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# 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.

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## 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

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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.