serve and Return." This helps parents to understand simple ways to nurture the imitative capacity of young children and to respond in positive health-giving ways (CDC, Harvard Univ.).

Simply put, step one is to notice where the baby, toddler or child's attention is focused. This is the "serve." The caregiver imitates the child's attention by turning their own attention in the same direction; they "return" by affirming the child's focus. The adult then adds language by naming, or commenting. They

then wait for the baby's reply. The ball of conversation is passed back and forth until the child's attention moves elsewhere. Social learning is enriched by this warm exchange, as the child learns to imitate passing the ball of attention back and forth with another. These steps toward "matching attention" can be practiced with a very young baby and even continue through an entire childhood.

On countless occasions we caregivers model self-regulation for the young child. Over time the child internalizes this process and begins to imitate the art of emotional self-regulation (Ibid.). When the child joins an early childhood class, the teacher now models for the children the intricate human experience of self-regulation within a circle of others: classmates and teachers. Teachers may continue to rely on the deep imitation of heart-entrainment by bringing a dysregulated child into our heart-field; we put an arm around them or hold them on our lap and hum a bit (Flowly Resources). We can add simple, steady words, to help connect the higher language centers of the brain to the impulse-related sensory motor system. The teacher encourages "We can use our words. Let's say 'I would like a turn with the bucket.'" This modeling and the child's power of imitation grow in time. Adults play a critical role in showing the child pro-social behaviors they can imitate, to diffuse emotionally charged situations (Clegg, 2017).

These roots of imitation create a strong scaffolding for other kinds of imitative learning, beyond the intricacies of social dynamics (Ibid.). The child in the early childhood classroom learns many functional skills, and these too, are learned best by imitation. She learns how to hang her coat on the correct hook, how to take her basket of crayons to the cupboard, how to squeeze the sponge before washing the snack table, how to hold the dustpan as her friend sweeps the crumbs. She also learns how to construct a cozy "house" with cloths and clothespins, how to make a fairy house outdoors, how to balance on a log, how to hop from stump to stump. Each year in the classroom brings more skills, particularly creative skills. Eventually, after seeing a puppet play by the teacher, the five- and six-year-olds may imitate the entire process: create a story, gather equipment for the story's set, and perform their own puppet play.

Imitation now, direct instruction later

The strong foundation in imitation laid in the early years gives the child a great advantage to continue to

learn by observation. Research affirms the principle of imitation over direct instruction. "Indeed, children are more likely to imitate the same ritualistic actions when the actions are presented as group conventions, such as 'this is how we do it' rather than as instrumental goals: 'First we gather the beads, then we choose the needle and thread, then we knot the thread and begin to string the necklace'" (Liberman, 2018).

Let's explore typical activities in the early childhood classroom in the light of imitation. We can use the lens of "formed activities" as compared to free activities. Formed activities are those that the teacher brings to the children with a conscious intent of "teaching" through imitation. Free activities are those that the children engage in during their creative play. We will often see the formed activities we have offered sprout up in their free creative play.

The following is excerpted from my book *With Stars in Their Eyes: Brain Science and Your Child's Journey Toward the Self* (SteinerBooks, 2019).

Let's examine what we will call "formed movement" accompanied by "formed speech." Young children, especially in the stages before verbal language develops, depend primarily upon gesture to convey their needs, moods, curiosities, preferences and affections. We can speak to them through movement first, with speech following as a support. We offer nodal times during the day in which together we attend to the primordial language of movement and introduce the elegant speech of rhythmic and rhymed language. Out of the inborn capacity for imitation, they will not only follow the gestures we model, they will play with the language as well as also follow the soul-mood we portray.

Throughout the day we can bring formed movement, attended by rhythmic speech, to the children in the small rituals we practice. Let's bring them finger games and hand movements full of archetypal gestures; these enhance our mealtime graces and bedtime prayers. As movement developmentally precedes speech, let's remember that gesture is primary. The fact that gesture is attended by our rhythmic formed language, though, scaffolds for their unfolding capacity of language acquisition. We can use nursery rhymes and finger plays at transition times, such as while we move from creative play toward nap time, or from outdoors to snack time. Remember, these movements and gestures are offered by *simple modeling, not by instruction* or required participation. We give them not only the

gestures and musical speech, but also our genuine delight in them; this is an irresistible combination.

Let's be aware of the health-giving aspects of formed movement, and the cognitive scaffolding of formed speech. The child has the opportunity, through the joy of imitation, to imbue physical activity with the delight of imagination. In the classroom there are many ways to offer these "living pictures." Not only at transition times, meal and nap times, but also at the all-important circle time. I feel that circle time is the heart of the Waldorf Early Childhood classroom's rhythm. It is full of song, poetry, movement, traditional singing games and finger games. The children are bathed in these living images, and they move through the "stories" told in this lively way, as a school of fish move as one being. Story time, as well, offers the child the opportunity to not only imitate certain story lines or character, in their creative play, but to build upon these imitations and add variations on a theme."

Imitation is, indeed, still the foundation of learning. Seeds are sown as the unborn child is held within the biochemical and electromagnetic field of the pregnant mother. This deep connection creates a strong foundation for the baby and toddler. The social-emotional grounding — serve and return — learned in synchrony with attentive parents and caregivers creates a dependable scaffolding. When the young child joins a classroom situation, they bring this foundation to the development of other forms of imitative learning, such as functional imitation and language acquisition through imitation. Teachers, caregivers and parents can be crucial agents to enhance this natural learning sequence. For the magic of imitation is here to stay! ♦

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For a PDF version of this article with all the references formatted as hyperlinks, please email lwidmer@waldorfearlychildhood.org.

Warmth: Worthy of Imitation

~ Dakota Butler

When my personal journey as a Waldorf educator began, I found that working intimately, intentionally, and spiritually with the realm of warmth helped me live into my individuality as a teacher. My interest in consciously working with warmth was sparked when I first read Rudolf Steiner's esoteric science teachings. A beautiful imagination washed over me when reading about Old Saturn, the earth's first incarnation.

"In the beginning there was warmth... there was a constant interaction between the warmth beings on Saturn and the surrounding spiritual beings. The Old Saturn stage seemed like one big mirror of celestial life. These beings were mirroring off of each other, which slowly formed the being of warmth... There was no 'life' in these warmth bodies themselves, but the life of their surrounding beings were expressed in them."

—Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Esoteric Science*

This archetypal mirroring of celestial life in and of itself was perhaps the first, truest and purest form of imitation, which in turn laid the foundations for the germinal human being to develop. A gift from the cosmic world, we are designed and destined to be imitative beings.

Warmth is one of the greatest gifts we humans have received. As caregivers, warmth is one of the greatest gifts we can offer our children. Caregivers should aim to have an understanding of warmth, and how we use warmth to aid in our care for the children. We must first allow the children to develop a healthy sense of warmth at every level—the physical, life force, soul, and "I"—before they can become adults with the ability to pass the gift of their warmth on to others.

I believe it is more important now than ever to be deliberate practitioners of empathy and warmth. We should consider the struggles that our marginalized communities are going through, as well as the daily struggles and anxieties that our parents and children are facing, and strive to approach each other with open hearts, a desire to understand, kind words, kind gestures, and warmth. As caregivers of young children

who aim to be worthy of imitation, we should educate them about what it means to nurture each other through our gestures and intentional actions.

Below are excerpts from my Early Childhood thesis, where I explore why working intimately with the realm of warmth aids in the development of children and adolescents. The excerpts that were chosen for this purpose consider why, as teachers of imitative young beings, we should be deliberate users of warmth.

* * *

Why Warmth?

Our children are wholly sense organs. Starting at birth, they sense the whole entire world around them and they absorb it so very deeply into the depths of their soul. I cannot stress enough how they truly absorb everything. If we fill the children up with soul warmth, they will grow healthy, enthusiastic, confident, and be able to enter freely into the world. When warmth becomes part of the adult's soul life, it becomes second nature, and most everything we do will be carried with warmth. How we cultivate warmth, our relationship with our own developed warmth organism, and knowledge of the ways warmth works in human earthly life will set children up with a foundation to be kind, loving, enthusiastic, nurturing human beings who have developed their own sense of warmth, and who can be the warmth in other people's lives.

