

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 88, Spring 2025

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

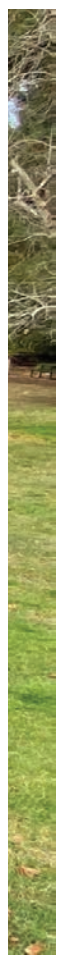




Photo courtesy of Christine Burke and the Emergency Pedagogy Team

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning



2025 has ushered in astonishing events. To begin with, devastating fires destroyed campuses of the Pasadena and Westside Waldorf Schools in Southern California. Not only the school buildings were lost but the children's work, books, teachers' libraries accumulated over years, furnishing, play things, and other material teaching resources are also gone. School families, teachers, and other community members lost their homes and all possessions. The magnitude of what has been experienced and of what they are now confronting physically, soulfully, and spiritually to re-found their communities is immense. As this issue of *Gateways* opens, we pause to hold them in heart and mind as they give birth to new stages in their growth. We also extend our holding thoughts to Asheville Waldorf School in North Carolina whose school community was hit by destructive flooding in the aftermath of tropical storm Helene in September 2024. Many thanks to the Emergency Pedagogy teams who visited these schools to bring support in these traumatic times through play, games, artistic activities, and counseling.

On the theme of birth, a verse by Rudolf Steiner meant to be spoken to a very young child by a loving caregiver keeps coming to mind. The language is adjusted to offer it as a communal intention to support these births from afar (perhaps as distant midwives):

*May light flow into you that can take hold
of you.*

We follow its rays with the warmth of our love.

*We think with the best glad thoughts of our
thinking on the leaping of your hearts.*

*They are to strengthen you, they are to bear
you up, they are to keep you pure.*

*We would fain gather our glad thoughts into
your steps on the paths of life,*

*That they link themselves to your own will
of life,*

*Finding strength in all the world, ever more
through its own self.*

* * *

The challenges of this new year are not only connected to our schools' losses. Change to cultural attitudes, policies, and practices confront us with dizzying speed with the change in governmental administration. Pandemic-deprived children continue to carry their distress into our classrooms to teachers who report their own depletion.

All of the above stand in stark contrast to the upcoming celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the first official Waldorf kindergarten in Germany in 1926. There is truly much to celebrate. Waldorf early childhood education strives to provide a protected space in which children can unfold their developmental plan through imitation, play, movement, real-life activities, and rich cultural exposure of language, story, verse, and song. We wish for the children to have time and space to not be hurried or intruded upon by external societal expectations and pressures. We say these things. But some voices question whether these are appropriate goals for our times?

This anniversary invites, even insists, that we take a deep look to identify the essential experiences and qualities that will support healthy incarnation for our children in the 100 years to come. With this issue, *Gateways* offers articles that point us back to the sources out of which Waldorf education has grown. These articles conduct us to statements and indications from Rudolf Steiner that we are asked to live with and sincerely ponder. We must have an inner knowing, certainty, and conviction that what we are doing truly serves children.

The first two articles are classic reprints, offered by founding Waldorf teachers who have left their legacy of understanding and encouragement to help us on our way. Dr. Helmut von Kugelgen shares "The Laws of Childhood," which calls us to consider these foundational intentions around which we create our classroom curriculum. Do these continue to hold true? How are we manifesting them in our classrooms?

Play was the primary focus of Joan Almon's work within Waldorf early childhood education and the wider world through Alliance for Childhood. Her article, "The Healing Power of Play," demonstrates

how vital play is as a force to support healthy physical, emotional, and social development.

The next cluster of articles weave a thread between imitation and play. Eniko Reeder describes her experience of how she had to throw out all of her expectations and usual practices to help a group of disorganized young children find their way into imitation, play, and social awareness. The way she describes how she took tiny, sequential steps in rhythmic, repetitive ways can stand as a model for teachers to consider.

Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt shares valuable insights about imitation and play from her perspective as a eurythmist. She suggests that free play is a pathway to future freedom. She ends with a verse that may become a new favorite when we understand the qualities that stand behind the sounds emphasized—A (*Ah*), E (*Ay*), I (*Ee*).

Ryan Rayniak introduces us into the realm of “adventure playgrounds” and “loose parts.” He gives suggestions as to how we might appropriately embrace more of this spirit in our play environments.

Jane Swain has a new book forthcoming in two volumes titled *Free Movement from the Very Start*. Her article is a small excerpt from a chapter on imitation. Her research takes us deep into a more profound understanding of what imitation is and how children under seven imitate within their body.

The next article continues to look at original descriptions from Rudolf Steiner on imitation and play. Nancy Blanning spent many evenings reading and re-reading these fundamental statements until they began to speak more profoundly, and here shares these thoughts with readers.

Laurie Clark’s piece on “Learning to Learn through Play” takes us on a journey from how the idea of academic push-down into kindergarten arose in the late 1950s with the “space race.” The value of play became obscured and undervalued. Laurie’s discussion readjusts this picture to show how play is actually the road ahead to future academic accomplishment and development of executive functioning. Timing is everything.

Throughout this section, brief vignettes offered by teachers and observers give a glimpse of the limitless potential of play and imitation to enliven our daily activities. When we make space for them, they will surprise and delight us in the most varied ways.

Our next section, News and Updates, starts with an article profiling a generous, good friend to Waldorf

education: Mercurius USA and Canada. Mercurius is a prominent supplier of the materials—wood, wax, and wool—we depend upon to offer Waldorf education. What is not so well known is that it continues to operate in the way it began, as a modest home-based enterprise which models itself on the ideals of the healthy social life. Their story is interesting and one *Gateways* is happy to share.

Emergency Pedagogy Crisis Intervention was mentioned at the beginning of this editorial. Christine Burke shares an article to describe this trauma intervention that was shared with the Ashville, Pasadena, and Palisades West Side Waldorf schools this school year. Shock and trauma are filling the world. It is important for all teachers to know of this work and resource.

For the Classroom brings some suggestions from Keiko Rothfield on how she brings her sometimes wild and boisterous young home group to calm and quiet. These may remind us of effective practices and inspire new ideas as well.

Aaron Joseph and Justine Franco share a new rendering of “Mother Holle” as a circle play. The article describes their process of finding important wisdom pictures in this story and their work to find new vocabulary that removes the painful sting of what we now see as excluding, judgmental language.

Games are fun and powerful opportunities to invite imitation through movement. Some strongly imitative games from Ruth Ker’s *Please, Can We Play Games?* are included. “The King and Queen” and “Old King Cole” are offered—along with suggestions for changes in word choice to make these more inclusive. “Tom Tiddlyng” and “Brow, Brow, Brinty” are delicious in sounds and a fun way of sequencing body geography.

We always need good stories, and “Flame” by Sasha Etzel is poignant given the recent consciousness of fire.

This section concludes with a short piece meant as support for adults. Whenever we find it hard to catch our breath and breathe rhythmically, an imagination of “Seven Angel Breaths,” written down by Nancy Blanning, arises from Dr. von Kügelgen’s advice about connecting with our angels.

In our Book section are featured two new publications—*The Little Book of Parenting* by Chinyelu Kunz and the first volume of Jane Swain’s *Free Movement from the Very Start*. Each is a valuable new resource for our work. We also want to call your attention to *Mentoring and Professional Review*, edited

by Diane David, a new, combined and updated edition of two essential resources.

Some older titles are also recommended, going back to the sources that Waldorf education has arisen from. Three collections—*From Kindergarten into the Grades*, *On the Play of the Child*, and *Understanding Child Development*—have gathered together statements about imitation, play, birth of the etheric, and school readiness. In our year leading to the one-hundredth anniversary of the first Waldorf kindergarten, these

provide material to read and ponder upon. Another classic resource, Renate Long-Breipohl's *Supporting Self-Directed Play*, describes how children find their way into life through imitation in play.

We are being offered a year to review and understand where we have come from, where we are now, and where the children are calling us to follow them into the future. This is a challenging, noble, and exciting journey to travel together. ♦

—Nancy Blanning

INVITATION FOR SUBMISSIONS

for Gateways

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THE FOUNDATIONS OF LITERACY

The Fall *Gateways* will focus upon how we build the Foundations of Literacy with children and prepare them to enter academic instruction in the grade school years.

The booklet *Speech Development in the Digital Age* explains that this is not accomplished through screen exposure. Rather, through live, human speech and encounter, the foundation for literacy is created. Articulate speech, as well as the ability to listen, and to understand non-verbal communication through movement and gesture, depend upon being with worthy human models in real time and real space. We teachers are the models. When we truly understand this phenomenon, we can help to evoke amazing developments within the child.

Speech is a movement process. As Rainer Patzlaff puts it in *Speech Development in the Digital Age*, “This movement process, which remains unconscious, takes hold of the listener’s muscles and limbs so that they join into the same movements. Literally the whole person is listening. Even our larynx speaks and sings along constantly when someone is speaking or singing. . . And this is only the first stage of the listening process. In the next stage, this movement progresses from unconscious, purely muscular activity to the rhythmic system of heart and lungs. Storytellers can observe the effect it has there in human listeners, where it manifests tension and relaxation and in the acceleration and deceleration of natural rhythms. These subtle nuances take hold of the soul and become vibrant experiences.”

What we bring through the word is powerful, indeed. For our Fall issue, *Gateways* invites observations and examples around the following themes, and any others that support the age-appropriate cultivation of literacy in early childhood. Please bring your own questions as well.

- Where and when do we use speech to open the door to literacy?
- How do we see movement in the early years forming the basis for later academic learning?
- What are we doing that we can build upon further, can extend to give more enrichment?
- How can we understand and pass on to parents and colleagues the benefits of delaying formal literacy instruction during the early childhood years?

With your submission, please include a short bio of yourself, including the age-group you work with, where you work, and anything else that is relevant to your submission (5-6 sentences).

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

Focus—Play and Imitation

The Laws of Childhood

~ Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen

Childhood is governed by sublime laws, and demands humanity and selflessness from the adult world. For this reason, the small child poses a great challenge to our intellectual modern consciousness. Should the realm of childhood be protected from the “experts,” whose thoughts are not born of love and perceptivity? Should the invasive experimentation, which alters and thereby affronts human destiny, be forbidden? Should it not still be our duty to our children to think ahead in reverence before daring to demand something of them—or before withdrawing and leaving them to their own devices? No matter how we act, we form children in our own image: it is not their consciousness, or even the soul, which has not yet spread its wings to take flight, but the convolutions of the brain, the fine vibrations of the glands, liver, circulatory system that we affect.

As a result, the first law of childhood is that the small child’s whole body is a sense organ, open to any and every impression. The child is extremely sensitive to the immediate surroundings. A smile, an expression of love, a tender word (unequaled sources of warmth and strength), colors, shapes, arrangement of things, and the positive thoughts of the people in the surroundings—all shape and form the child, as do nervousness, senseless acts, and outbursts of temper.

It is thus not so much heredity that is responsible for the similarity between parents and child; rather, small children are not yet consciously able to shield themselves from outside influences. These impressions penetrate right to the marrow of their bones—their reactions can be seen, for example, in changes in skin color or in digestive problems. The first days of a child’s life, as more and more psychologists are discovering, have a lasting influence because the initial impressions grow with the child’s body, as scars or as healthy tissue do.

The second law is one born of love, a sacred habit that every individual brings along: learning takes place through imitation, which incorporates the impressions

made on children by their surroundings. An act of love, even if it was merely an act of sexual intercourse, summoned the child’s being and prepared a body as a physical abode. From the loving spiritual world of the unborn, the child brings over a feeling of unbounded trust in the goodness of our world. Thus, there is the desire to imitate everything, and everything becomes part of the child through imitation: gestures, inner attitudes, outward conduct, language we use and the thoughts we think. “Imitation” is the magic word in the child’s education until the age of nine or ten, when it is gradually replaced by other forms of learning. The child’s habit of imitating us—filled with great trust and equally great expectations—exhorts us to be worthy of that imitation. Not lectures, but meaningful actions mold a “brain” which is capable of thinking meaningful thoughts. Inconsistency has the opposite effect.

These considerations lead us to the third law, which remains of great importance for the first years of schooling—and which is still a painful experience for the student struggling during exams: the forces of growth and memory (visual representation) are identical. Burdened with pedantic knowledge, children are robbed of the formative forces necessary to develop and strengthen their growing bodies. This is the reason why most precocious children look pale and wan, and why children who play imaginative games have a healthy complexion. Why should young children be weighed down with the banalities of everyday life? They will learn soon enough to differentiate between thick and thin, round and square, or between the fireman and the policeman—and will have no trouble doing so. The most important thing for the first seven years of life is to stimulate the child’s creative imagination through play and actual doing.

For this age group more than for any other, the following holds true: *The child learns to be human from other human beings.* What happens if this fourth law is disregarded? If the parent or teacher replaces their own stories, games, efforts and failures with

books, learning materials, or even the television set, they deprive the child of the most important thing they can give: human contact. The perception of a personality behind the activities the child sees in turn awakens the child's own personality. For what good is knowledge and more knowledge if a person has no imagination and is incapable of forming judgments and acting responsibly on those insights?

There are three different kinds of "sustenance" that nourish children and become part of them: food, the air they breathe, and the sense impressions from the world around them. So, the fifth law is to pay attention to quality. Prepare meals lovingly, using as many wholesome fruits and vegetables of the season as possible. An attitude of thankfulness for "our daily bread" increases its value; indifference, indulgence, and lack of social graces reduce it. In the family, there should be an alternation between outside and inside activities, sleeping and waking, serious moments and times of joy, Sundays and workdays. All of these factors make an essential contribution to the quality of the sense impressions children take in from their surroundings. Should they have mechanical toys or the stones, shells, building blocks and pieces of cloth that stimulate the imagination? Should they have woolen underwear or synthetics? Is the instinctive feeling that small children do not belong in front of the television set (not even to watch programs made for children!) already dead? Strollers should be built so that children can see and be reassured by the adult's face, for exposure to a flood of impressions from the street that children cannot assimilate only serves to make them nervous. We should constantly remind ourselves that anything that children cannot digest or that is of poor quality only weakens them. Children challenge our adult world to critical reflection.

From their point of view, much could indeed be said about the quality of our cities, the daily rhythm of our outer lives and the richness of our inner lives. Children demand humanity from us.

At what age do they become our contemporaries? In the beginning, they still live in humanity's earlier, dream-like state of consciousness; later, they will most certainly overtake us, for it is their task to take up the torch of the new generation. At no time, however, are they miniature adults. They must be gradually strengthened for the tasks of our century and equipped to carry its burdens. This upbringing must proceed step by step. Giving children too little of what they need for their age—or giving it to them too early—creates problems right from the start.

That is why the sixth law under consideration here is: development takes time, each step being built upon the preceding one. In the first two to three years, this development proceeds by leaps and bounds. Children learn more during this time than later during job training or in the university. The will power to stand erect and to learn to walk is followed by the child's awakening to feelings that find their expression in the spoken word. Only thereafter is the first word that is thought, and not imitated, spoken: the word "I."

This three-fold development also holds true for the first seven years of child development. First, children must come to grips with gravity, testing their will with each step taken. Then, reaching beyond the outstretched hand in the form of words, they express the first stirrings of the soul. A dialogue with nature and the world of fairy tales and an exploration of the social and imaginative-artistic aspect of language has begun. Finally (between the ages of five and seven), uniting word and language gestures, the child forms the first thoughts, creates new words and philosophies as only a child can. This law is clearly shown again in the three seven-year periods leading up to adulthood. Up to school age, and somewhat beyond, children should do things in order to grasp them, learning through play and their own experience. Up to puberty, they should learn both through experiencing things and through discussions. What has been learned is no longer incorporated, instead, feelings slowly begin to

take wing. During puberty, lively interest in people's destinies, both near and far, should develop, expanding their horizon beyond their own country. Only now, on the basis of their own many varied experiences, can young people begin to form their own judgments. At this point, they have crossed the threshold from childhood to youth. A love of truth, science, and self-chosen responsibilities and obligations and an urge to act on their own insights, become strong, leading to career decisions and adulthood. Now the task is to think before one acts.