A Warm Gesture: Warmth Living in the Soul Mood of the Caregiver

We nurture the soul through empathy, enthusiasm, acts of kindness, and love. We may also offer humor and laughter to our children. When we are offering warmth to another, a gesture of devotion is present. The ways in which we bring warmth to the child nourishes their sense of wellbeing. As caregivers, we must have empathy. "It is important for Early Childhood educators to be deliberate users of empathy. In an empathetic atmosphere, our endeavors can sometimes be rewarded with spiritual blessings" (from *Working With the Will* by Margret Meyerkort

and Rudi Lissau). Being in a state of empathy means being absolutely present to the children before you, with openness and a desire to understand, respond, and share in the experience with the child. Children (who are wholly sense organs) are affected by the mood of the adults, by their thoughts, feelings, words, and gestures. As teachers, we should be offering grace, space, allowance, gratitude and appreciation towards the children. Through our work, we hope to offer a seed, and a foundation for them to take through their lives.

When our soul warmth is highly developed, we can offer warmth in everything we give the children; through our body language and gestures, tone of voice, times of intimate care, activities we participate, and beyond. An intentionally used, living, soul warmth organism of the caregiver will make the children feel appreciated, seen, heard, safe, and confident in their world.

In the Waldorf Schools, we have ongoing work in the area of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ). Many Waldorf schools have an official statement regarding their commitment to the necessary (and yet vulnerable) work with DEIJ+. This can be broken down into many forms, and can be brought to our practical work in ways of trial and error. Adults should consider their soul mood while engaging in this work as it relates to our children. We should always be striving for a genuine acceptance of another. Differences come in many forms: skin tones, languages, cultural normalities, neurodiversities, sexualities, gender expressions, and body types. As caregivers, we are not always prepared for every situation. However, we need to have an openness and willingness to try to understand the children, and our fellow humans in all of their differences, and meet these differences with absolute soul warmth. Children

who grew up with noticeable physical differences, disabilities, medical needs, and imbalances in their sensory processing and behaviors, and children who may have an inclination towards clothing, toys, and preferences outside of society's engrained gender expectations should all be met with the caregiver's acceptance, openness, and willingness to understand and empathize. Caregivers should especially be "tapping into" their soul warmth in times of caring for children when adversity arises in the classroom.

The gesture of warmth should live in the caregiver, and teachers should allow themselves to meet all children, and fellow humans, with a gesture of warmth. Our acts of service to others should be done with a sense of warmth, as that is where we can find a soul connection with the other, and where we can nourish the warmth organism of the other. The children are imitative beings; when we offer a warm gesture to the children, it touches their soul, and the children have been given something their warmth organism can mimic, learn, and grow from. Our job as caregivers is to guide the children's warmth organism through its development. Offering ourselves in this way, meeting soul to soul, is a very rich and meaningful experience for the child. ♦

Dakota Butler began her Waldorf journey in 2019, completing her Early Childhood training at Alkion Center in Ghent, NY. She serves as mixed-age Kindergarten lead teacher at Mountaintop Waldorf Children's Garden in Saugerties, New York. This article is drawn from her research thesis on Warmth, titled "The Journey of Warmth, Explorations into the Warmth Organism," which details understanding the importance of warmth in all aspects when working with the young child.

The Child Learns To Be Human from Other Human Beings

~ Laurie Clark

"We all have a longing to grow into our truest selves so that we can become revolutionaries of tenderness."

~ Gregory Boyle

While I was standing in line at the grocery store, I observed a little child somewhere around 18 months old with his mama. I smiled at him, and he looked back at me with the sweetest of smiles. I clapped my hands and he clapped his hands. I waved good-bye, and he waved good-bye back while his mama was busy at the counter paying for her groceries. Without words, we both had an uplifting conversation to carry into our day. This precious little boy, with absolute unconditional trust, mirrored everything that I did.

Young children do what they see being done around them. They even perceive the deeper parts of us. We become transparent to the young child in our thoughts and feelings, and they are even able to sense how we "do life."

Imitation is a spiritual capacity. Every human being has a guardian angel that escorts us when we become active on another's behalf and when we reach out to become our truest self. Young children imitate unconsciously from the heart, with uninhibited, unfiltered faith in what they see, not yet separated from the realm of the angels. Adults work out of a more conscious imitation of higher beings when they reach out with love and selflessness towards another human being.

When we read an inspiring story or hear of a courageous act, we may feel that we long to imitate what another person has done. We may ask ourselves, out of a deep feeling, "Would I have been brave enough to do that?" How wonderful it is to hear about seemingly impossible deeds that our fellow human beings have accomplished. Something in our soul is moved with the longing to imitate such deeds.

Mainstream psychology has come to the understanding that little children learn and perceive through imitation. Albert Bandura (1925-2021) made contributions in the fields of psychology and

education, and created what he called Social Learning Theory (SLT). Bandura states that social behavior is learned by watching the behavior of others, and that the young child models this. Bandura describes three key concepts about how the child learns. First children observe, then imitate what they observed, and then they model it and do what they have experienced.

When we take a closer look at these three concepts, it opens the door to better understand the idea of imitation.

1. Observation means to pay full attention to something. This is the foundational building block for imitation. Children pull all that they see, hear and experience directly into themselves, just as a magnet pulls in iron filings.
2. Imitation is when the child inwardly replicates what has been presented. Imitation means not only copying something, like another's behavior, but also replicating another person's motivation.
3. Model: The word model means to fashion and shape a person or thing that serves as a pattern for the one who is observing and inwardly imitating. The child will figure out how to spontaneously do what they have experienced.

Imitation proceeds by first paying full attention to something, then inwardly replicating it, and finally following the pattern and modeling it.

Today, teachers are experiencing that there are many children who do not imitate. It is not that they cannot imitate, but there is something blocking this natural ability. Often this blockage comes out looking like challenging behavior. Every behavior is a communication to the teacher, so we must ask, what is the child trying to tell us?

With these children, it is essential that the teacher make an extra effort to become ever more sensitive, with empathy and understanding for the

child's situation. A child will resist a teacher who is not sensitive to them. Warmth of heart is ever more important so that the child feels safe and cared for. Those very children who demand the most from us are the ones who can help us build new potentials in ourselves. Building tolerance, acceptance and patience with these children already has a healing effect.

We do our best in presenting a circle, and then there are some children that are not imitating the movements and singing the songs. Perhaps a child is feeling very uncomfortable in their body, the socks are slipping down their ankles, or the child next to them is holding their hand too tightly. This kind of tactile sensitivity can be expressed as frustration, and the child might display all kinds of unpleasant behaviors. It may be helpful to check in before circle time. Maybe a rhyme with some firm, loving touch down the arms to the fingertips might help. This only takes a few minutes, and could make all the difference for a child who is having this difficulty. Keeping this child close and holding the teacher's hand might be helpful.

Another child may not have had breakfast and their blood sugar is dropping, causing everything to feel irritating. If the child has not eaten anything or not enough and the teacher is wanting their attention and participation during circle, there is little chance the child will not have some kind of breakdown. Offering some raisins and almonds some other quick snack with protein in it before the circle can be of great benefit.

There may be children who are slow in trying to figure out how to move their bodies the way the teacher is showing them. An example would be the movements of a carpenter making a house. This kind of child will just be beginning to hammer while the rest of the group is moving on to the next part of the circle. The child can feel disoriented, and a challenging behavior is bound to happen. Repetition of the movements is important for this child, giving them the time they need to stay with the group.