Willing and thinking—after a strengthening of their intermediary, feeling—have entered into a new relationship with one another.

What is already present in small children grows with them as they mature. So the final law is to protect childhood. Shield it from experimentation, from premature development, from floods of stimuli, from everything that serves to weaken the child's powers of imagination. Protect childhood as a source of physical well-being, of inner strength, of self-identity,

of social tolerance. If childhood is not filled with joy and warmth, imaginative games and meaningful experiences, many obstacles are placed in the path of sound development. ♦

Reprinted from *The Developing Child: The First Seven Years*, Volume 3 in The Gateways Series (WECAN, 2012).

Helmut von Kügelgen spent thirty years as a teacher at the original Waldorfschool in Stuttgart and was the founder of the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens (IASWECE). He also served as Director of the Waldorf Kindergarten Seminar in Stuttgart and edited a collection of booklets on the festivals and the inner life of Waldorf teachers, available in English as the Little Series. He crossed the threshold in 1998, and his work stands as an inspiration and confirmation that young children need time and protection in their first seven years so their healthy development can unfold.

* * *

It was a sunny day and the children were playing happily in the play yard. But then cloud-cover was blown across the sun. Quite quickly the mood of play changed. Without any word, the children began to seek and build shelters. It was striking how the mood of the light was reflected in the children's play.

Shared by Mary Ray, assisting teacher, Denver Waldorf School

* * *

The Healing Power of Play

~ Joan Almon

When I began teaching young children in 1971, I was untrained and unsure of myself as a teacher, but I was convinced of two things: There was a spark of spirit in every human being and there had to be a way of keeping it alive in children; and there was a way for a classroom full of twenty three-to-six-year-olds to play deeply and harmoniously with each other and not sink into chaos.

It took me some years to realize how closely related these two realities are: spirituality and play. It is hard to put into words, but there were many days in my kindergarten when I experienced the deep hum of children at play and thought, this is as close to heaven as you are likely to get in this lifetime.

Over the years, I saw many individual and cultural differences in how children play, but I was especially

struck by the universal quality of play. Play is one of the core experiences of life, and is intimately connected with children's growth, health and well-being.

I recently heard a well-respected early childhood educator, Gillian MacNamee of the Erickson Institute in Chicago, say that she sees play as one of the four essential indicators of a child's health, along with the ways they eat, sleep, and handle toileting. Given this central role of play in children's development, we need to do everything we can to support it and encourage it, especially in these times when it is disappearing from many children's lives.

Another core aspect of early childhood that is closely related to play is the child's ability to imitate adults at work and translate that work into their own drive to play. Nowhere did I see this as vividly as on a visit to a Waldorf school in Tanzania some years ago. There were two kindergartens in the school. One of the teachers was new to Waldorf education. She had only started a month before and was not yet in a training course. She was very gifted in playing with children individually, but she did not know how to help a group of twenty-five children play.

As I passed her room, I could hear the sounds of chaos, sounds I recognized from my own early days as a teacher. On the morning I visited her kindergarten, I told the teacher that I liked to sew while visiting a classroom and wondered if she had a doll to be sewn or a cloth to be mended. She looked very puzzled, and said: "Oh, I do all of that work at home, in the evening."

"No, no," I blurted out, not very tactfully. "In a Waldorf kindergarten, we do that work in front of the children to inspire their play."

There weren't many supplies in the kindergarten, but the children were making little pom poms with yarn and cardboard. There was a basket with a jumble of short yarn pieces in it. When the children came in, I was sitting at a table, making tiny little yarn balls, singing a song about winding the yarn, and putting each ball down in a circle when it was finished.

The children seemed spell-bound by the gestures, mood, and music. The whole group gathered around and watched intently. When the last bit of yarn was rolled up and the circle was complete, the children turned like a flock of birds and flew into every part of the room to play. They made a bus out of chairs, built little shops where they sold all sorts of things, and created homes for their babies. The teacher was astonished, but it was a simple picture of how children



Making a home for the fairies. Photo courtesy of Leslie Burchell-Fox

are inspired by real work and transform it into creative play through the power of imitation.

Sometimes imitation is weak in a child, and the child has difficulty playing. Then it is good to involve the child with real work: baking, cleaning, woodworking or whatever needs to be done. Usually, after a short time of working, the child wants to play and has ideas for play. In the most extreme situation I faced, I brought a child to my worktable for ten minutes every day for six weeks. By the end of that period, he was playing beautifully.

The relationship between imitation and play puzzled me greatly when I was a new teacher. Rudolf Steiner speaks often of imitation, but I could not grasp it at first. It helped to observe imitation in very young children who are learning to speak. They

imitate the language that surrounds them without anyone actually “teaching” them. But where does this capacity come from?

It was a great help to find Rudolf Steiner’s explanation of the origins of imitation in a passage from *Education as a Force for Social Change*, now included in WECAN’s book, *On the Play of the Child*. Rudolf Steiner gives a picture of how human beings interpenetrate with higher beings when we are in the spiritual world before birth and after death. We learn from them, not by standing apart from them while they lecture us but by entering deeply into their being. We breathe into them and learn directly from them. This gift of entering into the other we bring down to earth with us. We experience it strongly in the first seven years, and we call it *imitation*. It is much more profound than simply copying or aping another. It goes to the very heart and soul of who we are as human beings, uniquely individual yet capable of being at one with the world around us.

“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; everything we do arises out of the nature of the higher hierarchies. There, we are imitative to a much greater extent because we are united with those beings we imitate. Then we are placed into 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, or imitating them, continues. We continue to imitate those who are responsible for our upbringing and who are to do and feel only what we should imitate. It is extremely healthy for children to be able to live not so much in their own souls, but in the souls of the people around them...” (*On the Play of the Child*, 2012, p. 23)

In another set of lectures, *The Roots of Education*, Rudolf Steiner explains that this capacity to enter deeply into the hierarchies remains with us in early childhood and serves as the basis for a deeply held religious life in early childhood. This is not a religion children are “taught,” but rather it is a foundation for their religious life on earth. It is then built upon, shaped and formed by their family and religious community. Rudolf Steiner describes this foundation of religious experience in this way:

“Only on the basis of this knowledge can we correctly understand what expresses itself in the life and activities of children under seven. They simply

continue in their earthly life a tendency of soul that was the most essential aspect of life before birth. In the spiritual realm, one surrenders completely to the spirit all around, lives outside oneself, all the more individually, yet outside of one’s self. One wants to continue this tendency toward devotion in earthly life—wants to continue in the body the activity of pre-earthly life in the spiritual worlds. This is why the whole life of a small child is naturally religious.” (*On the Play of the Child*, p. 24)

In other places, Rudolf Steiner gives indications that kindergarten teachers are like priests in the kindergarten. But one can easily misunderstand this indication. Normally, the priest is at the altar, looking up to the spiritual world and guiding the congregation toward the divine. Young children, however, have just left the world of the divine and are finding their way to the earth. Our task is to help them find their way while recognizing that the divine world works strongly into the earthly. We stand not at the usual altar but at the worktable baking the bread of life, sewing, gardening, and much more.

There is a difference for the children in whether we experience the earth merely in its most external, materialistic way or whether we recognize the hand of the divine in the creation of all that is earthly. It is not necessary to speak about these things with the children, although occasionally something about the angels or God can be said, and these good beings also appear in some of our verses and songs. For the young child, our inner mood and gesture speak much louder than our words. If we hold the divine in our heart, and if our own inner practices are directed toward the spiritual, then the children feel at home on the earth in a way they never can if they are surrounded by a purely materialistic view. Deep in their being they know there is a spiritual world and are seeking an earthly experience that mirrors it. They look to us to understand this reality and they grasp it through imitating our inner mood.

The importance of the inner mood of the teacher was brought home to me often in the kindergarten. There were days during playtime, for instance, when there was a nervous energy in the room. The children were playing, but in a superficial way. I would look around the room wondering who was disturbing their play.

Usually, no one was upsetting anyone else, yet there was a noticeable tension in the air. Finally I learned



A climb to the top. Photo courtesy of Leslie Burchell-Fox

an important lesson: that when I experienced that nervousness I needed to first look at myself. Often I had become inwardly agitated and had lost my calm focus. When I took a deep breath and became centered again, the whole class settled down into their play.

Side by side with the child's capacity for imitation stands another important capacity: it is a deep wisdom that guides each step of their development. Every healthy infant knows when to turn over, when to sit up and when to walk.

How do the children know what to do? No one instructs them, nor do they learn these things through imitation. Rather, there is a deep wisdom in each child that guides them along their path of physical growth and development. This same wisdom is at work when children play; it helps them choose the play scenarios they need for their next steps of development, including ones they need for healing. Children often use make-believe play to resolve problems that are troubling them. They may not be able to express the

problem in rational language, but they can express it in play.

There was a little boy who came into my mixed-age kindergarten when he was about four years old, and the first thing I noticed was that he had an unusual voice. His use of language was well developed, but his voice was that of a very young child. It didn't fit his age of development. I watched his play, and every day he played in the same way. He took seven or eight wooden stumps and built a small circular house. Then he'd go into the house, and cover it with a cloth roof and spend the whole play time in it. The house had no doors and no windows.

I spoke with his mother to better understand what was happening in his life. She was very concerned, and said he had been fine up until age three. Then a baby sister was born, but at first he accepted her well. When the baby was about six months old, however, something changed in the little boy. The baby was at a very cute stage and everyone responded strongly to her

and not so strongly to the older child. Then he began to regress. He developed baby speech and insisted on drinking from a baby bottle again.

One day when I looked into his play house. I saw that he was curled up in a tight little circle and realized he had made a womb for himself.

He had gone back as far as he could, as if he was still inside his mother. I was concerned, but at the same time had a sense that he knew what he needed and that our task was to protect him so he could have this experience. My assistant and I made sure no one disturbed him in his play. For about two months he played in the same way each day. The rest of the morning he participated in our kindergarten activities, and seemed quite fine, although the baby language continued.

Then, one day, he left a little opening in his house, not a very big one, but it proved important. A couple of days later, he made a bigger opening, and then he went out looking for a friend. He chose a lovely boy named Bill and brought him into his house with him. There they played for a few days, but the house was rather cramped. Then it began to grow with more stumps, cloths and other building materials.

Over time it grew big enough for other children to come inside and play. Gradually, the little boy's voice came back to normal. He had worked something through with that remarkable wisdom children have that guides their play.

Sometimes, however, children get caught in patterns that are not so healthy and one sees this in their play as well. They may start out in a healthy direction, but then get stuck in certain patterns. This happened to two little boys, Brendan and James. They were good friends and had played together for several years. Now they were five and you could see their intellect waking up. They became very interested in arithmetic, for instance, and would throw arithmetic problems at each other over the snack table.

They entered a very intensive phase of play with each other. Each day they took a number of playstands and built a house for themselves. They would not let any other children in, and they used many ropes to weave a kind of spider web over their heads, back and forth from one playstand to the next. At first I marveled at their intensity, but after a few days I became uncomfortable. It seemed they were retreating into

an ivory tower and cutting themselves off from others.

After four or five days, I made the difficult decision that I would put the ropes away. When they entered the room and looked for the ropes they came to me and asked where they were. I simply said the ropes were resting that day. I expected a storm of protest and even tears, but instead they seemed relieved and did not argue with me. They continued to play with the play stands but in a much less intense way. They gradually let other children enter into their house. Their play became quite social again.

A few days later they again asked for the ropes. I wasn't sure what to do. I could see that something had changed, and they were in a new stage, but I was concerned that they might revert back to their old play. Yet I trusted their process of growth and decided to give them the ropes. Now a whole new play developed. Playing with other children, they took the ropes and used them as telephone wires, connecting all the play houses in the kindergarten, connecting all the children in a huge labyrinth of ropes. The ropes were still a picture of their mental activity, but now with a strong social impulse.

It is not always easy to discern what is healthy and what is not in children's play, but as Waldorf teachers we can cultivate discernment through our inner work, our schooling path as adults. There are many wonderful exercises that Rudolf Steiner has given us that help us develop our inner capacities. One that I especially love is the exercise of observing that which is blossoming and growing in the plant world and that which is fading and decaying. You can do this observation out in nature or with flowers in your room. You observe the tight form of the bud, so closed yet full of potential life. Then gradually it opens, and opens wider and wider. Then the petals begin to thin, to turn brown, perhaps, to curl back and fall off the flower. Over and over you do these observations and gradually you sense in a child: "This child is in a budding, opening process, or this child is drooping and not thriving. Or perhaps this child is fading, but it feels appropriate, as if it is shedding an old skin and making way for a new one." There are no recipes for these judgments, only an inner awareness that comes in part through experience but is heightened through inner exercise and study.

When one sees how powerful play is for children's normal development and how they use it to work through difficulties, one can only be grateful for this enormous gift that every child possesses. At the same time, one needs to be very concerned that so many children are not playing anymore.

There is not much research about the decline of play, although Sandra Hofferth at the University of Maryland is compiling some data at this time, but there are many anecdotal reports. A professor of early childhood education in Boston told me of a workshop she did at a NAEYC conference. It was a year after 9/11 and she was asking the teachers if they saw an increase in violent play in their kindergartens.

There was an uncomfortable buzzing in the room as they began to speak with each other. She asked what was wrong, and one teacher spoke up and said: "The problem is not that we see more violent play, the problem is that we no longer see children playing at all." She asked if others had a similar experience and about 90% of the two hundred teachers put up their hands.

In the Alliance for Childhood, we followed up on this story with a small study in which experienced public school kindergarten teachers in Atlanta were asked about play in their kindergartens. They explained how play had disappeared over a ten year period: first the play centers became learning centers, but the children could still explore freely in them and play. Then each learning center had goals and objectives, and the children had to focus and work on the learning goals. Child-initiated play had disappeared, but the teachers said something else that was equally disturbing.

Several remarked that if they gave their children time to play, the children did not know what to do. "They have no ideas of their own."

Having worked with five-year-olds for years, I found this astonishing. Fives are usually brimming over with ideas. Their mothers would tell me how the children woke up in the morning announcing what they would play that day in the kindergarten. How is it possible that they have no ideas of their own?

There are many factors that contribute to such a change: the huge amounts of screen time children have today; the over-abundance of organized after-school

activities that rob them of free time to play; the fact that most early childhood programs are increasingly academic and take children away from the experience of play. It is also the case that many adults today did not play freely when they were young and do not appreciate play; they are even fearful of it.

Waldorf early childhood educators have rich experience with children's play and are in a unique experience to share their insights—in workshops and courses, in the classroom with visitors observing, in play days organized for community children, in articles for local papers and magazines.

It is vital that play remain a central part of childhood. It contributes to all aspects of children's development: physical, social, emotional and cognitive. Also, there are physical and mental illnesses that result when play disappears, and they can be serious in nature. For the sake of the children today, their future and that of our society we need to do all we can to protect play and restore it. ♦

This article is based on a lecture given by Joan Almon at the 2005 WECAN Conference, "Playing, Learning, Meeting the Other." It was reprinted in the 2012 edition of *On the Play of the Child*.

References

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Joan Almon was a kindergarten teacher who found Waldorf education and became a pioneering teacher in the United States. She was co-founder of WECAN and the US coordinator of the Alliance for Childhood. She was a passionate advocate for children's welfare and their right to play. Joan was a sought-after and engaging speaker on behalf of Waldorf early childhood for decades. Her humor and lively examples of children radiated with warmth and respect for children and families. She crossed the threshold in 2019.



From a mixed-age classroom years ago: A mother in a class had died of cancer. The class teachers had held a “Birthday into the Spiritual World” party in honor of the mother. A few weeks after the celebration, two children were observed playing quietly in a corner of the room, wearing crowns and silk capes. This was an unlikely duo—a mature, kind, generous and thoughtful girl and a boy who was one of biggest rascals in the class. The teacher could not resist inching closer to the pair to hear what they were saying. The girl said, “I died.” And the boy said, “And I died.” The girl continued, “And I am an angel.” “Okay,” said the boy. “You are an angel. But remember, I have a short cut to God.” After that day, there was no more dying in play time. The whole class seemed to have digested this experience to their need and went on with playing life.

Shared by Nancy Blanning and Terri Kosmicki, Denver Waldorf School



Taming “Wild Horses” through Imagination, Imitation, and Play

~ Eniko Reeder

Last year I was hired as a long-term substitute preschool teacher at a local private school. Though not a Waldorf program, the school leadership gave me full support to teach using my Waldorf approach, which is the only way I know how to teach.

Upon receiving my class of 3-4 year olds, I was immediately struck with the realization that this was not going to be like what I was used to. In my twenty plus years as an early childhood educator, I had become accustomed to children who were filled with wonder, who listened and followed me around like chicks following their mother hen. I accurately sensed the reality that transforming this into a coherent group of listeners and imitators would be a long and challenging journey. The children were loud and without boundaries. There seemed to be no listening and no interest toward any adult in the room.

We started each day outside, where they mostly played well; but the second I opened the door to go inside, the “little goats” got loose. They wanted to run in the hallway pushing each other out of the way, loudly laughing at each other when someone got hurt,

rushing to be the first one to get to their cubbies. The decibel level drowned out my ability to direct. I would have had to scream to have any effect. Moving into circle time was unruly. Nobody followed the teacher’s lead to sit. If they did, they would be silly with each other or jump back up and run to the cozy corner and pile onto each other.

In the past, I’ve always started the school year with a short little circle to set the rhythm and create anticipation and an experience that circle is fun. However, I quickly came to the realization that most of the children had very limited spatial orientation or listening skills and showed no interest in what I was about to offer. I also realized that painting was not yet possible. In the past, I’d place some seasonal decor in the middle of the snack table with a candle, but not this year! The children actually climbed up on the table, not only to explore, but to disarrange.

When we sat down for story time, the children loudly talked and joked with each other, not acknowledging that something new and special was coming. I sang a song and moved on to something else

in response. I left my puppets in their basket, thinking that these children were challenging me in seemingly insurmountable ways.

None of my teaching skills were working. So, I decided to completely let go of my old ways and forge a new one from scratch. As opposed to preventing the hurricane, which I was used to, I was going to need to learn to focus back on myself and “be the eye” of the hurricane—modeling calm, quiet, and no judgment—knowing that, given the right temperature change, all hurricanes eventually come to an end. As teachers, we know that children *are* our curriculum, so I had to give up my understanding of where one would typically expect children to be and begin to really let go, take interest and observe where these children were.

Prior to this experience I had founded and directed a forest/outdoor school in Fairfield, Iowa, called Singing Cedars, where we spent most of our time outdoors. There we saw first-hand how nature and long walks transformed children’s behavior. I believe that forging group coherence and developing the social and emotional health of the group is the foundation of imitation and receptivity. But how was I ever going to take this group on a walk? They did not respond to our speaking. Walking outdoors did not seem safe. I decided to limit the daily rhythm and release expectations.

The rhythm rotated around outside play, snack, indoor play, attempts to do circle. Lunch followed with clear, reasonable expectations, like no yelling when sitting at the table and no getting up and running into the classroom after a few bites. We set aside candles, rituals and quiet eating, washing dishes, placemats, arts and crafts, and story. None of that was enforceable. We just let them eat and then play without hurting each other. During that time, I used my attempts at circle and playtime with them to make inroads and gain trust. Little by little we made progress.

Since my “Let Us Form a Ring” song did not draw the children’s attention, to get their interest and pull them together, I sat down and started a loud clapping rhythm alternating between hands, thighs and floor. At this point some of the children were beginning to join in and others were still scattered about. After a bit I began chanting with it: “Clap, clap, boom!” increasing the volume a bit with each round. After a few rounds, I ended by clapping the floor with a resounding boom. At this point, I was able to introduce the clapping name game, “Bibbity Bobbity Bumblebee.”

Bibbity Bobbity Bumblebee,
tell me what your name (*Teacher points to herself*)
might be.

Eniko.

Then we repeated the name syllable by syllable—*En-ee-koo*—alternating clapping hands and clapping the thigh at each syllable of the name. In this case it would be *en* (hand clap) *ee* (thigh clap) *koo* (hand clap).

Then:

Bibbity Bobbity Bumblebee,
tell me what your name (*Point to a child*) might be.

Say her name, “Paloma.” Then together we clap:
Pa-lo-ma.

By developing the game in this way, I was able to move them all into the circle. Something about the percussiveness of the clapping, along with the allure of hearing their names chanted, worked.

For a few days, that was my circle. Then, suddenly I could see that it wasn’t going to work anymore. The moment I began to chant “Bibbity...” I could feel that I was about to lose some of my wild ones, so I quickly transitioned to “A Bee Sat On My Nose” by starting with a strong “buzzzzz” sound, while gesturing a finger-bee flying all around me using my pointer and thumb as if I had a bee between them, and began the verse:

Bzzzzz...what do you suppose? (*Finger-bee to nose*)

A bee landed on my nose.

What do you think?

It gave me a wink. (*Wink*)

The bee says: I beg your pardon,

I thought you were a garden.

Bzzzzz... (*Finger-bee flies away behind back*)

Repeat with the other hand:

“Another bee landed on my nose...”

Something about the sound effect of buzzing, the motion of winking, the bee landing on my nose, then the flying behind my back, captivated them. After a couple of days I was able to add a couple of simple nursery rhymes like “Two Little Blackbirds.”

To bravely get them off the floor while holding them together—because they all felt like wild horses

that needed to be trained—I introduced the old song “I Go With My Pony.”

I go with my pony with a walk, walk, walk.

I go with my pony with a trot, trot, trot, trot, trot.

And when I’m going, I really get going.

I gallop until I stop.

Whoever stopped well got a pretend rosy apple to eat. As they improved their ability to stop on command, I would offer that when all the ponies learned to stop, we will all go on a special walk. We played this over and over. I made horse harnesses and they began taking each other for walks and runs in the yard, as if they were riding a horse. I was able to help them with pretend play by giving them pretend apples, hay, brushing them, or tying them to a tree.

At one point I brought empty cardboard boxes into the classroom, thinking they needed to press themselves into something to help them feel where they ended. It worked! Almost all the active children wanted their own box. They began hoarding stuff in their boxes. Thankfully the boxes were not too large, so they didn’t need much in order to feel that their boxes were full. As things progressed, they began connecting them together and asking to play neighbors. Success!

On one occasion, one of the little girls moved in and played in a box all morning. Towards the end she told me she was a doll and it was delivered to my house. I opened it and said, “Awww... this is the most beautiful doll. I haven’t seen anything like it before... and look! It even came with a hair brush.” I held up a hair brush and brushed her hair for some time. This was over a year ago, and the little five-year-old still tells me from time to time with the sweetest, kindest smile, “Remember, I’m your doll.”

After three months of training horses, I endeavored to take the group out for a walk. I found a place close to our play area with no toys or manmade structures where the children could run freely, roll down a hill, hide in the bushes, climb a tree, and act out all that movie stuff they were so filled up with. It wasn’t a forest, like at my previous school, but it was unstructured nature. I prepared them by explaining that we could only go if everyone listened to me. “When I say ‘Stop,’ or ‘Hold your horses,’ you must stop!”

They were very excited about leaving the yard. I opened the gate and after a few yards one of them took off running. “Oh, my,” I said, “looks like I’m going to need to take all my horses back to the training yard.” So we all turned around and the whole group was very angry at the culprit. Back in the yard, we continued with training our ponies.

The Pony Song was definitely the song of the year. It came in very handy. I would put the horse harnesses on the children I couldn’t trust yet, and the responsible children were the trainers with the reins.

The next day we were lined up at the gate and I asked, “Are these horses ready for a walk?” “Yes,” they enthusiastically replied. “Are they ready to listen?” “Yes,” was the answer. “All right then, we can go!”

And so we went, some of them wearing the harness, some of them holding the reins, some holding hands, while we were all singing the Pony Song, walking, trotting, galloping and stopping. When we arrived at our play area they were all excited. Some of them jumped up and down, some were timid, some immediately took to exploring and began tracking, climbing, and soaking up nature. A bright spark moved into their eyes and even the most difficult children were playing nicely.

This environment created opportunities for them to get hurt in a new way. This was not the kind of hurt usually suffered as a result of aggressive behavior on the playground, but hurt from taking risks playing in Mother Nature. This kind of hurt, getting scratched by a thorny bush, accidentally whacked by a stick, or stuck in a tree, helps them to move back into themselves and gives the teacher an opportunity to nurture, care and connect with them “I” to “I”. True recognition and respect work wonders.

I began building a fairy house. Some girls joined in immediately. We began gathering bark, twigs, leaves, berries... I wanted to involve the boys too, asking my most challenging boy if he could get me a piece of bark from a dead tree, or asking if they could break a piece of stick for me. I asked them for help partially to engage their will but also for them to feel successful when I thanked them. I also wanted them to feel a part of the creative process so they wouldn’t destroy it. The fairy house was the beginning of many imaginative stories and projects.

I unobtrusively brought in songs and nursery rhymes wherever and whenever I could. “Jack and Jill went up the hill,” each time we went up the hill. We had a perfectly shaped slope for rolling down the hill. With just a brief demonstration on my part, rolling down became a favorite game as all the roly polies woke up. We also made wreaths from wild grapevines to decorate our yard and made magic wands by tying leaves and berries onto the tip of a stick using long grasses. We then used the magic wands when someone got hurt. We would use fairy band aids on pretend wounds. I’d feed the kitties if they pretended to be cats, or take the birdies off the tree when they got stuck and feed them a pretend worm before momma bird helped them off the tree.

In just a few months we witnessed a transformation. The outdoor experience made the children tired enough to sit nicely at the snack table after a long walk. I was even able to sometimes share a short story while they were eating. Following a strong rhythm, keeping the children consistently acting within my expectations, and letting them play in nature in an unstructured

environment did the magic. I was able to introduce the “curriculum” bit by bit and gradually remove myself from their play. It was wonderful to see how the principles of Waldorf education work no matter what kind of environment we are in. The important thing is that we remember to meet the children where they are first, work in that realm, and slowly bring them into ours. I believe as well that without the constant work with Archangel Michael and the spiritual world, none of this would be possible. ♦

Eniko Reeder, born and raised in rural Hungary, came to the U.S. after graduating with a B.S. in education and earned her Waldorf early childhood teaching degree at the teacher education program in Eugene, Oregon. Eniko founded Singing Cedars School in Fairfield, Iowa, an early pioneering outdoor program. She has been working as a mentor and pedagogical advisor for over twenty years. Currently, she is director and mixed-age kindergarten teacher at Maharishi School in Fairfield.

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In the aftermath of the southern California Palisades fire, which had destroyed the Palisades campus, children were outside playing at the remaining Westside Waldorf School campus. There the play yard wood chips were covered in ash and fire debris that had to be watered down every morning to keep toxic fumes from rising up when the sun shone upon the surface. So the time outside was limited and play confined. After a week or so, the storage shed with all the toys and tools could be opened up, to the children’s immense delight. A group of boys flooded into the shed and took out all of the red plastic buckets and rakes, shovels, all the implements available for their regular play. The red buckets went onto their heads. The implements became fire-fighting equipment and hoses. They were now a fire brigade and commenced to meet the fire in their play. Their trauma healing work had begun.

Shared by Anjum Mir, teacher and co-administrator, Westside Waldorf School

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Reflections on Imitation and Play

~ Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt

While reflecting on imitation and play, and putting on my “eurythmy hat,” I looked in the book *Foundations of Curative Education* by Margarete Kirchner-Bockholt. Although this book is a therapeutic eurythmy resource, I found some insightful and revealing ideas there.

A sequence of sounds is suggested (for trained therapeutic eurythmists) to do with children who “lack powers of imitation.” The given sounds are A-E-I-I-E-A. The three vowels are pronounced as *Ah* (A), *Ay* (E) and *Ee* (I). The sequence is like a wise story that can help us understand the path of imitation.

Kirchner-Bockholt writes, in accordance with Rudolf Steiner’s teachings, that “The power to imitate is a great gift which the child brings from the spiritual world, where he/she turned towards the higher beings in devoted imitation.” The A, which begins the sequence of sounds, is the sound of receiving in wonder. We descend to earth with the starry gift of imitation, bequeathed to us from the heavens.

When we encounter physical existence, we grow, develop and change. This is portrayed with the next sound: E. In the meaning of this sound, we take hold of ourselves and gradually become more conscious, skillful, and self-aware. We awaken to the world, to the kingdoms of nature, and to the people and activities around us. We meet the world; and engage, play, make and create.

The English word “play” carries the E sound strongly, as do “awaken,” “engage,” “make,” and “create.” In play, we explore and experiment. We exercise new movements, ideas and emotions. We take on new roles and make new connections with others. Play is like an unfolding life story: “What will happen next? Who will I be?”

The next phase of development is expressed with the sound I. With this sound, we stretch out into the world and express our individuality, our being. We joyfully “shine outwards” with warmth and light. In I, we develop our unique gifts, find our path, and

discover our freedom. Our deepest life intentions may be revealed and realized.

In his article: “Walking, Speaking, Thinking: Imitation in a Bodily-religious Way” from the Swiss Teachers Course (1923), Albert Steffen wrote: “In the beginning the child merely plays, but it plays in earnest. There is only one difference between the play of the child and the work of the adult. It is that the adult adapts himself to the outer utility which the world demands; his work is determined from without. Play is determined from within, through the being of the child, which wants to unfold...The important thing... is to let ourselves be guided by the individuality of the young human being.”

Free play arising out of imitation would seem to strengthen the individuality of the child. In this way, we can perhaps understand free play as a stepping stone to freedom. Along this pathway, the children can discover and connect with their unique, innermost being, and share this “brightness” with the world.

Returning now to the therapeutic eurythmy exercise for children who lack, or who have weak powers of imitation, the sequence begins with the three sounds A-E-I, and then swings back through them with I-E-A. The intention is to stimulate both inner and outer movement, and to strengthen the child’s life forces and energy/ability to imitate. The sequence of sounds ends where it began, in A. Perhaps the child, and all of us one day, will have something to give back to the stars.

The following short poem was inspired by the same sound sequence, while seeking to understand the path of imitation and play. If you like to play too, see if you can find the sounds (A, E and I) embedded in the phrases!

*We come from the stars, bearing gifts from afar.
We play and create, connect and relate,
To find who we’ll be, joyful and free.
We’ll reach to each other,
Share with sisters and brothers,
To arrive at the stars, bearing gifts from afar. ♦*

Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt is a eurythmy teacher on the West Coast of Canada. Her first Waldorf career was as a kindergarten teacher in Northern California and later in Vancouver. Wendalyn currently teaches eurythmy with the West Coast Institute for Studies in Anthroposophy, and at a small initiative school. Her first book, *Dancing Stories for Movement and Circle Time with Young Children*, was published by WECAN in 2024.