Another child may be unable to imitate the movements during circle time because they have been in front of a screen and are overwhelmed by images which are hard to process. Because the young child is so open without filters, images from screen time run round and round in their mind like a recording that cannot stop. This makes it difficult to pay attention to what is happening in the circle. Sometimes it may help if before circle time there has been some big movement. If one takes an adventure walk before circle and runs, skips, and jumps, this can get what is stuck in the mind

moving in the body, and loosen up the images. Also, including strong imaginations in the circle with little unexpected surprises may help loosen up the screen images and pull this child's attention back.

There are also children who carry deep anxiety for different unknown reasons. Some are always worried about what might happen next and not what is happening in the present. They constantly ask the teacher what will happen after we do this activity and what happens after that. This kind of worry is called anticipatory anxiety. It makes it difficult to be present to what is happening in the moment. If the teacher can find a way to preview the morning routine, this can be of great benefit for the child who carries such apprehension. Making some felt pictures that show how the morning will go can be helpful, or some other way of representing the day in images can put the child at ease.

These are just some examples of how to work with these children. There are many ways help children through the blockage that is keeping them from their natural ability of imitation.

It is interesting that Albert Bandura calls his theory a *social* learning theory. This means one way we learn to be a human being is to observe, imitate, and model the way we see other human beings treat one another.

The word social comes from the Latin (*socius*) which means an allied friend, a companion. A teacher can become an allied companion who stands by the children's side as they learn how life on earth works. Our task as pedagogues is to create worthy patterns that create a path for the child to follow. The child is enthusiastic and wants to know how to *do* life, not to hear explanations about life. Being a living example is a big responsibility and requires commitment and intensive generosity. We can ask ourselves a question here: "How are my relationships with my colleagues, my friends and family, am I creating worthy patterns for the child to follow?"

Our work with Waldorf pedagogy centers around the young child's natural ability to not only emulate what the teacher brings to the classroom. It is the teacher's privilege to model what it truly means to be a human being. What we think and feel is transparent to the little child and they inwardly imitate it. We are not perfect human beings, and sometimes things don't go as well as we would hope. In the book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* by Rudolf Steiner, he implores us to not lose faith in ourselves and to press on when we have made mistakes. He asks us never to despair

over failure, but to keep trying and remain steadfast. Our wellspring of strength is inexhaustible when we are spiritually striving.

It is a virtue to get up again after falling in the midst of difficulties and challenges and begin anew. The children sense this in their teacher and inwardly imitate this. It gives them courage with their own struggles. That thought may help to keep us going on a challenging path, with persistent determination and willingness to stretch and widen our hearts. ♦

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Inspiring Imitation: Real Activity with Real People in Real Time

~ Nancy Blanning

Young children learn through imitation. This was one of the first insights shared by Rudolf Steiner in his 1907 lecture—“Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science”—where he gave the outline for what would develop into Waldorf education more than a decade later. If we have been astonished by the accuracy, beauty, and charm of how young children imitate back to us what they have experienced through their senses, we may now be perplexed, disappointed, and dismayed that children are outwardly imitating

less and less. To “teach” young children through imitation and example is a foundational tenet of our pedagogy. What is going on?

Along with noting the powerful influence of stress, rushed lives, and technology and media in our modern age, we may ask what models for imitation are present in the child’s environment today. We know that for young children to achieve uprightness and walking, speaking, and the beginnings of thinking, there must be a live human being in the child’s environment who



Photo courtesy of Erica Milone



Photo courtesy of Erica Milone

demonstrates, who models these human capacities. An active, in-the-flesh human being as model is essential. Children begin their human unfolding by imitating other human beings. They imitate what they see and hear, how others move, how human models make their way through life.

What do children see now? Not much. In fact, one could be so bold as to say ADULTS ARE BORING. Adults today seldom offer children imitative pathways to help them develop as confident, physically competent individuals who can stand securely in the world.

The new WECAN publication “Speech Development in the Digital Age” presents a compelling explanation that acquiring speech and thinking—and all that grows from them on a developmental pyramid, including academic skills—depend first on full-body movement. Young children need full freedom for self-initiated movement, without adult interruption or intrusion, in infancy and toddlerhood, as the Pikler birth-to-three wisdom articulates so clearly. From then on, children need to see and hear adults actively moving in purposeful ways to serve our human needs,

the needs of our environment, and the needs of dear Mother Earth. *They need to see real activity by real human beings in real time.* If they see nothing that awakens their birth-given imitative capacities, they will have nothing to imitate.

Children do, however, still need to move. When they are offered nothing interesting around them to imitatively awaken their movement, they will begin to “discharge” in erratic, dysregulated ways. Erratic, dysregulated, erupting, and exploding behaviors are signs of distress, calling to us to offer more real, big-enough-to-be-seen, purposeful movement.

Outdoor-oriented programs have obvious advantages in this regard. Lifting and carrying heavy things, digging, and raking are easier to provide in an outdoor setting. All children are delighted by these activities, especially if there is a purposeful intention in gardening, building a fire, and so on. Urban children need these activities and movements as well. Urban educators need to be resourceful, to envisioning how to create similar opportunities in city schools. And even outdoor program children need chances to clean and care for an indoor environment. How can we wash play cloths and towels big enough to be wrung out and hung out to dry, iron items big enough to take some effort, mop the floor with a heavy mop, and polish a silver teapot that is really used every day, not just as a showpiece or to provide busy work?

Children are looking to adults to provide purposeful activity that they can imitate. Having real work and movement to imitate in the larger environment stimulates and opens the door for imitation in circle time and play. That is the goal we are striving toward for the children’s sake. Joep Eikenboom, author of the book *Foundations of the Extra Lesson*, stated that children are always imitating. If they are imitating nothing, they must be witnessing “nothing” as a model. The children are looking for real activity that is purposeful and bold, not boring. ♦

Nancy Blanning serves as editor of *Gateways* and is Co-Director with Leslie Burchell-Fox of the *Early Childhood teacher training (WECTE)* at *Sunbridge Institute, NY*. Her special interest is in supporting young children’s healthy physical, emotional, and social integration through joyful and purposeful movement.

The Many Faces of Waldorf Education



Welcoming in the Youngest Ones: New Dogwood Nursery Opening September 2024 at New Amsterdam School

~ Jeannie McGartland

Photo courtesy of Jeannie McGartland

Little ones—the world is full of them! Everywhere you look, there they are: bubbly newborns, newly-mobilized one-year-olds, and newly verbal two-year-olds. No matter who we are in their lives, they lay easy claim to our hearts' love and good will, simply with their joy and light.

Since its founding, the New Amsterdam School has brought the transformative benefits of Waldorf early childhood education to the Lower Manhattan community, offering programming for children ages 3-6 years old.

The nature of our modern lives means that there are many families in our community looking for longer hours of care for their children, especially with drop-off options. Families are searching to find a nursery

program aligned with their values, a beautiful place for their littlest ones to spend their days. After over a decade of creating a thriving early childhood program, the New Amsterdam School faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees are very excited to announce that beginning in September 2024, we will be supporting even younger children through our newly established Dogwood Nursery, the first Waldorf daycare in New York City.

Inspired by the early childhood centers leading this work in the Waldorf community, our faculty and staff are committed to bringing the magical, reverent care that is found in these classrooms to the East Village here in New York City. In the Dogwood Nursery program, we welcome children ages 18 to 24

months, and provide a beautiful homelike space that is child-centered and nurturing. With curriculum created to meet the development of the growing toddler, with a gentle daily rhythm, small class sizes, and an individualized approach that centers on dignity, respect, and reverence for the developmental stage each child is in. Children and families will not be rushed in their development and learning, but rather offered the experience of a slower pace of life, living in the present, from moment to moment. They will experience their teachers as patient models for imitation, who give them love, attention, and the freedom to learn, move, and explore. They will be nurtured by an environment rich in sensory activities and full of song, and will enjoy wholesome and nutritious foods.

A unique aspect of New Amsterdam's offerings is their close relationship with a neighborhood community garden. The children spend time in the garden daily, experiencing the natural elements throughout the seasons. Being immersed in nature and seeing a garden grow provides an abundance of opportunities for free movement, unrushed exploration, and gentle sensory experiences for the smallest members of our community.