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There had been a huge, violent snow storm in western Massachusetts which had closed all roads, downed massive trees, and isolated people in their houses because driveways and roads were impassible. When children returned to school, there was much activity in the classroom play time. Two boys managed to use two playstands each as stilts. They “walked” to a place in the room where other children had made a shelter with more playstands and cloths. Many children were gathered inside. Reaching their destination, the playstand boys began to make buzzing, mechanical noises as they reached up and out from where they were standing. Inside the shelter, children were gathered around one little girl with a baby doll under her shirt. There was suddenly a gasp of awe. The baby emerged from underneath the shirt and the children quietly celebrated. . .

What were they imitating through play? The boys with their play-stand stilts were emergency workers who had come with chain saws to release power lines and saw limbs which were trapping residents in their houses. One class family was expecting a baby. The mother had gone into labor when there was no way to get to medical assistance. So the baby had been born at home. . . Play—the means to make sense out of huge experiences.

Observed by a visitor to Hartsbrook School, Hadley, MA

* * *

How Adventure Playgrounds Nourish Play

— Ryan Rayniak

My first daughter led me to the Waldorf kindergarten. I was a stay-at-home Dad with a one-and-a-half-year-old little girl and we needed to get out of the house and meet other kids. Honestly, I needed to get out and have some adult interaction. I had no idea what I was doing as a Dad and was looking for something to inform my parenting. I was vaguely familiar with the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy via an interest in biodynamic gardening, and while looking for a parent-tot program I found a Waldorf school that had just pioneered a program in the fall.

I was drawn in by the calm surroundings created by the subtle colors and simple natural toys. I was held by the rhythm and repetition of the day, as it was foundational for me as a new parent and eventually becoming a kindergarten teacher myself. Holding hands and singing was always a bit uncomfortable, but there were a couple of other dads in the circle and the

mood this brought the children eventually helped me overcome any apprehension I may have had.

The thing that captivated my attention and curiosity the most was the presence of the teacher. Her appearance was that of a stereotypical Waldorf early childhood teacher, with a long dress and apron. She had long gray hair, a twinkle in her eye, and a gentle smile. She spoke objectively and simply but was always upright, joyful, and firm, especially with us knucklehead dads.

This was her outward appearance, but when I became a teacher myself I realized that the picture she held inwardly of the children and the adults in her class created the calm and warmth I felt. This person was the model of goodness, truth, and beauty inwardly, which then outwardly created the mood for the adults and children to live into. It was her mood of soul that created the magic in the classroom.

It is this mood of soul that I would like to keep in mind as I further explore the idea of Adventure Playgrounds or Loose Parts play. At the heart of this theory of play is the principle that the child is the director of the play, held by the attitude of the playworker or the caretaker in charge.

In the UK, “playworker” developed as a term for adults who facilitate children’s play, and who assist in the creation of adventure playgrounds. With a wide variety of open-ended objects, typically gleaned from the waste stream, a space is created which invites children into meaningful self-directed play. The role of the playworker is foundational in the success of the environment. Playwork organizations and training courses have emerged to support children’s freedom to play, which is severely endangered in our time, and have spread beyond the UK to the US and other countries. In these movements are many parallels to a play-based, child-led Waldorf kindergarten.

It was at the end of World War II, that the idea of adventure playgrounds and their therapeutic advantages was first championed in the UK by Lady Allen, whose work eventually crystallized into the National Playing Fields Association. She was a landscape architect, aristocrat, and advocate for children’s play. She observed that the play spaces being offered to children were not conducive to the health and freedom of play, but were rather quite unfit for child development. Children would naturally gravitate towards piles of rubble rather than the sterile spaces that were provided. See the Reference list below for a couple of films from this era that are both informative and entertaining.

The development of an Adventure Playground play space is left up to the children. It could potentially look like a chaotic mess or a junkyard, and present more risk than adults may be comfortable with, but for children, it presents infinite opportunities to create their imaginary world and self-direct their experience.

Rethinking our play spaces and attitudes about risk and safety may enliven our play spaces and enhance the children’s experience. When children are given the opportunity to play in an environment held strongly by the calm of the caretaker, who carries a supportive inner picture, the therapeutic and healing aspects of play are palpable in the environment and foundational to the well-being of children. Partnered with the introduction of a myriad of open-ended objects,



Water play. Photo courtesy of Leslie Burchell-Fox

endless opportunities for incarnation are available and can downright be a lot of fun.

To stand beside a child with an attitude of trust and respect for their struggles and joys is a gift we can give to children in their play. It is our attitude of reverence, freedom, and respect that helps them unfold their gifts, rather than our imposition of an ideology, a set of rules, or our own relationship with fear. It is necessary for children to have the opportunity to unfold into the world and create their own world, rather than the world folding them into adult concepts. If the teacher feels safe and trusts the surroundings and the child’s process, the children will inwardly imitate this feeling of safety and also trust their own process of becoming. They may meet their challenges, developing a pathway to their gifts. Our mood of soul supports the potential for their play to be a source of healing.

Play is an opportunity for children to experience themselves, the environment, and others to the fullest. They are able to follow their deepest spiritual gifts and impulses and share them with others. The five foundational senses are constantly being engaged and shared. The unseen will forces are made visible through lively movement, imagination, creation, and destruction. The existence of boundaries, both within oneself and through meeting the other, is discovered. The mysteries of the incarnational forces are given the opportunity to be realized, as the children seek out and find the encounters that will assist them to incarnate more fully.

The simple introduction of a few different types of objects in a Waldorf kindergarten play space could give the children endless opportunities for work and play. Objects extracted from the waste stream can be introduced to the play space, to be engaged with in an imaginative manner by the children. The introduction of milk crates, discarded lumber pieces, wood rounds, and pine boughs left over from a winter spiral could enliven the benefits gleaned from the Adventure Playground and Loose Parts play paradigm. The possibilities are limited only by our own childlike imagination. ♦

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- On YouTube, search for “Lady Allen Adventure Playground Chelsea, Circa 1970s” and “Children play in World War 2 bomb site rubble.” These vintage films give a glimpse of the origins of the Adventure Playground movement.
- On YouTube, search for “The Land: A Movie and Discussion about Adventure Play, Part 1.” In this presentation from the Boston’s Children’s Museum, a short documentary is shown that gives a modern view of an Adventure Playground and the Playworker’s role. The film begins at 00:05:23.

A couple of websites to visit:

popupadventureplay.org
playeverything.wordpress.com

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Children Are Not Little Adults

~ Jane Swain

In our serving young children, what is needed is an understanding of their basic nature. The young child is not a little adult! One of the most defining features of young children is their manner of sensing. In a lecture called “Walking, Speaking, Thinking,” Rudolf Steiner explains: “The first three years, and from then onwards to the seventh year, are much the most important in the whole development of a [human being,] for the child is not at all the same being as in later life. In their earliest years the child is one great sense-organ. The scope of this idea that the child in their first years is wholly sense-organ is not generally brought to mind with anything like sufficient intensity; indeed, it is a question of using very emphatic words if the whole truth is to be expressed.”

Steiner is using clear, strong language in this quote. He regards it as crucial for anyone who is caring for infants and young children to understand

that the young child is a total sense organ. In order to more fully understand this statement, it is helpful to contrast the spatial relationships of the sense organs with the actual sensations they are registering. These spatial relationships are different in the young child as opposed to in the adult.

The sense organs as places of imitation

In the lecture “The Human Heart,” Rudolf Steiner describes that sense organs create inner reproductions of the outer world. “In our eyes, for example, we have a process imitating in a certain sense what is going on in the outer world—reproducing it, just as the camera reproduces whatever is there in front of the lens. The human being becomes aware of what is thus imitatively reproduced in his eyes, and thus he gains information about the external world. It is the same with the other senses. But this restriction of the imitative principle

to the periphery of the human organism occurs only at a later stage in life.”

Steiner states in “Body Viewed from the Spirit,” “... in an adult light comes to a standstill in the eye, and only sends the idea of itself, the concept of light, into the organism. In a child it is as if every little blood corpuscle were inwardly illumined, were transfused with light—to express it in a somewhat exaggerated and pictorial way. The child is as yet entirely exposed to those etheric essences, (effluvia), which in later life we arrest at the surface of our bodies, in the sense organs... Thus, a child is exposed to sense impressions in a far greater degree than is the adult.”

Sense organs employ an imitative process when they are registering stimuli, and this process occurs in the interior of the sense organ. In the mature adult, the sense organs are located on the surface of the body, hence the imitative principle is confined to the peripheral area of the body. However, this is not the case in the child under seven, as their whole body functions as a sense organ. Sense impressions pass into the interior of the body, where they are reproduced—where they are imitated. This is a deeper reason for the young child’s acting out of imitation.

It follows then, that because the young child’s whole body serves as a sense organ, the young child is a permeable being. The outer world impinges upon their interior spaces. They are unable to filter sensations from the environment.

We can use the eye as an example. An impression enters the eye and impinges on the blood at the back of the retina. In subtle ways, the blood carries this impression to be absorbed in the interior of the body. In the same way, in the young child, what is in front of the body enters into the interior of the body as a whole, and acts upon the circulation, digestion, breathing, etc., thus working to form the entire body. All of the child’s physiology is affected and mirrors the sense impressions from the child’s environment, which then directly affects the forming of the organs. In “Walking, Speaking, Thinking,” Steiner explains, “The child imitates in every gesture, in every attitude, nay, even in the pulsations of the blood and in the rhythms of the breath and of the various vessels, everything that goes on around them; from birth to the age of seven, the environment is the model which the child copies.”

We may or may not see any overt imitation when a child senses something. Yet the child’s physiology is

imitating inwardly, and this is what has such an impact on the formation of the child’s organs.

The child’s sensory impressions form the child’s body

Steiner brings this line of thinking to a practical conclusion in “The Human Heart”: “Hence is it very important to let nothing happen in the young child’s environment, not even in the form of our thoughts and feelings, which the child cannot rightly absorb and make [their] own.”

In lecture two of *The Kingdom of Childhood*, Steiner gives the example of what happens to the child if they witness an outburst of anger in their environment. He says, “But the child during the first seven years is really an eye. If something takes place in the child’s environment, let us say, to take an extreme example, a fit of temper when someone becomes furiously angry, then the whole child will have a picture within [them] of this outburst of rage. The etheric body makes a picture of it. From it something passes over into the entire circulation of the blood and the metabolic system, something which related to this outburst of anger.” Waldorf kindergarten teacher Janene Ping often says, “We might as well have a blinking neon sign above our heads when we are angry or out of sorts, for the children perceive this immediately.”

As the young child is wide open to sense impressions—anger, even chronic sadness in an adult—and is unable to filter sensations, it is up to the adults in their surroundings to provide an appropriate environment, knowing that what is sensed in the environment is literally forming their bodily organs. It is all the more important to help form a protective and supportive sheathing around the entire family when a baby is born, in order to prevent or deal with the all too common condition of postpartum depression, for example.

However, there is choice in the child’s imitation

On the one hand, we have seen that very young children are innocent and completely at one with the world. They are unable to guard or protect themselves from what is in their world, and they must imitate it. On the other hand, in lecture four of *Man’s Being, His Destiny, and World Evolution*, Steiner states that there is choice involved in what the child imitates; there is a protection.

“What the child absorbs, however, is absorbed only in the waking state. Eventually the child goes to sleep. Children sleep a great deal. And during sleep the child is able to choose: What they want to absorb is sent out of their soul into their body, their physical organism; what they do not want to absorb is ejected during sleep into the etheric world. Thus, the child takes into their bodily organism only those things that have been predestined for them by their destiny, their Karma. The working of destiny is seen with especial vividness in the child’s very first years.”

In other words, indeed, the child must imitate during the day. However, there is a compensatory process at night by which the child may reject some of what they have taken in. They may choose between what they want to incorporate into their bodily forms and what they don’t. This understanding emphasizes the importance of sleep for the playing out of the child’s destiny.

In the lecture “Working from Spiritual Reality,” Rudolf Steiner discusses whom the child chooses to imitate. He says, “And whom do we like best to imitate? The individual who gave us our qualities in the world of the spirit, from whom we took something when we were in that world, be it in one particular field or another.” In other words, the child imitates the people with whom they had a connection in the spiritual world before they were born.

Steiner continues, “If you do not merely take what I am saying as an abstract truth but let it enter fully into your soul, you will find it has tremendous significance. Just think of the truly serious mood, the profundity of feeling which would come if, in the field of education, people lived with the idea: You are now showing the child something which [they] accepted from you in the world of the spirit before [they were] born. Just think, if this were to be the real impulse! It is much more important that such a mood, such a feeling, is brought to the task, rather than teaching people how to do this and how to do that. This will follow if the atmosphere is right between teacher and pupil, and if teachers are truly conscious of the great task life has given them. Above all there has to be this truly serious mood. It is poison to demand that children should understand everything, as it is often demanded today. I have frequently pointed out that children cannot understand everything. From their first to their seventh year they cannot understand at

all; they imitate everything. And if they do not imitate sufficiently they will not have enough in them later which they can use.”

In this passage Steiner speaks about the importance of the mood of the adult, which can be cultivated when the adult understands the pre-birth connection between the adult and the child. He goes on to say that developmentally, young children are not able to understand, and we should not expect them to. Instead of understanding, they imitate. Imitation builds a sort of framework out of which they can later extract meaning—later they make use of what they have previously imitated in order to understand. If they have not accrued enough imitative experiences, they will be lacking in what they can use.

What exactly do young children imitate?

In *The Child’s Changing Consciousness*, Steiner addresses the question of what children imitate. He says, “How are children affected by what is going on in their immediate surroundings during [their] first period of life...? They see that people are engaged in all kinds of activities. But what children take in are not the actual deeds in themselves, for they have not yet developed the faculty of consciously perceiving them. What they do perceive are meaningful gestures.” Peter Selg puts it another way—he says that the child perceives the “intentional movement of [the attachment figure’s] form.”

In other words, the young child notices process and inner intention as opposed to end product. It’s not important to them that the kitchen has been cleaned up, but rather the manner in which you clean it up. The degree to which babies and toddlers imitate the gestures of the adults in their environments can be astonishingly detailed and accurate. I once witnessed a father light the first fire of the season in the wood stove. He patiently and even reverently built the fire, lit it, and used the bellows to get the fire going. His toddler stood watching, mesmerized by the father’s actions. She swayed side to side in perfect unison and timing with the father’s in-and-out movement of the bellows.

In her book *Peaceful Babies, Contented Mothers*, Dr. Pikler gives an example of the infant’s remarkable ability to perceive our gestures when she discusses caregiving. “How different it can be, what a different picture of the world an infant receives when quiet, patient, careful yet secure and resolute hands take

care of her—and how different the world seems when these hands are impatient, rough or hasty, unquiet and nervous. In the beginning hands are everything for an infant.”

Rudolf Steiner made a similar statement in a lecture to public school teachers in 1919, lecture six in *The Spirit of the Waldorf School*, where he is speaking about the child’s early stage of life. He says, “In every tone of speech, in every gesture that we as teachers use in the presence of the child during this stage, lies something to which the child adapts itself. As human beings we are much more than we know by the external reflection of our thoughts. In life we pay little attention to how we move a hand, but the way we move a hand is the faithful reflection of the whole state of our souls, the whole reflection of our inner mood. As adults with developed soul lives we pay little attention to the connection between our outer [actions and inner soul mood.] The child, however, lives into these intangibles. We do not exaggerate when we say that those [people] in the young child’s surroundings who inwardly strive to be good, to be moral, who in their thinking and feeling consciously intend to do the child no wrong, even in what is not spoken—such people affect the child in the strongest possible manner through the intangibles of life.” The child looks behind our superficial presentation and perceives the “intangibles” of our inner being.

Herbert Hahn captures the essence of the child’s need for the adult to act out of their higher selves in his verse:

*It will indeed come to be for us a necessity
That we observe the children day by day
And also exercise in ourselves day by day
Control of our own thoughts and feelings.
Every child has a subtle perception
Of whether the person looking after them
Or teaching them is inwardly equipped in their soul.
The child’s well being depends to a great extent
On what is growing and developing in the inner soul
Of the person in charge.
Develop your keenness of observation,
Nurture the powers of your inner Being,
Develop vitality of thinking,
Depth of feeling, strength of willing. ♦*

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Affirming the Essential Tasks of the First Seven Years

~ Nancy Blanning

Celebrating one hundred years of Waldorf early childhood education is as daunting as it is exciting. These years have seen countless children nurtured and nourished through Waldorf early education. Our classrooms have provided time and protection to allow the wise developmental plan children carry within themselves to unfold.

One hundred years is a long time. Is the way we understand children still valid? The world has changed enormously during that time. Today, the fast pace of life, technological orientation, stress, and concerns over how we will keep up and be prepared for the future are pressing. Are we negligent in not introducing elements of academic study in the kindergarten? Mainstream kindergartens are emphasizing more and more academic instruction, eliminating play to give time for this academic push. How will Waldorf-educated children catch up? How will they keep pace with others in this competitive world? These are questions we must consider and respond to by looking deeply into what we understand as essentials of childhood.

Rudolf Steiner was not a theorist. He did not create theories of how he thought children *should* develop. He was an observer. He deeply and devotedly observed children (see Peter Selg, *The Therapeutic Eye*). His intention was to see and understand how children enter from the spiritual world into the earthly domain to find their way as strangers in an unfamiliar land. How is it that the incarnating child learns to become a fully developed human being in body, soul, and spirit?

What do we understand “education” to be? This English word comes from Latin. The prefix *ed-* means “out”; the verb *ducere* means “to lead, to draw, to bring.” Joined together, “educate” means to lead or draw out what is already inside the human being. Steiner observed that there are inclinations and capacities—both gifts and challenges—already present within each human being. Our task as educators is to support the unfolding and out-flowing development of what the child has brought from the spiritual world to realize pre-birth intentions.

Steiner describes that children accomplish this task through three particular activities. They **take in experience through their senses**—the physical

senses of touch, life/well-being, self-movement, balance, smell, taste, vision, warmth, and hearing. They digest and integrate these experiences through **imitation** and **play**. Steiner emphasizes in all of his pedagogical lecture series that the bedrock of early child development in the first seven years is imitation and play. These are the child’s primary modes of learning until the **birth of the growth forces** (also called etheric forces), which have been dedicated to healthy growth of the physical body thus far, of which the change of teeth is one sign.

The 1907 lecture *Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science* gives a representative description of the important development in the first seven years, which Steiner emphasizes in other pedagogical lectures as well.

“With the physical birth, the physical human body is exposed to the physical environment of the external world. Before birth it was surrounded by the protecting envelope of the mother’s body. What the forces and fluids of the enveloping mother-body have done for it thus far must from now on be done by forces and benevolence of the external physical world. Before the change of teeth in the seventh year the human body has to accomplish a task on itself that is essentially different from the tasks of any other period of life. In this period the physical organs must form themselves into definite shapes; their whole structural nature must receive particular tendencies and directions. Growth takes place in later periods as well; but throughout the whole succeeding life growth is based on the forces developed in this first life-period. If true forms were developed, true forces would grow; if misshapen forms were developed, misshapen forms would grow. We can never repair what we have neglected as educators in the first seven years; just as nature causes the proper environment for the physical human body before birth, so after birth the educator must provide for the proper physical environment. The right physical environment alone works on the child in such a way that the physical organs correctly shape themselves.

“Two ‘magic’ words indicate how children enter into relationship with their environment. These words are **imitation** and **example**... 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... includes ... everything that can be perceived by their senses.”

The profound understanding presented here is that the impressions coming into the child through the senses are imitated not only outwardly, in ways we can see, but also inwardly. The outer experiences resonate inwardly and affect the formation of the body’s organs. Hence, we want to provide children with the most health-providing experiences possible.

“If we place ourselves in the soul of a child relative to the environment and realize how every spiritual impulse is absorbed into the whole being—how [in] every movement of the hand, every expression, every look in the eyes of another, the child senses the spirit in the adult and allows it to flow in—then we will also perceive how, during the first seven years, another being is building itself on the foundation of the model provided by heredity.” (*Essentials of Education*, lecture of 4/19/1924)

With the release of the etheric forces from inner physical growth and maturation, signaled in part by the change of teeth, things change; and the child becomes ready and open for the academic expectations of the school years. But until this time, “the child does not really form solid, contoured concepts; to be sure, the child remembers a lot but does not retain its memories in concepts; actually, intelligence does not yet appear.” (*Spiritual Science as a Foundation for Social Forms*, lecture of 9/18/1920)

Steiner related that these growth forces are released in stages, first from the head region by about age two and a half.

“This change can be recognized externally by the emergence of an exceptionally vivid memory and wonderful imagination. However, ... children continue to live by imitation, and therefore we should not attempt to make them remember things we choose. At this stage, it is best to leave the evolving forces of memory alone, allowing children to remember whatever they please. We should never give them memory exercises of any kind, otherwise, through ignorance, we might be responsible for consequences we can see only when viewing the entire course of human life.” (*Soul Economy*, lecture of 12/29/1923)

What consequences are being referred to? To call upon these growth-forces for memory pulls them away

from organ building. The degree to which the inner organs grow and mature in the first seven years is what we carry into the rest of life. This organ-forming is only accomplished in the first seven years and cannot be changed or “made up for” in later years.

“We must also realize, however, that despite the preoccupation of children with their processes of growth, everything we do around them nevertheless makes deep and distinct impressions on them... we must not forget that everything at work within the child’s soul [in thinking, feeling, and willing] after the seventh year was directly involved in the process of building organs up to that age. This means that until the seventh year, the impressions coming from the outer world directly affect their physical constitution—the lungs, stomach, liver, and other organs. In children at this age, the soul has not yet become free of the physical organization, where it is still actively engaged. Because of this, all of the impressions they receive from us through our general conduct have decisive effect on their future constitution of health or illness.” (*Soul Economy*)

We are urged to take these statements deeply to heart. For the child to receive health-building sensory impressions and to have the growth forces protected from being prematurely directed to memory and academically-designed activities is a mandate given to Waldorf early childhood educators.

Now to consider play. If imitation and example interact so deeply with one another, this is also true of **play** and **imitation**. **Play** uses imitation as the gift through which children digest, express, and make sense of their life impressions. Along with imitation, play stands as an essential in the Waldorf early childhood classroom.

Rudolf Steiner describes that there is “a larger, higher self” within each human being.

“When we reflect upon this we find something that is exercising a special kind of formative influence on the child [from within] ... Where do we find that which acts upon the child as a higher self, as a higher entity that is part of the child, yet never enters into [the child’s] consciousness? Strange as it may seem, it is nonetheless a fact that this begins to be manifested in purposeful, well-organized play. In the child’s play activity, we can only furnish the conditions for education. What is gained through play activity stems fundamentally from the self-activity of the child, through everything that cannot be determined by

fixed rules. The real educational value of play lies in the fact that we ignore our rules and regulations, our educational theories, and allow the child free rein.

“What does the child do when left to their own devices? In play, the child experiments with external objects in order to find out whether or not they respond to his own activity: [the child] generates an act of will. Through the way in which the external objects respond to the operation of the will, the child learns from life, if only through play, in a totally different way than normally follows from the influence of another personality and his pedagogical principles. Therefore, it is of primary importance that we introduce a minimum of the rational into the child’s play—the less rational and the more imaginative element in the play, the better... To a certain extent, play activity is an important factor in education for our whole life.” (*Self-Education*, lecture of 03/14/1912)

Further observations about supporting soul-nourishing, capacity-forming play encourage openness with no fixed rules or expected outcome. Play wants to be allowed flexibility and spontaneity. Children are constrained by being given fixed concepts and artificially created materials or toys that have conceptual or academic intention behind them. The child comes into earthly life to learn how to be a human being—how does one live life? What does one do?

“In reality, we should not allow the children to do anything, even in play, that is not an imitation of life itself... We must make it a rule only to let the children do what is an imitation of life, even in play. This is extremely important.” (*The Kingdom of Childhood*, lecture of 12/29/1920)

The benefit of play opportunities as described above come to fruition and observation in later life.

“... we also know that the child imitates when playing. Basically, the urge to play is not totally original; things that the child perceives in the environment are imitated. The unprejudiced observer will observe soon enough that imitation lies at the basis of play. But every child plays differently... The way a child plays, especially at ages four, five and six, goes down in a certain way into the depths of the soul as a force... what constituted the special character of the child’s play goes down, as it were, into the hidden recesses of the soul. But later it reemerges in a particular way. It comes back between age twenty-five and thirty, which is the time of life in which we must find our way into the world; it is also the time of meeting the outer world

and learning from experience and destiny. Some will fit in readily, others less readily... It is necessary to gain an overview of the totality of human life to see how the sense of play reemerges between the ages of twenty-five and thirty. In that way one will get a picture that is artistic in nature, and one will know how to guide and direct the impulse to play in such a way that it will make a difference. It will give the child something for much later in life.” (Unpublished lecture given in Utrecht, 02/24/1921)

Numerous times in these quotations, “the birth of the etheric” is mentioned. We understand that when the etheric/growth forces have accomplished the forming and maturation of the internal organs (which includes not only the metabolic organs but also the brain), these forces are released to take the next educational step. This stage, usually called “school readiness,” is signaled by many changes. One sign is the replacement of baby teeth with the permanent ones. Other signs are maturation of facial features, a lengthening and stretching of the body, change in posture, gross and fine motor dexterity, emotional and social maturity, and so on. The confirmation of school readiness relies on a whole picture of these factors, not one alone. Do these various aspects of the child come together to offer a collective picture of readiness? (Please refer to WECAN publications *From Kindergarten to the Grades and First Grade Readiness* for more detailed discussion.)

Here we are challenged with making a sensitive discernment. It is such a happy situation when a child shows mature development in body, emotional and social life, and eagerness to move on because their early childhood tasks have been completed. Sometimes the collection of readiness indicators is uneven or inconsistent. What to do then?

Observations made by Audrey McAllen, creator of the Extra Lesson therapeutic support for children, can help to guide us. She directs our attention to **consolidation** of readiness indicators. She explains that important consolidations occur from age five to seven.

“It is of the greatest importance for the future of our pupils that the five-to-seven-year stage of development is consolidated. At this stage, the capacity of creative play begins to wane because the formative forces have changed their activity and are now engaged in the overall growth of the body, bringing its threefold harmonious structure to completion. The children now want to exercise their limbs in work and in gaining

bodily skills. They need activities which absorb and direct their energy into their bodies. They should not have this stage of their development arrested by entry into school and by being faced with learning, however ideal and artistic it may be. This puts a heavy responsibility on our Waldorf kindergartens to provide the older age group with the right facilities, as without them the children become rambunctious, a sign that has often been mistakenly attributed to 'school readiness'... Brain growth at age seven is one of the biggest [growth] spurts. Remember that the child's matrix is shifting from environment to knowledge of the world. This is the time when child development specialists who base their theories on Piaget's work, such as Pearce, Hymes, and Elkind, believe that it is appropriate to introduce formal academic instruction, and not before." (McAllen, "School Entry and the Consolidation of Developmental Processes," in *First Grade Readiness*)

Abundant time for experiencing the world through sensory impressions that do not overwhelm, for imitation, and play are essential to give children a strong footing for entering into life. Each of these aspects is more vast than a single article can describe. These thoughts fortify our appreciation of the importance of imitation and play and of allowing children time to satisfy the developmental mandate of their kindergarten years. ♦

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Learning How To Learn Through Play

~ Laurie Clark

Early childhood education as a distinct field originated in the early 19th century with the ideas of Friedrich Fröebel and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, who emphasized a holistic, experiential, play-based approach. When the Waldorf kindergarten movement began in the 20th century, adding Rudolf Steiner's spiritual perspective to the physical and emotional understanding of the young child, it developed this play-based approach further.

The idea that early literacy for the young child should replace a play-based education began to take hold with the launching of the Russian space satellite Sputnik in 1957. A race began between Russia and the United States. Sputnik spurred the Passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958. This Act provided federal funding to "improve" education in math, science and foreign languages in schools.

Suddenly, teaching academically in early childhood became an emergency. That is when the "curriculum

shove-down” began; what was taught in the first grade became the curriculum for preschool and kindergarten. Education became “a race to the top” rather than serving the young child’s natural development.

Rae Pica, an educational and movement specialist, has been working with young children for the last 40 years. In her book *What If Everybody Understood Child Development?* she states, “The belief that earlier is better has become deeply ingrained in our society—whether we’re talking about academics or athletics. Anxiety rises as children fail to meet their parents and teachers’ expectations. And here’s the punchline: child development cannot be accelerated.”

Early academic education has dramatically increased stress and anxiety for children. An American Psychological Association headline reports that “Studies Show Normal Children Today Report More Anxiety than Child Psychiatric Patients in the 1950’s.” Meanwhile, according to *Psychology Today*, the decline of play has contributed to a rise in children’s disorders.

Looking through the lens of anthroposophy at human development can help to understand why teaching academic concepts and literacy skills causes anxiety and stress for young children. Spiritual science describes that the human being not only has a physical body but also invisible subtle bodies that include the etheric, astral and the ‘I’/higher self. The etheric is the subtle body that carries our life forces, our vitality. For the first seven years, these life forces are used for growth, and over time become available for learning and memory.

In *The Education of the Child*, Rudolf Steiner states, “Life in its entirety is like a plant. It holds a future state within its hidden depths.” It is hard to imagine that when we look at a tiny sunflower seed, it has all the potential to grow into a giant six-foot flower. Concealed in this tiny seed is everything that it will need for its future. The substances and vital forces are all contained within it. When it is put into the garden and cared for by a good gardener along with the rain and sun, it rises up out of the earth towards the heavens. But before it can grow so tall, sometimes up to six feet or more, it needs to develop strong roots so it will not fall over. The life forces of the plant know just what to do, the sunflower transforms itself step by step so that it can eventually unfold into a magnificent golden blossom.

The young child is much like a sunflower. From birth to seven years old the average child will grow in

height somewhere between 30 to 35 inches! The etheric vital forces do their work in a formative way to build and sculpt the child’s body. Rudolf Steiner describes a kind of protective “etheric envelope” that is invisibly around the child during the first seven years of life. The etheric body nourishes and provides the child’s physical body with the life forces that it needs to grow, swaddled by this “etheric envelope.” The sunflower seed is also encased in a shell that protects the inner kernel until it is ready to open and grow strong roots into the soil.

As teachers, we can provide a garden-like environment with awareness of this delicate “etheric envelope” so that the roots that are trying to grow, the very life forces that are shaping the organs, have the opportunity to build the foundation for a healthy body for the whole of life. Teachers can tend the “Garden of Children” by providing a strong, predictable rhythm, imaginative movement, circles and stories, and sprinkling all of this with lots of time for creative play. The warmth of heart that the teacher gives lovingly to the children in their care is like the reflection of the sun’s light that shines on the growing plants.