As this classroom establishes, New Amsterdam School will also be looking to grow and support further Infant Classrooms in the coming years, for children ages 12 months to 18 months.

The need for aligned and affordable early childhood programs in our neighborhood is critical; 60% of our enrolled families receive tuition assistance each year. Faced with rising costs and a scarcity of subsidized or sliding-scale programs, many parents are left without viable options for their children. We believe that



Photo courtesy of Jeannie McGartland

economic status should not inhibit a child's access to a quality education and access to green spaces and nature, which, unfortunately, is often the case. In creating this new program our mission is to create more equitable access to this unique, high quality early childhood experience for all children and families. Diversity and inclusion at early ages is essential to fostering tolerance and acceptance as adults. We envision a program that is truly accessible to all. ♦

Jeannie McGartland is School Director of New Amsterdam School in New York City.

The Worker Characters in Storytelling and Puppetry: How they Can Support Imitation in Children

~ Suzanne Down

Meaningful, purposeful work can be a potent antidote for a child to help balance the overwhelming nature of technology today. Our interest in practical life, our physical and heart engagement in doing real work, baking, knitting, sewing, shoveling, planting a garden, building, and so on, provide the vital source of imitation for our children. Through their eagerness to imitate us, we help enliven their relationship to their own will forces, their confidence in “doing,” and their sense of joy. When children imitate useful, worthwhile actions that we perform in their presence, they are forming the building blocks of their own moral capacity.

When they view puppet characters also visibly engaged in “doing,” this reinforces the children’s imitative powers, and sparks their own interest in participating in a life of accomplishment in the daily life around them. Imagine the sense of self-worth that can arise from this.

The key is in building up our own story imagination. We draw on our own life experiences, story meaning and symbolism, research, and consciousness, and warm it all into an imaginative inner picture. We find the inspiration for these worker tales in the activity of the competent puppet characters that inhabit them.

The shoemaker lovingly, with great care, cuts the leather and stitches it together to make a shoe! His whole being shows interest and pride in his workmanship. There is a leaning-in to the stitching, as his eyes look at what he is creating. His soul nature surrounds the shoes he is making. After all, the true archetypal shoemaker is making a shoe that supports humans walking their way through the world, each with an individual destiny. We all are shoemakers in our inner life.

The farmer stands sturdily in the field and views the land. They will dig and plant, water, and nurture the earth and the plants that grow in their care. They are the caretaker of earth, and grow the food that gives

us sustenance. The sun shines on their hat, the rain falls on their back. Through wind, snow, morning and night the farmer steadfastly takes care of the land and the growing of things. We honor this profession in the rhythmic, earthy nature of the farmer’s gestures.

I look for opportunities in every story, from nursery rhyme to fairy tale, to bring forward the rhythm of practical work. The baker kneads the dough, her whole body moving in the action of kneading. Her whole heart is in each stage of the process. We can clearly bring the gestures to the children, the mixing, the rolling, so that the texture of the dough will become visible. When she puts it in the oven, we will see her smelling the sweet smells, and when she tastes it, mmmmm, we taste it too! All this we pour into our character from our own inner imagination, awakening insight into these practical, yet ensouled gestures.

Whatever the worker is doing, we establish a relationship... the shoemaker cares for the shoes he is making, the farmer’s crops are important to their soul. The baker finds joy in each loaf of bread she makes. But when the worker character’s work is caring for sheep, or a cow, or the chickens, or a child, the relationship is elevated because there can be a visual and believable response from this other character. When the shepherd tends to the sheep, and pats the sheep’s head, the sheep can look up at the shepherd and respond to the caring gesture. We see what lives in the interval of the relationship. What is between them is made visible. ♦

Suzanne Down is the founder and director of *Juniper Tree School of Story and Puppetry arts in Colorado*. The school offers a full-year online training in puppetry arts, summer in person intensives, puppetry tutorials, and story writing workshops. All of these offerings weave together pedagogical, artistic, and therapeutic aspects of puppetry. Visit her website at junipertreepuppets.com for details.

An Inspiring Play Moment

~ Kristy Lollar

One morning as our preschool children began indoor play, several five-year-olds built themselves a den and became a pack of wolves with a few tigers included.

Simultaneously, a few children set up house in the play kitchen and began making food to serve at their table. The tigers began to prowl into the kitchen, and those in the kitchen whined and fussed and told them to get out. The tigers weren't listening to them, so I entered the area and told them, "If I saw a tiger or wolf at my door, I would not open it to let them in. If you want to come into the house, you will have to be a person and ring the doorbell. Then you might be invited in."

This changed the whole game. The tigers and wolves became magical. They were still wolves and tigers over in their den, but as they crossed the room, they would stand tall, become human, and ring the

doorbell. Then the friends would invite them in. In fact, the kitchen helpers asked what the visitors would like to eat, and then they would prepare them a feast. The table was filled with jolly eating and talking. Then the visitors would say "thank you" and leave. As they crossed the room again, they would return to their animal forms and proceed to growl and tussle in their den. ♦

Kristy Lollar is lead teacher in a mixed-aged kindergarten class at Prairie Moon Waldorf School in Lawrence, KS. With degrees in dance and early childhood education, she has experience in traditional education and homeschooling with her own children, through which she became introduced to Waldorf education. She has a special love of stories and gardening.

Autumn Story: A Movement Imagination

~ Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt

Begin sitting down and accompany the story with movement and gestures.

In Autumn, there are good things to eat:
Rose-y apples, crisp and sweet,
Pretty berries, walnuts brown,
Golden corn with a tassel'd crown.

Stand and continue telling the story, accompanying it with movement and gestures.

On the farm these good things grow,
For the farmer tends them so.
Yet around the fields, there creep
Other creatures who like to eat.

Reynard Fox and Winn the Deer,
And Johnny Crow all come near.
And Nibbler the Mouse
With the furry grey ears.

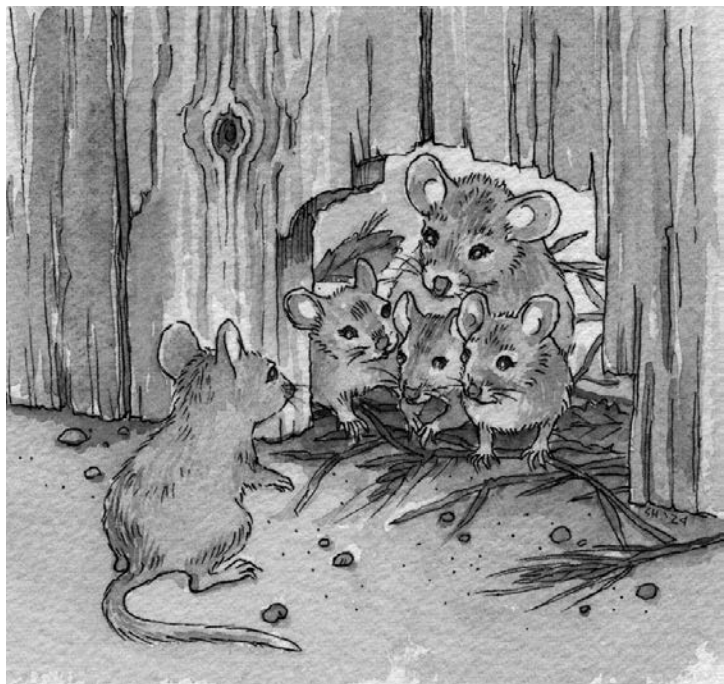


Illustration by Sheila Harrington from Dancing Stories

Take hands and walk around the circle while singing a short autumn song. You might enjoy “Autumn Has Come” by Peter Patterson in the Wynstones Autumn collection.

Stand and continue telling the story, accompanying it with movement and gestures.

Nibbler the Mouse played in the corn
And watched it grow tall all the summer long.
He thought he would gather a few little seeds
To hide in his nest for his winter needs.