Being respectful to these forces that are invisibly working in the child will sustain them. Just like the sunflower that grows on the stem, unfolding leaf by leaf, the child also develops step by step. If the roots of the sunflower are not strong and developed, it will topple over and not be able to hold the weight of the beautiful blossom. This holds true with the child’s delicate unfolding of their life forces as well.

The young child learns about life implicitly. When we ask more of them in an explicit way, through presenting concepts and giving instruction, we are asking them to take those forces out of the “protective envelope” and into the head to explicitly think. We are taking the very forces that are needed for the building and shaping of their body that will be freed up around age seven. Play is the young child’s work, this is the way they learn how to learn.

It so happens that the latest brain research matches what Rudolf Steiner described over a century ago. In a 2014 story on NPR’s Morning Edition, Sergio Pellis, a professor and researcher at the Canadian Centre for Behavioral Neuroscience stated, “Play is what prepares a young brain for life, love and even school work. But to produce this sort of brain development, children need to engage in plenty of so-called free play, no coaches, no umpires, no rule books.”

In a report titled “The Power of Play,” The Academy of Pediatrics advocates that self-directed, creative play regulates the body’s stress response and is a basis for successful executive functioning. “Play is voluntary and often has no extrinsic goals; it is fun and often spontaneous. Children are often seen actively engaged in and passionately engrossed in play; this builds executive functioning skills and contributes to school readiness.”

Executive functioning engages the *process* of learning *how* to learn, rather than instructing with content. EF takes place in the prefrontal lobes of the brain, which are involved with developing empathy and emotional intelligence. This part of the brain is sometimes called the seat of consciousness.

We are not born with Executive Functioning skills, and they do not develop automatically through maturation; they need to be practiced, and continue to develop from early childhood all the way into the mid-twenties. Stress is one thing that “freezes” children’s ability to apply executive functions appropriately. Chronic stress and anxiety are the biggest risk factors for executive dysfunction throughout the life span, particularly in children, for whom the executive functions that help us to manage stress have not yet matured. Meanwhile, as the experts have stated, play is the developmentally appropriate way for young children to develop these functions.

There are ample opportunities to practice executive function in the Waldorf early childhood classroom, through enriching activities and a warm, calming atmosphere. Executive functioning abilities that include flexible ideas, self-regulation, and working memory, all happen through the beauty of the Waldorf curriculum and through the open-ended, creative opportunities to play.

The frontal lobes extend down to the motor cortex, which coordinates movement, the young child’s preferred way of learning. In a Waldorf early childhood setting all kinds of movement opportunities can be available to play with: a rocking horse, rocking boat, scooter boards, swings, slide, bars to hang on and trees to climb. Movement helps neurological connections to be made.

Circle time is a stupendous opportunity to include integrative, gross motor movement that weaves through an imaginative story with rich language and song. Playful movement that might include spatial orientation, proprioception, vestibular, and bilateral movement can be experienced.

Lots of fine motor opportunities are offered that involve small, precise movements with the hands and fingers. In a Waldorf setting this is experienced with crayon drawing, painting, finger plays, finger-knitting, and sewing. The older children in the class love to do weaving and more complicated sewing.

Working memory is the ability to hold onto information while busy doing another task. With young children, this kind of memory is practiced in a natural way through imaginative play. When children are playing together, they have props that represent various items that they remember as they create the scenario. A piece of wood may be a loaf of bread, a child-size broom may be a horse; they hold onto that information as they create imaginative story scenes.

Working memory is not the same thing as developing long term memory. Long term memory begins to emerge around seven years old. During a first-grade screening, questions can be asked to observe if long term memory is starting to develop, such as, “Can you tell me about the story your teacher has been telling you?” Until this developmental landmark, a young child does not hold memories yet in time sequence. I was visiting a class on a Monday morning and at snack time the teacher asked the children what they did during the weekend. A five-year-old child in all earnestness said, “I stacked a lot of bowls together, then I built a crow’s nest in the top one and I flew away!” He wanted to participate in the conversation, but sequential memory was still gestating in the “etheric envelope.”

Stories such as “The Little Round Bun” where the bun runs away from the grandfather, then the rabbit, and so on, adding one character after the next, develop the beginning roots for sequential memory. Children’s games such as “Farmer in the Dell” and “Sally Go Round the Sun” are the most exquisite way to practice imaginatively, sequential working memory with movement.

Creative play is an opportunity to practice what executive functioning calls flexibility in thinking, but for the young child, it is more about flexibility in imaginative ideas. Children engaging in play with each other will often shift roles in their play and find various ways to come to solutions when they disagree. A child may want to join in play that is already in progress. It takes some stretching and sometimes compromise to make the change.

When two children are playing together and one wants to change the scenario of the play, it takes flexibility on the part of the other child and sometimes requires negotiation. I once heard a child suggest to the other, “Let’s say, you were going to see if I was asleep in my bed, but I was outside flying, ok?” After a few moments of silently looking at the friend who made this suggestion, he agreed, but only if he could fly out too!

Self-regulation, sometimes called impulse control, takes a whole lifetime to learn. How do we react to others? Can we hold back and listen to another person? Playtime gives abundant opportunities to experience practicing how to self-regulate. Spontaneous speaking during play is a kind of self-regulating language, which helps the child feel in control and manage stress. As adults, we self-regulate when we silently speak to ourselves to surmount obstacles and manage our emotions.

Circle time holds many imaginative ways to create movement experiences that promote self-regulation. For example, movement polarities, such as galloping fast on ponies and suddenly pulling back on the reins: “Whoa, pony, whoa!” Taking giant steps and switching suddenly to fairy steps and back again, or speaking in loud and then “whispering” voices are other effective ways to practice adjusting to sudden changes.

Acquiring the ability to hold oneself back and wait for others during handwashing, not eating snack until after a verse is sung, and waiting for one’s turn to talk to the teacher when the teacher is talking with another child are all good regulating practice.

Executive function and imagination go hand in hand. Children have the natural ability to imagine all of the “what ifs” in open-ended play, and there are myriad ways that pretend play can go. Even in adulthood, when there is a problem that needs to be solved, we say, “Let me ‘play’ with that idea.” We consider and ponder, trying to think “outside the box” and come up with possibilities. Einstein discovered the theory of relativity by imagining himself riding on a ray of light. When Barbra McClintock, a Nobel prize winning scientist who discovered the property of genes, was asked how she did this, she explained that she imagined herself into the chromosome.

Rudolf Steiner describes all that is active, living and growing has an etheric body. The human being has an etheric body in common with the animals and plants. The word etheric comes from the word ethereal

which originates from the Greek verb *aithein*, meaning “to ignite.” The word paints a picture of someone lighting a fire that is glowing with intense brightness. The young child is eager, carrying a bright, inner fire of enthusiasm to imitate all that is being done around them so they can learn about life. It is interesting that *aithein* is a verb, which is active and dynamic. Young children are “verbing” most of the time; they live in activity, and prefer not to have explanations and instructions about life. They want to do life! They are open and place complete trust in those who care for them, replicating much of what they see others doing.

As we meet the questions that are now arising, “Is the Waldorf education that was founded by Rudolf Steiner almost 100 years ago still a good fit for the children of today?” and in the Waldorf early childhood education world, “Should we begin to teach literacy/pre-literacy skills so the children will be successful in first grade?” we should be mindful of that fire of enthusiasm. We must take care not to quench it through well-meaning, but developmentally inappropriate treatment. The living force at work in young children will transform into the faculty for school learning and other higher brain functions, when the time is ripe. We can best support it by placing the child’s need for imaginative play at the center of our work, as those who truly understand the needs of young children have always done. ♦

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Laurie Clark has been involved in Waldorf early childhood teaching for over four decades and is a prominent teacher trainer, author, workshop and conference presenter, and mentor. She and Nancy Blanning co-authored *Movement Journeys and Circle Adventures*, vol. 1 & 2. Laurie is presently enjoying assisting with her daughter in a home program for two-to-four-year-olds, which she loves.

News and Updates

Reimagining Business: A Partnership for the Future

~ Allyson Jakubicka

Which are the crucial yellow crayon colors for a young child?

How much painting paper will I need to paint weekly for one year?

Can you play that glockenspiel for me so I can hear the tone?

These types of questions often come from early childhood educators in conversation with Mercurius, a company dedicated to serving Waldorf schools and teachers. It is a role they have embraced since their founding nearly 40 years ago, when Waldorf educators approached a local businessperson to help source safe, high-quality materials for children. Today, Mercurius continues to operate on the same principle: listening to what educators need and responding thoughtfully.

But Mercurius's approach extends beyond simply providing products. The company actively reinvests in Waldorf education, staying true to the ideals of balance and sustainability inspired by Steiner's Social Threefolding Model. Their economic approach aims to strike a balance—keeping prices accessible without compromising quality, environmental responsibility, or core values. To achieve this, they partner with suppliers who share their mission to support both present and future generations. Many of these suppliers also prioritize social inclusion, employing individuals often excluded from traditional job markets due to personal circumstances. Through Mercurius's network, their products reach schools seeking exactly these kinds of meaningful materials.

Despite its appearance as one large company, Mercurius is actually a global network of small, independent businesses. In Canada and Mexico, for example, Mercurius operations are female-owned and home-based. Logan O'Hearn, of Mercurius Canada, attended the Toronto Waldorf School from kindergarten through grade 12. Her parents began their company nearly 30 years ago, and today Logan continues their legacy. In Mexico, Ana Sofia Ruenes

runs Mercurius Mexico from Mexico City, drawing on years of experience in Waldorf education. She also serves on the board of Kalimori, a non-profit that supports adults with intellectual disabilities through job training and fostering independence. Similarly, Mercurius USA—once operated from a garage in California—now serves all 50 states and Puerto Rico with a team of seven people. Allyson Jakubicka, of Mercurius USA, was a Waldorf parent for decades and Board of Trustee member at her children's school for years. Together, these Mercurius branches contribute to Waldorf organizations like WECAN, reinvesting directly into the educational communities they serve.

Just as Waldorf education was born out of a reimagining of the traditional education model, Mercurius offers a novel approach to business. Instead of funneling profits to CEOs or shareholders, the company redistributes value back to customers and employees. Logan O'Hearn from Mercurius Canada adds: "Because we are held by Neuguss, a non-profit management company, they monitor our work within the Economic Realm to ensure our focus remains on keeping that equilibrium and looking to the future in how Mercurius aims to meet the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals in a few years. We factor in environmental impact, such as our carbon footprint and our suppliers' practices, beyond the short term. Ordering from us acknowledges our work in shifting away from the predominant tradition to a partnership that affirms shared values."

Sofia Ruenes from Mercurius Mexico shares: "Whether you are a parent or teacher, we all have the power to choose the types of products we give to children. At Mercurius, we consider the sources of raw materials, colors, packaging, and how these align with universal values. Equally important is the energy imprinted on products made by individuals with disabilities in social workplaces. Moving forward, where we choose to buy will determine what the world produces."

Mercurius's commitment to supporting educators has been unwavering since those first Waldorf teachers lit the spark that became Mercurius. Today, that mission continues to thrive on a global scale. Allyson Jakubicka from Mercurius USA: "I try to put myself in staff, faculty, or an educator's shoes. 'Can I find an easier way that works for my colleagues in how we need to streamline things for this teacher?' We know for a busy person, especially in a school environment, looking for products and ordering is only one of many tasks for the day. The customer stays at the forefront. I am always so proud of our team too, and the work that goes into bringing products from our door to yours. We strive for a positive working environment and recognize everyone's role here. In this increasingly

anonymous e-commerce world, I appreciate seeing and being seen as a human being."

For those curious to learn more about Mercurius and its mission, the company welcomes the opportunity to connect and share its vision for a balanced, sustainable future. ♦

Allyson Jakubicka *has worked for Mercurius USA since 2017 and enjoys engaging with educators, working on product development and meeting with manufacturers of their products. One of her highlights was attending the World Early Childhood Conference 2019 in Dornach. Previously she's been a small business owner, translator, and a Waldorf parent to three children.*

Emergency Pedagogy in Los Angeles

~ Christine Burke

It is 5 o'clock on a Saturday and an unusual group is gathering. Movement specialists, a movement therapist, medical professionals, artists, a few MFAs, art therapists, and a speech artist/communication studies professor have gathered. Almost all have been or are practicing teachers. The uncommon thing is that this is a team of Emergency Pedagogues which has gathered to meet with the Waldorf school communities devastated by the fires that raged through southern California, displacing nearly 200,000 people—families, children, community members. This team of 24 came from across the world to use emergency skills as teachers to meet and help these brothers and sisters to process the traumas the fires and their aftermath have caused.

This Los Angeles Fires Intervention team split in two over the week of February 9, 2025 to brave

the winding freeways each morning and meet the children, teachers, and parents from two schools that burned to the ground—Pasadena Waldorf School and Westside Waldorf School—with the evidence-based Emergency Pedagogy sessions. These sessions were filled with arts and movement, song and artistic speech. In the afternoons we met the public at large in both downtown Los Angeles at the Natural History Museum, and in Pasadena at the Rudolf Steiner Community Center.

One part of the sessions included trauma-informed, art-based, quiet activities, such as watercolor painting with simple colors, storytelling, dynamic drawing, free drawing, handwork, string games, and clay/plasticine molding. The other part of the sessions included trauma-informed activities to foster social movement, self-care, and connection, including rhythmic hand



Photo courtesy of Christine Burke

games, artistic speech, balance games, eurythmy, and therapeutic educational games of trust. The sessions were structured so that the Emergency Pedagogues could meet the children where they were in the trauma. The training includes learning to work with flexibility and knowing the signs and symptoms that can arise after a crisis has occurred.

What is Emergency Pedagogy? It is the inspiration of Bernd Ruf, founder and director of the international organization Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders and the Parzifal Center in Karlsruhe, Germany. Ruf, a long-time Waldorf teacher, founded the Parzifal Center in Karlsruhe in the 1990's for what were then called "wayward" children. He soon discovered that these children were almost entirely children who had been traumatized from a variety of events that they not had able to process. The healing education offered to these children became the basis for the sessions that Ruf developed for EPWB when, after a meeting with the war in Lebanon in 2006, he was able to first experience how the methods used on the long-time traumatized children could positively activate healing forces in people—especially children, but also adults—that could prevent the onset of post-traumatic disorders and diseases.

Bernd Ruf has been training teams of Emergency teachers all over the world since 2006 and has activated teams in almost all major crisis situations, both in natural disasters and man-made disasters, across the globe. Ruf joined us on this crisis intervention in Los Angeles and was able to continue training some of the team as well as speak to parents and teachers

about how to work with exercises to further help the healing process where needed. Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders: USA is in the process of forming a non-profit, with teams in California, Michigan and New Hampshire, and growing.

Dr. Ida Oberman, founder of the first trauma-informed, urban, community school in the USA (in Oakland, CA), brought and trained her whole staff in Emergency Pedagogy in 2012, and co-led the first EPWB crisis intervention during the Camp Fires in Northern California. Here in Los Angeles, we began training teachers in December of last year.

The World Central Kitchen supported this effort by providing hot lunches and dinners for the children and families along with local partnering restaurants: Bravo Toast, Little Fatty, Xuntos, Lola's Mexican, Flaming Grain. Thanks to these incredibly generous restaurants and food trucks and World Central Kitchen for all they do for people in disaster zones. ♦

For more information about or to support future crisis interventions by Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders: USA, email Christine Burke at epwb.usa.calif@gmail.com.

Christine M. Burke, a trained Waldorf Teacher, works and/or teaches as a Creative Speech Artist/ Logodynamics Practitioner, Emergency Pedagogue, Communication Studies Professor, and entrepreneur. Christine lives and is active in her local community of Ventura, California and serves Anthroposophy on a variety of North American councils and boards.