But along came the farmer in the early morn
And he cut and he cut, and he cut the corn.
Yes, he cut, and he cut, and he cut the corn.
What did Nibbler do that day? Why, the small mouse
ran away!

Move with quick, light little steps around the circle as mice, with the following verse. If you like, you can hold your arms and hands in front of you, like small paws. With a younger group, you might choose to take hands and move all together around the ring.

Run, Nibbler, run! Run, Nibbler, run!
The harvest time has now begun.
Run, Nibbler, run! Run, Nibbler, run!
The harvest time has now begun.

Stand and continue telling the story, accompanying it with movement and gestures.

At last, the little mouse could rest,
Safe inside a cozy nest.
While the autumn wind went on
To sail the leaves and sing this song.

Take hands and walk around the circle, repeating the autumn song from before. After the song, stand and continue the story, accompanying it with movement and gestures.

Johnny the Crow sat in the patch
And watched all the pumpkins grow plump and fat.
He thought he would tap at the pumpkins so sweet—
A good little dinner for blackbirds to eat.

But along came the farmer when the sun stood high,
And he brought home the pumpkins to bake into pies.
Yes, he brought home the pumpkins to bake into pies.
What did Johnny do that day? Why, the blackbird
flew away!

Move around the circle as birds with the verse below. Extend your arms wide and lift and dip them rhythmically, like wings. With a younger group, you might prefer to once again take hands and move together around the ring.

Fly, Johnny, fly! Fly, Johnny, fly!
Or you too may be baked in a pie!
Fly, Johnny, Fly! Fly, Johnny, Fly!
Or you too may be baked in a pie!

Stand and continue telling the story, accompanying with movement and gestures.

At last the little crow did rest,
Safe inside a cozy nest.
While the autumn wind went on
To sail the leaves and sing an autumn song.

The imagination continues with Winn the Deer and Reynard the Fox. The full text can be found in the Dancing Stories book. The circle concludes as follows:

Now do not think the animals won't eat,
For in the woods are berries sweet.
And leaves and seeds the plants will bear.
Good Mother Earth has left them there ...with care.

All dear animals in every place
Know the warmth of her embrace.
And sheltered in each forest house
Sleep fox and deer and bird and mouse.

Sing a quiet song or lullaby to conclude the story circle, perhaps one with a Mother Earth theme. ♦

Excerpted from *Dancing Stories* (WECAN, 2024)

Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt is a longtime instructor in therapeutic Eurythmy and movement with many years teaching kindergarten in several North American Waldorf Schools. Her interest and delight in movement and circle time work with young children led her to write the stories collected and published by WECAN as *Dancing Stories*. She currently teaches early childhood caregivers in several training institutes. Her home on a beautiful island off the west coast of Canada with trees, animals, and sea continue to inspire her stories.

Inviting Imitation through Circle Time

— Stacie Warren

For a circle to engage the children, I have learned that the circle must resonate deeply within the teacher. Only our relationship with the circle will draw forth their own willingness to journey with us. By creating my own circles, I have learned to meet the specific needs of individual students and the changing dynamic of each class as a whole. Self-created circles come from a place within me that speaks more vividly to the children. That makes it easier for me to memorize the circle and brings forth the imagery in my actions. As they encounter these authentic actions that come out of my self, the children are much more comfortable entering my imaginative world.

To create consistent expectations, each circle has a simple pattern.

- Coming together (same song and action each time)
- Big movement to integrate into body, leading us into a journey
- Rest
- Spring up with a surprise or a movement that tickles the children
- Rest
- Big movement/journey
- Rest (same verse and action each time)
- Awakening, with an individual child touching each child with the “Waking Wand”

Each circle has a definite beginning and ending to give a breathing-in and breathing-out rhythm. We begin with the same song, with which we join hands and walk around the circle together.

Because we play Ring-Around-the-Rosie type games outside, the act of joining together in a circle is familiar and reminiscent of a joyful activity. Students for whom holding hands is not pleasant are given options to walk alongside us and join back in as soon as we’ve stopped holding hands, or to hold a shirt tail or sleeve instead of hands as long as their neighbor agrees. Honoring individual needs invites more children to participate.

Including movements that speak to our children is important. Many young children are quite impulsive, struggling with their body’s boundaries. To help these

children feel the extremities of their being, our circle starts with great stomping and clapping/knee-slapping movements after the opening song. This draws their awareness into a more manageable space within and around them. For a quieter alternative, we might squeeze our arms and legs like a tube of toothpaste the full length of our body so that we may move out of our heads and into our bodies. This “full body hug” requires children to cross midlines, builds body geography, and provides proprioceptive feedback for sensory-seeking children.

Now that we are in our bodies, we can move out of the circle by galloping, flying, crawling, tiptoeing, gliding, walking backward, or whatever the moment calls for. This traveling segment is accompanied by a repetitive song that aligns with our movement, one that then may be seen repeated in their independent play again and again. We journey around the tables and back to the circle rug, transitioning into a resting position on the circle carpet.

During this short resting period, we may be hiding from a wild beast, or could be trees waiting to sprout out of our seed jackets. Sometimes we are covered by a white sheet of “snow” falling on us or a brown blanket of “soil” by the hands of the assisting teacher. This invites calm after our big movement. Then we might emerge from our hiding spot or sprout upwards into big movement again. The middle movement is usually one that tickles the children or provides a child or two the opportunity to choose an imitative movement.

The movements that tickle the children include changing the pace, such as starting something very slowly and going faster and faster and then slower and slower. Children also love the opportunity to show off their skills, such as balancing on one foot or stretching to their tallest selves. Additionally, children love crawling through tunnels and caves (under a table with a silk on top), being rolled up like a cocoon in a blanket (older children can do this to each other in teams), spinning, pretending to be animals, walking over lava across a narrow bridge (the balance beam), stepping across a stream on stepping stones (large blocks arranged across the floor), tiptoeing through the snake’s nest (small branches or a rope laid across

the floor in a random pattern), or climbing a mountain (step stools/chairs/stumps/small tables staggered up and then down), etc. All of these activities build their gross and fine motor capacities, help them integrate into their bodies, give variety, build their imaginations, provide proprioceptive feedback, and keep them fully engaged.

Children love opportunities to be imitated and love to be given the chance to choose a movement to be followed by all. This might look like asking a different child each day to choose how we will travel on our journey, or to choose an animal to imitate. This gives children the opportunity to command attention in an appropriate way, and keeps them attuned to who might be chosen next. Some children might choose to watch many times before joining in. Honor their process and incorporate their help if possible, such as holding onto one side of a silk with your assisting teacher while their peers crawl under it, rubbing backs while we are in a resting position, and so on. Empowering them lets them be part of the circle, inviting their inclusion in a comfortable way.

After this second period of movement, we come back into calm. Perhaps we “freeze” in a position that requires balance on one foot or roll into a ball

backward like a roly-poly. In a few calm moments, we will have a big movement again, such as the journey back (going the opposite direction as the first journey). Once we return from this journey, we come back for a final calming end to our circle, with the same verse and action each time. This definitively signifies the end of our circle and allows time for our hard efforts to sink deeply into our being. During this calm, the assisting teacher will rub our backs (with the children’s permission). Then one student will be in charge of gently tapping each quiet child with our “Waking Wand” to wake us from our rest. ♦

Stacie Warren is the founder and lead teacher of Sunflower House Preschool in Colorado Springs, CO, a nonprofit Waldorf-inspired preschool program. She began as a mainstream third grade and early childhood special education teacher. When introduced to Waldorf education, everything resonated deeply and led to her completing the Early Childhood teacher program at Gradalis. Stacie brings her observation skills and insights from special education into her Waldorf teaching.

Gluten-Free Bread Recipe

~ Erica Milone

Sunbridge Institute graduate Erica Milone authored a cookbook for the outdoor kindergarten (as well as indoor ovens) as her final project. Here is one of the great options that accommodates gluten-free and vegan diets—and is delicious for all other diets as well.

This is a delicious GF bread option that comes out like traditional crusted breads. The dough is on the sticky side. When rolling, keep a bowl of oil to dip fingertips in to make handling a bit easier.

This dough can also be shaped into “Dragon Bread” for festivals like Michaelmas, using wet or oiled hands to shape & dried fruit or nuts for decorating.

Gluten-Free Bread Recipe

Makes about 24 Rolls

Ingredients

3 Cups White Rice Flour
1 1/2 Cups Sorghum Flour
1 Cup Tapioca Flour
1/2 Cup Arrowroot Flour
2 TB Xanthan Gum
2 TB Sugar
1 TB Salt
1 TB Yeast
3 3/4 Cups Water, 100 degrees F

Directions

Mix all dry ingredients together in large bowl.

Add in water and mix with Danish dough whisk (a special tool useful for mixing dough, made of a flat loop of wire on a handle and available in kitchen shops or online).

Let sit in a warm place, covered, at least 1 hour. Refrigerate before using for easiest handling.

Baking Rolls

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.

Sprinkle a little extra flour on dough before breaking off and handling.

Form dough into log shape (baguette shape and size) on parchment lined baking sheet, using wet hands.

Cut log into 1 inch rolls and place spaced apart on baking sheet, or leave in baguette shape and bake as is.

Brush rolls with ghee, coconut oil (for vegan), or butter.

Bake 18-20 minutes or until golden brown. ♦

Optional—to makes crisper crust like Italian or French bread:

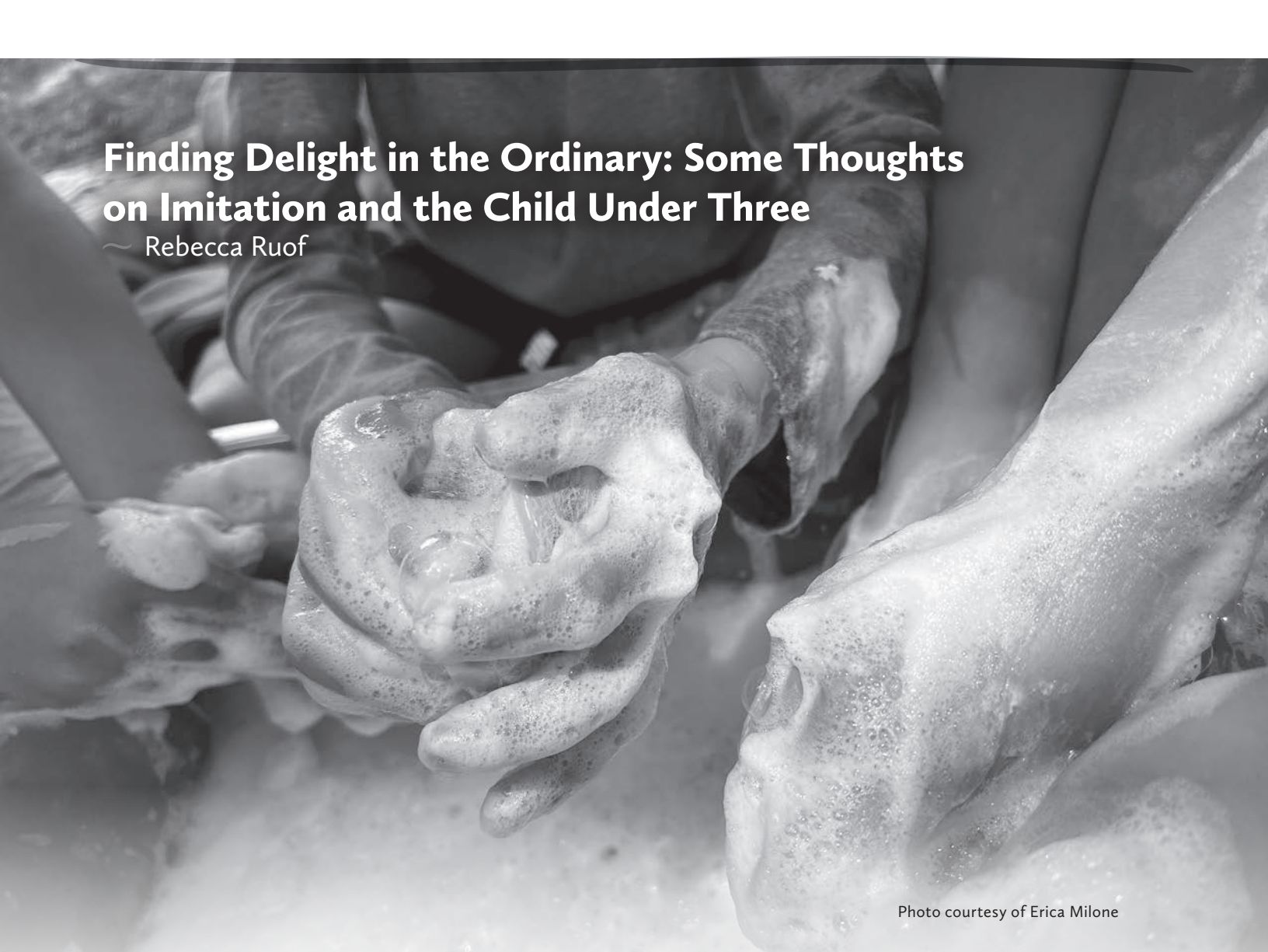
When preheating oven, place a non-glass, oven-safe pan on bottom rack. When bread tray is ready to go in oven, pour 1 cup of hot water in pan on bottom rack and place bread tray in oven on top rack.

Campfire Option

Bake in parchment-lined Dutch oven over hot coals as a large round loaf for 30-40 minutes.

Erica Milone is an assisting, mixed-age kindergarten teacher at the Waldorf School of Garden City. During the pandemic, she ran her own forest kindergarten based on Waldorf pedagogy. She finds that practical work of preparing and cooking food together feeds the children literally and also fuels sensory experiences that nurture their growing capacities.

As a person with celiac disease, Erica transforms recipes to be safe for those who need to avoid gluten, knowing how isolating it can be for children when they cannot eat the same thing as their peers. Erica holds her diploma in Waldorf early childhood education from Sunbridge Institute.



Finding Delight in the Ordinary: Some Thoughts on Imitation and the Child Under Three

~ Rebecca Ruof

Photo courtesy of Erica Milone

We had all made our way to the table, and there was a mood of reverence and anticipation as the children waited for the food to be passed out. We always start our snack time by lighting a candle and saying a blessing in gratitude for the food we are about to receive. While all eyes were on me, I gently started singing and struck the match. On that particular day, the match exploded like fireworks, sending sparks in every direction. My assistant teacher and I looked at each other in surprise and burst out laughing (we are usually quiet and composed around the table). It was not our proudest teaching moment, but it was genuine and filled with joy and wonder.

For the rest of the school year, every time we lit the candle before snack, the children would laugh. Every day!

This is such a clear example of how children imitate their environment. This includes the people around them and their outer and inner gestures. Young

children still feel themselves as one with the world and live into their environment with trust and complete surrender. This is especially true for the youngest ones, who don't refer to themselves as "I" in a conscious way yet. They give themselves over to the world because they believe that the world "is good and of a moral nature" (as Rudolf Steiner explained).

In *Education as a Force for Social Change*, Rudolf Steiner speaks about how before birth, we are one with our environment:

Children carry their prenatal experiences in the spiritual world into physical existence after birth. In the spiritual world, we human beings live in the beings of the higher hierarchies ... There, we are imitative to a much higher extent because we are united with those beings we imitate. Then we are being placed in the physical world, but we continue our habit of being at one with our surroundings.

The habit of being at one with the beings in our surroundings, of imitating them, continues.