For the Classroom

Guiding Children from Expansion to Calm

~ Keiko Rothfield

Our days with children follow a rhythm of expansion and contraction, much like breathing in and out. We go from outdoor play to circle time, back to more play, then a morning activity, and onward to snack time—and so the large group dynamic flows.

Even during snack or lunchtime, we experience smaller cycles of expansion and contraction. For instance, we start with handwashing (expansion) and then sit together, singing a blessing song (contraction). We pass the food around, gradually moving into the expansion of eating time. With just twelve children and two teachers, we all sit around the table. Rather than enforcing quiet eating, I encourage light conversation, fostering connection with nearby friends. Sometimes, when children speak in their “One Volume Only” mode, the table gets quite loud as everyone tries to be heard. That’s when I step in for a little “traffic (volume) control”—just like an old-fashioned police officer directing traffic at the center of the podium, using hands, eyes, and facial expression to help everyone communicate smoothly.

We used to have a house rabbit who hopped on the floor of our nursery room. Her cage was by the kitchen sink, so we could give her kitchen scraps. Whenever she felt uncomfortable, she would hop away to her cage. I’d make my eyes bigger and say, “Oh, we’re probably talking too loudly for her sensitive ears!”

Now that she’s no longer with us, I’ve placed a small fountain near the table, behind a curtain. Sometimes, I lean in, cupping my ear, and whisper, “Can anyone hear the fountain? Is it whispering or singing?” This invites everyone to quiet down, listening for the gentle sound of the water.

Creating Calm with Nature and Playful Gestures

When we’re eating at the outdoor table, I’ll often look for birds or hummingbirds visiting the feeder. The children know to stay quiet so they don’t scare the birds. Sometimes, I’ll make a hand gesture where I touch my middle and ring fingers to my thumb, with my pointer and pinky raised—like a bunny with sensitive ears. I softly say, “Oh, bunny, oh, bunny, what do you hear? With your sensitive ears, are we too

loud for you?” I repeat this a couple of times. Then, the “bunnies” (my hands) yawn, scratch their ears, and settle to “sleep” as I rest my hands on my tilted face. This playful gesture speaks to young children through imitation, helping them connect with the idea of caring for others.

I use this when I only have a short time to bring the children to a calm state. If the energy is especially high and I have a bit more time, I act as a “chorus conductor.” We start with an enthusiastic and energetic song, such as “Old MacDonald,” or “Where Is Thumbkin?” I start with big, animated gestures to match their large energy, and then gradually tone it down. For example, with “Old MacDonald,” I introduce many loud animals, but toward the end, I introduce a tortoise. The children’s eyes widen, waiting to hear the tortoise’s sound—only to discover it’s silent! The song then ends softly and quietly.

In my version of “Where Is Thumbkin?” I include “Thumbkin, Pointer, Tallman, Ring-a-ding, and Baby.” For Baby, the lyrics go: “Where is Baby, where is Baby, here I am, here I am. How are you today~?” (omitting the word “sir”). We finish softly with “crawl away” (only goes halfway) “crawl away, crawl away, crawl away” (finally reaching to hide behind my back) followed by “Take a nap” as we rest our hands together by our tilted face, using a gentle voice to help “Baby” fall asleep.

Songs and finger plays are such valuable tools for engaging preschoolers and guiding them from high energy to calm focus. These are just a few of the ways I bring our group together. I’d love to hear any tips you might have, too! ♦

Keiko Rothfield was born and raised in Kyoto, Japan and carries a rich family heritage, having grown up in a culture of Minimalism, Shintoism, and Buddhism but also attended Christian services since a small child. Keiko is a licensed elementary school teacher and graduate of Rudolf Steiner College in CA. She enjoys singing, writing, gardening and traveling. She has been director and lead teacher of Treasure Garden Nursery School in Fair Oaks, CA since 2002.

A Tale Transformed

~ Aaron Joseph

We created the following Mother Holle circle at the end of the Bay Area Center for Waldorf Teacher Training (BACWTT) Early Childhood Teacher Rejuvenation Week in June 2024. The week was led by Anna Rainville, Diane David, and Lynn Turner and the theme was “Reimagining the Archetypes in our Stories and Circles.” Among the many deepening and enlivening activities of the week, we undertook a study of the story of “Mother Holle” over a period of days, during which we delved into some of the characters and words that could make it difficult for an aware Waldorf teacher to tell any of the extant English translations of the original Grimms’ tale to children in our increasingly diverse schools.

Our discussions touched on notions of gender, social norms of “beauty,” value judgments about work and productivity, and stereotypes and unconscious biases that we could potentially be perpetuating when telling stories to children of color or to those whose family cultures are not primarily influenced by Anglo societies and traditions. However, we also contemplated and discussed the underlying esoteric themes as seen by Rudolf Steiner; the story can be read as an allegory for the processes of karma and reincarnation. We then went on to connect deeply with some of the archetypal imagery, and importantly, to our own universal core values, which transcend time, place, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and gender, and which can be brought to children within the Mother Holle story. As we grappled with these interweaving, disparate conversations and meditations—at times passionate, emotional, and even uncomfortable, given the array of perspectives and personal biographies that participants were bringing into the dialogue—something unexpected occurred: the Mother Holle tale transformed.

It might have at first appeared to some (myself included) to be a familiar but antiquated, or even offensive, narrative that was not worth saving, easier to dismiss and replace than to edit or reimagine as a potentially contrived, proscribed exercise in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. However, the story slowly began to draw me deeper into its home, like the mysterious, slightly frightening, but ultimately loving and wise crone that is the story’s namesake, and I felt almost magically compelled to follow the path to its conclusion. As we “did the work,” our instructors suggested some of us take on the task of writing a Mother Holle circle, and like

the first child in the story, who dreamily but willingly shakes the bedclothes until the feathers fly and float to the ground like snow, my colleague Ms. Justine and I suddenly found ourselves in a flurry of inspirations and images.

It was the evening of the Summer Solstice and the night before the full moon. We giddily took armfuls of these creative “feathers” and “snowflakes” back to our rental home, which was situated on a lagoon of the San Pablo Bay. As the moonlight shimmering on the water reflected a similar snowy-downy image, we furiously worked late into the night to compose a Mother Holle circle, with our third colleague, Ms. Tina, by our side for suggestions and encouragement. To our increasing entertainment and occasional hysterical laughter, we threw into the circle a bit of everything we had learned and discussed during the week: eurythmy gestures, little tunes, a more sensitive depiction of the two children, a redemption of the rooster from an ominous judge to a lively and wondering figure, even our music teacher’s assignment to compose a song in the mood of the fifth. Just about the only thing we didn’t include in the circle was a single pronoun, which we didn’t think could be done without sounding awkward! The joy of the process and the product seemed to redeem the challenges of the week and in the story itself.

The next morning, our last of the training, we had the pleasure of bringing the entire group of participants and instructors into the circle and “piloting” it with all of them. It was deeply gratifying to hear our colleagues “awww” during the tender moments in the circle, and the loud peals of laughter at the sillier parts or recognition of “inside jokes” from the week. Some commented that the circle has both playfulness and reverence, and while we were careful to maintain the integrity of the original story and imagery, many of our friends felt that the circle universalizes its themes and dissolves the judgments that could make the original Mother Holle uninviting or inaccessible to some children, parents and teachers. We hope that many of you will be inspired to include Mother Holle in your circle repertoire, and to ask deep questions about whether and how you might be able to reimagine—and not simply abandon—the archetypes, values, and images that appear in your stories and circles. ♦

Mother Holle Circle

~ Justine Franco and Aaron Joseph

Please create your own movements and gestures to go with this circle. There are many opportunities for different kinds of movement. Unless otherwise indicated, you are also invited to make up your own tunes for songs, in the mood of the fifth.

There once was a mother in a cottage so fine.
One child did the chores, while the other would whine.

One dusted the tables...
...and polished the floors...
and folded the napkins...
and put them in drawers.

SING (to tune of "Here we go round the mulberry bush":
This is the way we dust the room, dust the room, dust the room.
This is the way we dust the room, so softly in the morning.
Shine the floors...so smoothly in the morning.
Fold the cloth...so neatly in the morning.
Close the drawers...so gently in the morning.
(Hum the same tune once through the verse)

SPEAK
The other would stamp, for chores are no fun,
And hide in the cupboard, till the cleaning was done.

SING (to tune of "Old Brass Wagon"):
Buried beneath a big blue blanket (3x).
Here I'll hide till chores are done.
Bundled beneath a big blue blanket (3x)
If mother should find me, then I'll run.
And run and run, and run and run, and run and run ...
for chores are no fun. Humph!

One morning, Mother said to the first child:

Bring this basket. Fill it with flax.
Spin it and spin it, no time to relax.
Spin it and spin it, until you are done.
Then you shall have time to rest in the sun.

The child sat beside the well and spun the mother's thread.
and spun and spun and spun some more till drops of blood were shed.
The spindle fell into the well and landed with a splash.
The child jumped right in after it, and disappeared, alas.

The child awoke in a meadow so bright
Two eyes beholding the strangest sight:
A baker's oven all full of bread:
"Take me out, take me out, you sleepyhead!"

SING:
This is the way we take the bread...So carefully in the morning. (Sing song 2x through)

The child walked on through the meadow so bright,
Two eyes beholding another strange sight:
A tree of apples all rosy in cheek:
“Shake me, shake me!” The branches did creak.

SING:

This is the way we shake the tree... to harvest in the morning.

The child walked on through the meadow so bright,
Two eyes beholding another strange sight,
Which gave the child a bit of a fright:
A crone whose teeth glimmered like stars in the night:
“Do not be afraid, my child. Stay with me and work a while.”

SING: “Frau Holle Hymn”

Child, fluff my blankets, lift them high.

Up fly the downy feathers.

Down to earth, they softly float

Like snowflakes in winter weather.

And when the first child had made the crone’s bed,
The old crone approached and lovingly said:

SING:

Child, you’ve finished your work with loving care.

Child, you’ve finished your work, it is so fair.

The child left the old crone in due time,
Longing to visit the cottage so fine.
Through the great gate, the child did go.
From two little hands golden light did glow
Which followed the song of the rooster’s crow:

SING:

Cock-a-doodle doo, cock-a-doodle doo.

Oh, what a light there shines from you! (Sing verse 2x)

The next morning, Mother said to the other child:
Bring this basket. Fill it with flax.
Spin it and spin it, no time to relax.
Spin it and spin it until you are done,
Then you shall have time to rest in the sun.

The child sat beside the well, and would not spin the thread.
But pricked a finger till it bled
And threw the spindle in instead.

The spindle fell into the well and landed with a splash.
The child jumped right in after it and disappeared, alas.

The child awoke in a meadow so bright
Two eyes beholding the strangest sight:

A baker’s oven all full of bread:

“Take me out, take me out, you sleepyhead!”

SING:

This is the way we leave the bread...So carelessly in the morning.

The child walked on through the meadow so bright,

Two eyes beholding another strange sight:

A tree of apples all rosy in cheek:

"Shake me, shake me!" The branches did creak.

SING:

This is the way we scoff at the tree... so rudely in the morning (Sing verse through 2x)

The child walked on through the meadow so bright,

Two eyes beholding an expected sight,

which filled the child with secret delight:

A crone whose teeth glimmered like stars in the night:

"I see you are not afraid, my child. Stay with me and work a while."

SING:

Child, fluff my blankets, lift them high.

Up fly the downy feathers.

Down to earth, they softly float

Like snowflakes in winter weather.

On the first day, the other child did make the bed.

But the next day did nothing the old crone had said.

The third day, the child in the cupboard did hide,

But the old crone still found the child and sighed:

SAY (no singing this time):

Child, you did not finish

Your work with any care.

Child, you did not finish your work.

Does that seem fair?

The other child left the old crone in due time,

Longing to visit the cottage so fine.

Through the great gate, the child did go,

From treetops so high, golden sap did flow.

And made the way home oh so sticky and slow

Till the child heard the song of the rooster's crow:

SING:

Cock-a-doodle doo, cock-a-doodle doo.

What did you get yourself into? (Sing verse 2x)

And if things have not changed, they are still the same today.

CLOSING SONG:

In the winter garden

Cool the breezes blow.

Snowflakes falling, calling, falling

Down to earth below.

Oh oh oh oh. ♦

Aaron Joseph and Justine Franco

and along with colleague and department chair Tina Kolkowski, comprise the lead Early Childhood team at the Waldorf School of Santa Barbara.

Aaron Joseph, M.Ed. *has degrees in Religious Studies and Education and Waldorf credentials from WISC. In his 20-plus years, he has taught grades and early childhood classes in public and independent Waldorf Schools. A longtime practitioner of meditation, Aaron is also passionate about bringing inner work to teachers and parents. He is father to four children*

Justine Franco, *a Waldorf student herself, holds a BA in psychology and Waldorf certification from WISC. She returned to the Waldorf School of Santa Barbara in a teaching capacity five years ago, moving from EC assistant and grades games teacher to her current lead position. Her storytelling and crafting activities are especially inspired by her time spent in nature and traveling with her son.*

Games To Encourage Imitation

~ Ruth Ker and Nancy Blanning

Adapted from *Please, Can We Play Games*, edited by Ruth Ker (WECAN, 2018)

There is much conversation in the field of early childhood education about some children's inability to imitate the example of the adults around them. The following games create opportunities for the children to imitate both the adults and their peers. Games can be a helpmate in our practice when we want to give opportunities to the children to find their way back to this natural intrinsic impulse of childhood—imitation.

It's important to be aware that the younger children may not want to go into the middle of the circle. This can be a painful experience for them socially so please

do respect their need to dream into the game and not be singled out at the center. However the younger children often like to participate on the periphery of the circle and the older children can delight in being asked to go into the middle. Some games can be adapted to circle format where the younger child can sit by the teacher or even on the teacher's lap at circle when it is their time to have a turn. It is always good for the adult to show the way when a new game is presented.

The King and Queen

Song and Game by Eleanor Winship

The king and queen are walk - ing, the king and queen are walk - ing,
'round our cas - tle walls, 'round our cas - tle walls. 1. O - pen the gates and
2. La la la la la la
let them in! O - pen the gates and let them in! Now we all
la la la, la la la la la la la la
dance and sing, now we all dance and sing.
la la la, la la la, la la la, la la la.

Round I: Children stand in a circle holding hands while the King and Queen walk around them.

Round II: Children in the circle raise hands (“open the gates”) so that the King and Queen may enter. All dance!

Note: This game, as written, uses traditional, archetypal language of “king” and “queen.” In this sense, we can picture that these are individuals who guide and care for others out of their nobility. Yet this usage can be problematic in our times. A non-gendered and more inclusive wording can be used instead, like the alternative wording offered here:

*Two good friends are walking, two good friends are walking
'round our castle walls, 'round our castle walls.*

As the game progresses, “walking” can be replaced by skipping, jumping, hopping, twirling, etc.

Old King Cole

Traditional Nursery Rhyme, adapted by Ruth Ker, alternative version by Nancy Blanning

This is another imitation game where King Cole or “Old Friends Cole” (as a possible alternative wording) calls out new activity.

In this game, the teacher-selected leader (Old King Cole or Old Friends Cole) can call for whatever action they desire. Each time a new leader (or leaders) calls out a different action (jumpers, drummers, clappers, pianists, hoppers, pointers, running-in-place), the children do the action in their place around the circle. It is ideal if other children playing instruments and adult musicians can visit to classroom to play. The children then have an authentic movement gesture to imitate. This more complicated game is appropriate for the older children in the kindergarten.