There is a tendency in our time to pull children out of this “beingness,” this “oneness,” and into understanding things intellectually. We reason with them and try to make them understand life through thinking. We say things like “Be careful!” and “This is not safe.” These are subtle ways we convey that they need to stay alert and awake at all times. By doing so, children can lose their inborn trust in their environment. They pull back from giving themselves over to the world and stop imitating what is around them.

A simple way to bring children back to an experience of “all is well with the world” is to engage in meaningful tasks to take care of our environment and each other. Putting away our toys nicely so they are ready for the next day, tending to our outside spaces to make them welcoming for people and animals alike, and taking time for moments of self-care are just a few examples. As teachers we have to learn to return to experiencing the “sublime in the ordinary” as Daniel Udo de Haes puts it in *The Creative Word*. That is what these children who have just arrived from spiritual realms are interested in.

In my toddler nursery, Monday is rice day. The children delight in helping prepare our snack. One of them brings our shiny pot to the table, another the measuring cup. The children watch as I carefully pour the rice into the cup. They take turns putting the rice in the pot. Oh, what a delightful tinkling sound it

makes! Usually we need at least two cups so we have enough for everybody. Then we add the water. One, two, three cups, and one more. The water is clean and sparkly and we don’t want to spill it. It also makes a sound as we pour it into the pot! We give the rice one good stir, put on the lid and set it up to cook. Then we bring things back to the kitchen area: the spoon, the measuring cup, and the big jar of rice.

There is nothing too ordinary in this simple act of filling our pot with rice. It is so much more than a physical activity. Our gesture is one of gratitude, joy, and care. It grounds the children in an atmosphere of goodness, and they are able to experience life in a way that makes sense to them. This is where the magic happens.

Modeling love and care for the ordinary things welcomes children into participating in earthly life. They will recognize in our actions and our inner gesture that they have indeed arrived at a good place.



Rebecca Ruof is a lead nursery teacher at the Berkshire Waldorf School in MA, after having taught at Green Meadow Waldorf School for many years. Rebecca, who grew up in Germany, attended a Waldorf school from kindergarten through high school. She teaches practical arts for nursery-aged children at Sunbridge Institute and shares insights into the unique needs of children from birth to three years.

Rommelgood's Tromping Song

~ Wilma Ellersiek

From *Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves: Hand Gesture and Movement Games for Young Children* (WECAN, 2024)

"Rommelgood's Tromping Song" is the companion piece to "Who Tromps Around Through All The Wood?" (p. 68-70 in *Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves*). The two games can be combined for a longer imagination in one circle or offered sequentially, "Who Tromps . . .?" first and then the "Tromping Song" in another circle to continue Rommelgood's adventures.

ROMMELGOOD'S TROMPING SONG



The musical score is written on a single treble clef staff. It begins with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some measures containing rests. The lyrics are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The score is divided into several sections by line breaks. The first section contains five lines of lyrics, each starting with '1. Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!'. The second section contains five lines of lyrics, each starting with '1. I am the GI-ANT Rom-mel- good! I tromp a- round through all the wood.' The third section contains one line of lyrics: '6. Then I go home, for home is best.' The fourth section contains one line of lyrics: 'Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!'. The fifth section contains one line of lyrics: 'Now I sit and take a rest.'

1. Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!
2. Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!
3. Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!
4. Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!
5. Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!

1. I am the GI-ANT Rom-mel- good! I tromp a- round through all the wood.
2. I am a GI-ANT great big man. With GI-ANT steps I cross the land.
3. I am as tall as a- ny tree. A- loft, my head you hard- ly see.
4. But my tre- men- dous, GI- ANT hat, you can see that, you can see that!
5. I am the GI- ANT Rom-mel- good! I tromp a- round through all the wood.

6. Then I go home, for home is best.

Rom and rum and rom and rum! - Rom and rum and rom and rum!

Now I sit and take a rest.

ROMMELGOOD'S TROMPING SONG

Spatial movement singing game

Text

1. Rom and rum and rom and rum!

Rom and rum and rom and rum!

2. I am the G I A N T Rommelgood!
I tromp around through all the wood.
✓

3. Rom and rum and rom and rum!
Rom and rum and rom and rum!

4. I am a G I A N T great big man
with G I A N T steps I cross the land.
✓ ✓

5. Rom and rum and rom and rum!
Rom and rum and rom and rum!

6. I am as tall as any tree.
Aloft, my head you hardly see.

7. Rom and rum and rom and rum!
Rom and rum and rom and rum!

8. But my tremendous, G I A N T hat,
✓
you can see that, you can see that!
✓ ✓

Gestures

1. At the accent in the melody line (—) make a long, elastic step. Make each step purposefully, slightly and elastically bending the knee.

The steps are long and heavy, not loud. The giant tromps, he does not stomp.

Move clockwise with right shoulder toward center of circle.

2. Stop. Stretch arms up high, with hands forming fists: Giant Rommelgood. On “around” nod, but leave arms stretched.

3. Again tromp clockwise around the circle as in 1.

4. Stop, then stretch arms and fists upward as in 2. Nod on “giant steps.”

5. Again tromp clockwise around the circle as in 1.

6. As above in 2, make yourself tall.

7. Again tromp clockwise around the circle as in 1.

8. Show a wide hat with arms and hands outstretched to each side. Nod at “hat” and “that.”



9. Rom and rum and rom and rum!
 Rom and rum and rom and rum!
 I am the G I A N T Rommelgood!
 I tromp around through all the wood.

9. As in 1 and 2.

10. Then I go home, for home is best.
 Rom and rum and rom and rum!
 Rom and rum and rom and rum!

10. First tromp around in a circle clockwise as in 1, then return to your starting place from the beginning of the game. One can also keep going in a circle and stop wherever one finds oneself.

11. Now I sit and take a rest.

11. Now either sit on stools or the floor and at “take a rest” cover head with arms.
 Alternatively, stop anywhere in the room, crouch down, elbows resting on knees, and head resting in hands. Stay quiet for a bit.

Conclusion

In order to calm the children down again after the lively tromping, the following song, “Quiet Diddledoo,” can be sung, hummed, or played on the pentatonic Choroï flute.

QUIET DIDDLEDOO

Soo - soo - soo - ! Rom- mel- good is rest- ing now.
 Soo - soo - soo - ! Rom- mel- good is rest- ing now.

Rom- mel- good, still as a mouse. Soo - soo - soo - !
 Rom- mel- good, still in his house. Soo - soo - soo - !

After the quiet song, while rising, the teacher can say: “Rommelgood has rested!”

If the “tromping step” still remains with the children, the following verse will be helpful:

Rommelgood tromps: rom and rum and rom and rum.

With steps so soft and small, there go the children all:

so - so - so - so - so - so - so.

Show everything in movement.

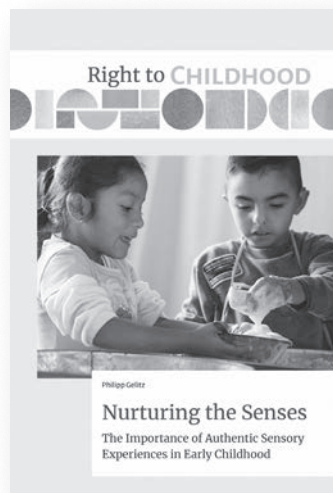
Publication News

Nurturing the Senses: The Importance of Authentic Sensory Experiences in Early Childhood

Philipp Gelitz, translated by Margot Saar

(WECAN, 2024)

Reviewed by Laura Mason



In this little 34-page booklet, author Philipp Gelitz helps us recognize the importance of providing thoughtful environments in which young children can take hold of their physical bodies. Presented in present-day language, referencing modern research, and with beautiful photos that

depict the experiences of children in various stages of development, it's a publication that every caregiver and early childhood educator should have.

The book opens with an imagination that places us in the comfortable and protected world of the human before birth, followed by a description of the post-birth conditions of gravity, light, color, sound, hunger, thirst, and discomfort, among a variety of other sensory experiences. We immediately understand the significance of creating a sensory environment that supports children from infancy, both protecting them from overstimulation and providing them with opportunities to exercise their senses and learn about the world and themselves.

As Waldorf educators, we are not alone in our understanding that immersive sensory experiences are foundational to children's cognitive development, and the author references several studies that demonstrate that. A modern understanding of perceptual systems,

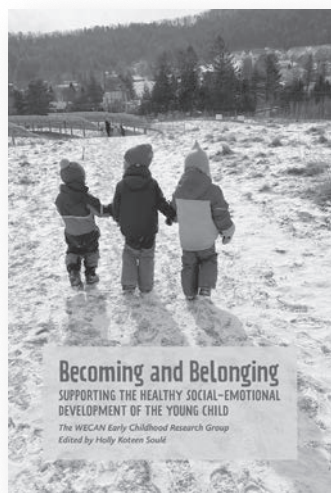
and a description of Steiner's twelve senses along with ideas for supporting the integration of each are also included. If you've been looking for a description of the twelve senses that is easily understandable and accessible to those new to Waldorf education, this is a great resource!

The author also introduces the idea of sensory congruence and the importance of children having experiences that do not isolate one sense from another but involve a variety of senses together so they can make meaning of the world. As we know, what a child learns through real-world experiences that involve movement, balance, sight, hearing, smell, touch, warmth, and more, is very different from what they might learn by looking at a photograph, which is primarily a two-dimensional visual experience. The author then touches briefly (and digestibly) on how the lack of congruent sensory experiences when using screens leads to incomplete impressions and the potential weakening of senses left unstimulated.

I was struck by the final few sections, in which different views of the human being are described. The author describes the modern concept of embodiment (which aligns with the way Waldorf education views human development) so concisely that it bears repeating: "a person's mental and spiritual potential depend on the extent to which they can take hold of their bodily structures." Our primary work as caregivers and early childhood educators is to help the children make a comfortable home in their bodies. This little book can help us be inspired to do so! I encourage educators to read it and consider sharing it with their school communities. It could also make a lovely study text for parent/caregiver groups. ♦

Becoming and Belonging: Supporting the Healthy Social-Emotional Development of the Young Child
The Waldorf Early Childhood Research Group, edited by Holly Koteen-Soulé
(WECAN, 2024)

Announcement by Donna Miele, WECAN Publications Coordinator



societal issues in supporting healthy development, especially social-emotional development. The authors have answered this call with a well-rounded offering of original articles and an appendix of selected supporting texts.

Relationship is foremost in the Group's concerns: helping young children to build relationships with each other and the world—to recognize “the I in you and the you in me,” as it is put by editor Holly Koteen-Soulé in the preface. Starting from this vantage point, the Group acknowledges that recent years have made relationship

Becoming and Belonging: Supporting the Healthy Social-Emotional Development of the Young Child was conceived by the Waldorf Early Childhood Research Group to address these post-Covid times, during which families are challenged by a host of world events and

a challenge for adults, whether we were isolating during the pandemic or entrenching ourselves in various camps based on ideological choices and strongly-held feelings about identity. How, then, should we approach early childhood education, in which learning to form relationship is so deeply necessary?

Each member of the Group answers from their own work, stepping back to examine the “Landscape of Social-Emotional Development,” moving closer to a position of “Beholding the Child,” meditating on “Re-Membering Play,” “Sensory Development as the Foundation for a Healthy Social-Emotional Life,” and “The Healing Power of Social Games,” among other topics. The collection also addresses children's foundational identity experiences (“‘Here I am!’ Positive Identity Development for Every Child,” “Face to Face, Heart to Heart, and Full of Imagination! Speech as the Living Bridge between the Emerging Self and the World”) and educators' personal development in and out of the classroom (“The Healing Deed,” “Soul Nutrition,” and “The Chalice of Community: The Social Art of the Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher”).

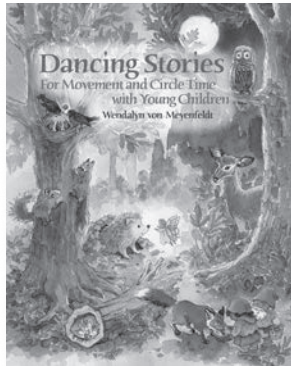
We hope you will find much to nourish and support your work in this discussion (which continues!) about creating space for emotional well-being and social healing, in your classroom and beyond. ♦

Dancing Stories: For Movement and Circle Time with Young Children

Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt

(WECAN, 2024)

Announcement by Donna Miele



Dancing Stories: For Movement and Circle Time with Young Children is a fresh, practical resource for the classroom or home program, filled with original verses and gesture games for circle time and play. Each day working on this book at WECAN, from perusing

Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt's bright, rich verses, to enjoying Sheila Harrington's fine illustrations of woodland creatures and fairy tableaux, was a joy.

Wendalyn's daily life among the cedars and saltwater landscapes of her Canadian coastal home have contributed unique yet familiar moods to her verses. Her long experience in eurythmy and

movement, as well as teaching in several North American Waldorf schools, have led her to craft wisely inventive new circle-time games and story activities for young children.

Movement activity, vital to healthy motor development, is central to the Waldorf early childhood curriculum. With this as her foundation, Wendalyn further infuses her work with a multicultural awareness of how important the circle dance is throughout the world, giving form to so many community gestures—blessing, gratitude, celebration, healing, invocation. She notes that when we bring this gesture to the early childhood classroom, we further demonstrate cooperation, patience, and other formative social cues and gestures.

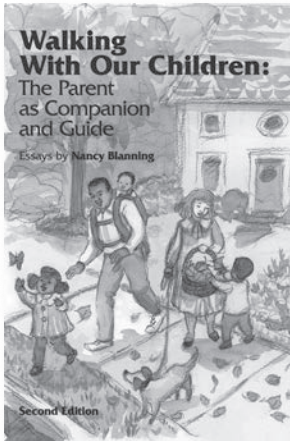
We hope you will enjoy your encounter with these new circle games, and bring them, with your own creativity and understanding, to your own circle time. ♦

Walking With Our Children: The Parent as Companion and Guide

Nancy Blanning

(Second edition, WECAN, 2024)

Reviewed by Ruth Ker



I invite you to spend time with this edited volume of wise and compassionate advice for parents. Although it is a wonderful resource for parents, and a support for the children of the world, it is also valuable for the Early Childhood practitioner who wants to find the words and ways to express important perspectives

to parents. As I write this, I'm remembering the many years of searching for just the right words or an article to give to the parents of the children in my kindergarten classes. I wish Nancy's book had been published then.

This book is a deed of love, arising out of many years of experience with families and the publication of Nancy Blanning's reflections in *LILIPOH* magazine and elsewhere.

Some of the original articles were published in 2010. In the preface, Nancy notes that the world that the parent is interfacing with in our time has had unprecedented shifts and is very different now from when she first began to write these articles. The edits within this second edition reflect the march of

time and the consequent environmental impacts that children and parents experience in our world. She avoids no topic.

Just for a little taste, I'll share that one of my favorite titles is called, "Guiding our Children: Enter the Flow and Let Go." In this offering, Nancy reflects on scenarios where adults have been able to sense the right moment to guide the child into a different direction without an abrupt transitional shock, rather than meeting a routine change with an impatient and critical response.

All of the articles in this volume are gifts, aimed at supporting adults to invest in the intentional and conscientious care of children. Every article will be helpful to early childhood caregivers, parents, grandparents, and anyone who wishes to approach caring for children with consciousness. Titles such as "The Parent's Question: What About Me?," "Preventing Addiction," "Childhood Learned Helplessness," "Love and Tolerance in Hard Times," "Leaping into the Fray of What to Say," "Whose Idea Is Your Child Thinking," "Gender Identity, More Complicated than Ever," "Show Me How to Do Life" — all of these and more are of interest to us in the beloved work we share in common. In her book, Nancy has shared a lifetime of thought-provoking experience which can assist us in our mission of helping children incarnate with strength into this life that they have chosen.

Thank you to Nancy for this valuable contribution. It is most certainly a deed of love. ♦