Old King Cole was a mer-ry old soul, and a mer-ry old soul was he. He
called for his pipe and he called for his bowl and he called for his fid-dlers three; and he
called for his fid-dlers three; and he called for his fid-dlers three. Ev' - ry fid-dler had a
ver - y fine fid - dle, a ver - y fine fid - dle had he, and
we'll all fid-dle for Old King Cole, and be as mer-ry as he.

Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he;
He called for his pipe and
He called for his bowl
And he called for his fiddlers three.

And he called for his fiddlers three.
And he called for his fiddlers three.
Ev'ry fiddler had a very fine fiddle,
A very fine fiddle had he.
And we'll all fiddle for Old King Cole
And be as merry as he.

Circle around together, one child in center

*Stop and face inward; King Cole beckons
three friends into the center.
King Cole and fiddlers do fiddle motion*

Everyone do the fiddle motion

Alternative wording:

Old Friends Cole were merry old souls
And merry old souls were they.
They called for their pipes
And they called for their bowls
And they called for their fiddlers to play.
Every fiddler had a fine fiddle,
very fine fiddles had they.
And we'll all fiddle for Old friends Cole
And be as merry as they.

* * *

Toes Tiddlying, Toes Tiddlying

Author unknown, submitted by Morgan Wade

This and the following are two fun body-geography touching games with rich language.

Toes tiddlying, toes tiddlying
Shin shanking, shin shanking
Knees napping, knees napping
Inchy, pinchy... inchy, pinchy
Whiney bulgy, whiney, bulgy
Breast berry, breast berry
Chin cherry, chin cherry
Moo merry, moo merry
Nose nipping, nose nipping
Eyes blinking, eyes blinking
Over the croon and away with it

Wiggle toes
Rub shins
Hands up and down on knees
Squeeze thighs
Rub belly
Hands crossed, up and down chest
Caress chin with right, then left hand
Soft rotation of mouth
Quick nip of nose 2 times
Blink eyes
2 arms raised, reach over shoulders and back again

* * *

Brow, Brow, Brinty

Traditional, source unknown

Brow, brow brinty
Eye, eye winky
Nose, nose nebbly
Cheek, cheek cherry
Mou, mou merry
Chin chopper, chin chopper,
Chin chopper, chin

Tap forehead in rhythm with speech
Pointer fingers tap near eyes
Tap nose in rhythm with speech
Tap cheeks as above
Tap sides of mouth
Tickle under the chin

Flame

~ Sacha Etzel

From *Tell Me Another Story*, edited by Louise de Forest (WECAN, 2019).

Not so far away and not so long ago, there was a dry desert land where Brother Wind blew gently upon the land and upon all Mother Earth's creatures. This desert land had many tall, fragrant eucalyptus trees and small little bushes covering it. Many creatures called this desert home.

The birds lived high in the trees and watched over the land and its creatures. They flew from tree to tree. Coyote could often be seen looking for small creatures to eat. Wild bushy-tailed bunnies hopped on two feet, eating anything green they could find. And deer could sometimes be seen eating leaves from the bushes and trees. Even though there was hardly any water, this was good land and the animals were happy living here.

One day, a spark of flame leaped out of Father Sun and landed on a bush. The bush began to burn.

Brother Wind blew and blew and blew and Flame grew bigger and taller and hotter. Flame jumped to a nearby bush, and then to another, and each time Flame jumped, it grew bigger and hotter. It wasn't long before Flame was as tall as the eucalyptus trees!

Oh, my! The animals did not know what to do; they did not understand that Flame wanted to give new life to that land. They called on Sister Rain to shed her tears. But Sister Rain could not come. They asked Brother Wind to stop blowing on Flame, but Brother Wind understood the ways of that land, and kept on blowing.

"What shall we do?" asked the animals.

Flame grew so big and so very hot that the animals grew very afraid. They could no longer live in their burrows or dens or branches; Flame was burning them all. There was only one thing the animals could do, and that was to leave their homes and find shelter somewhere else. And so the bunnies, coyotes, deer, and birds all ran as fast as they could, for they could feel Flame's heat coming ever closer.

Full of fear, they ran and they ran. They could not stop, though they were so very tired, until they had left Flame far behind. At last they came to the beach where Mother Earth was rolling her waves against the shore. There they rested, knowing that wise Mother Earth held everything in her bosom and that Father Sun spread his warm light upon the land. Here they were safe at last.

After they had rested they realized that they no longer had homes to live in. "My nest has surely fallen from the branch and been burned," said the bird. "My hole is certainly full of ash and smoke," said the bunny.

"My den is destroyed," said the coyote.

And the deer, who spoke very rarely, knew that her soft, grassy bed had been turned to cinders.

All the animals were sad and bewildered because they had lost their homes. Flame was destroying everything!

Wise Mother Earth embraced them and Father Sun encircled them with his warm light. The animals huddled together and listened to Mother Earth rolling her waves against the shore. They took deep breaths and were very quiet and still together.

Back in the desert land, Flame saw that almost everything was gone—the trees, the bushes, all the animals' homes, and even the earth were black. Flame knew that for there to be new life, all the old had to be taken away. Flame looked all around and saw that its work was done. A new land had been created. Flame leaped into Mother Earth's big bountiful ocean as she rolled her waves over Flame, holding Flame close to her heart.

Sister Rain sent rain to cool the burnt earth at last. Soon the animals could return to this new land. Already grasses were growing, stronger and greener than before. The shrubs grew back, bushier and fuller than they had ever been, and the trees sent out new branches and new saplings. The land had been made new!

Bunny burrowed down into the cool earth and coyote dug a new den. The birds once again built nests in the branches of the trees and bushes, and deer once again lay in her grassy bed. Brother Wind gently blew Mother Earth's soft ocean breeze upon all the creatures who were happily home again under Father Sun's warm sky. ♦

Sacha Etzel came to Waldorf education in 1989 after living in Mexico, the Polynesian islands, and Europe. She completed her Waldorf teacher training in 2000, while leading a Waldorf-inspired home program on a farm and also raising her beloved children. She volunteers for underserved communities, teaches mixed-aged kindergarten, family-child classes, student teachers, mentors and administrates—and loves writing!

Seven Angel Breaths: A Re-Centering Imagination

~ Nancy Blanning

A recent conversation among early childhood teachers turned to self-care. One teacher was brave and honest enough to say that she is simply worn out with responding to the daily dysregulation and challenges our children carry with them into the classroom. She loves her work, loves being with the children, but feels drained and unable to replenish. Many other teachers describe the same distress. We know that the children absorb and imitate the inner state and mood of the teacher. How can we adults find re-centering, regulating moments when it is not possible to retreat to compose ourselves?

The idea of Seven Angel Breaths arose out of thoughts shared by Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen, Waldorf class teacher in Germany for thirty years and then a deep friend of Waldorf early childhood education in his years of retirement. He spoke about the power of working in rhythm and with the archetypal number seven.

“In working with the spiritual world, it is important to work in a rhythm, and particularly the rhythms of seven are of great help. One can work with the rhythm of seven days or seven years or even seven minutes. . . In rhythms of seven a new strength appears.

“When we work with these rhythms of seven, the angels take notice of us. If, for example, we have a sudden impulse to act, we can take time and wait seven minutes before acting. We may then feel that seven minutes is a very long time indeed. But in this quiet pause something happens. Waiting these seven minutes gives the angels a chance to notice us, to let something ‘fall into’ us. In this way we make time for the angels to enter our lives, and they wait for us to do this. It is not that magnificent revelations from the

angels appear to us in this time, but that the angels see us. They can only perceive us when we are prepared for this to happen and give it time.” (Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen, “Working with the Angels, the Archangels, and the Archai,” from *Working with the Angels: The Young Child and the Spiritual World*, WECAN, 2004)

For ourselves as teachers, parents, and other adult care-providers, seven minutes can be impractical if something urgent arises that requires prompt attention. So the idea came for taking seven slow, deliberate breaths before responding to the situation before us. Following is a verse to accompany these seven angel breaths. Each breath (except for the seventh) is accompanied by a word or phrase of two syllables. Breathe in on the first syllable, exhale on the second. The final word of the verse will have its own natural in- and out-breath and take this breath especially slowly, even lingeringly. ♦

An – gel,
Guard – ing,
Guide my
Think – ing,
Feel – ing,
Will – ing,
Heart

Book Reviews and Announcements

The Little Book of Parenting: How To Nurture Your Child to Their Full Potential

Chinyelu Kunz, illustrated by Ella Manor LaPointe

Sheldon Press, 2024

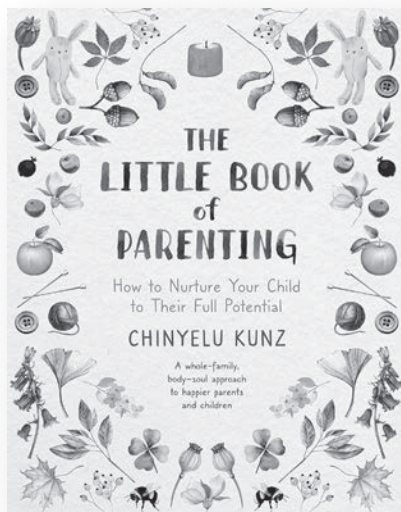
Reviewed by Donna Lee Miele

Chinyelu Kunz is a Waldorf early childhood educator who recognized the need for Waldorf-inspired parenting advice and created a mentorship program, the We Nurture collective. Out of her series of podcasts, her mentorship materials, and countless hours guiding parents and caregivers in the art of childcare, she has published *The Little Book of Parenting*, a uniquely wise and reassuring resource.

Kunz begins not with an anthroposophical overview of child development, but with the parenting relationship and with self-parenting in Part One, “Unlocking Your Child’s Potential.” She recommends approaching parenthood with unconditional love, which might seem self-evident. But it requires us to confront unconscious expectations and past experiences, awakening to the ways we might not have experienced unconditional love as children. “One of the reasons why parenting is so hard is because we are challenged with healing from our own childhood, and letting go of what didn’t serve us, all while raising our child,” she says, and “Parenting is truly an act of surrender.”

Fortunately, Kunz offers many simple, clear lists to help us approach parenthood, and to which we can fall back when we run out of steam. Among the essentials are to honor your children for who they are; to make time for self-directed play; and to understand where children are developmentally. “Sometimes,” she notes gently, “we will do anything for our child except let them be themselves, and this is often when parenting gets hard.”

In Part Two, “Building a Healthy Foundation,” Kunz explores the bases for a secure, nourishing home



life: creating rhythms, observing family rituals, building a “family culture,” recognizing the importance of sleep and mealtimes, and getting your child out into nature regularly and often. It’s less important to have perfect playthings, more important to recognize the value of a “tent” under the table and to make available the means to create one: an old sheet, some battered tin cups, throw pillows stolen from the sofa. It’s less important to talk about trees, more important to pick up a pine cone or an acorn during a walk outside and treat it as a treasure, creating a place

for it on a seasonal nature table.

Here, Kunz briefly discusses the foundational senses: “Children feel themselves into life with their whole body and with all their senses.” She also reminds us that modeling the qualities we most value is a vital part of creating our family’s culture, underscoring the need to nurture gratitude—not by constant reminders to say “thank you,” but by embodiment. “Gratitude,” Kunz writes, “might perhaps be the most important value to embody and model in family life.”

Part Three, “Supporting Your Child’s Well-Being,” while not a comprehensive discussion of anthroposophy, delves into its principles, touching on all twelve senses and the temperaments. Kunz finds this a useful foundation for her discussion of nurturing trust, setting boundaries, and supporting emotional and physical well-being. She also cites the unique spiritual understanding of the human being that underlies her approach. And she calls on parents to do a lot of writing, offering a wealth of journaling prompts to help us know ourselves as well as our children; and for partners to use and discuss, to make sure that they

are creating the family culture on equal terms.

In the end, Kunz acknowledges, “You will be triggered ... your patience will be stretched.” But, she concludes, “What’s most important is staying present to it all ... With this mindset, you will build a strong relationship with your child and strong family bonds.”

My parenting days are very different now than when my children were small—my youngest graduated high school in 2022. This book nevertheless jolted

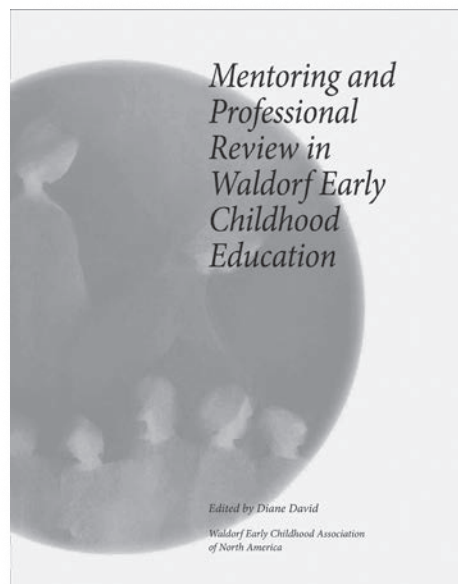
me with a realization that I still have much to learn. It isn’t only small children who imitate us, but also anyone with whom we are in a guiding or mentoring relationship, including our grown children. And when we teach our grown children to practice self-love, they can in turn model it for their children. This “little book of parenting” may therefore have a lot to offer readers at many stages in their journey. ♦

Mentoring and Professional Review in Waldorf Early Childhood Education

New combined edition, edited by Diane David

In 2005, WECAN published two long-needed guides to the areas of Mentoring and Professional Review and Evaluation, in order to support Waldorf schools and educators in their development. The foundational efforts of the WECAN Mentoring Task Force placed the child at the center of our work, urging that we create an ethic of care, openness, and responsibility in our classrooms and in our school community. A wide range of topics was covered, from welcoming the very young child to the classroom to the educator’s spiritual practice to contemporary challenges.

Twenty years later, a new, combined and updated edition of the two books offers wisdom, thoughtful inspiration, and practical guidance, including checklists and forms for the mentor and evaluator that enable all involved colleagues to be part of the process.



Diane David, editor of the new edition, was among the founding parents of the San Francisco Waldorf School, where she worked for twenty-eight years as a kindergarten teacher and was strongly mentored by some amazing teachers. She still teaches parent-child classes at SFWS. She is the Director of Early Childhood at the Bay Area Center for Waldorf Teacher Training and active in WECAN, both as a member of the Teacher Education Committee and as co-representative for Northern

California. She is a mentor and evaluator committed to building strong Waldorf schools through foundational work in early childhood.

We are pleased to be able to offer these essential resources in a format that will be even more useful for all Waldorf early childhood settings. ♦

Free Movement from the Very Start
Volume I: Self-Initiated Movement and Sensorimotor
Development in the Very Young Child
Introduced by Dr. Debbie Laurin

Free Movement from the Very Start establishes a foundation for responsive and ethical care of infants and young children. It is rooted in an approach that values slowing down, free movement, and responsive care at the heart of the caregiver-child relationship. Jane references Henry David Thoreau's description of a healthy tree. Trees that grow more slowly at first develop a sound core, as if strengthened and solidified by the absence of an accelerated beginning. This offers a fitting analogy of slower development for young children.

In Volume I, *Self-Initiated Movement and Sensorimotor Development in the Growing Child*, Jane Swain successfully weaves insights from Dr. Emmi Pikler, Rudolf Steiner, and from the field of Spatial Dynamics. She impresses upon the reader a lasting image of the infant as a human being who feels, observes, remembers, and understands its own divine developmental plan, if given the chance by the child's primary carers. Wisely, Dr. Emmi Pikler and Rudolf Steiner understood and valued an early developmental approach that was grounded in free movement and environments that supported a child's own time to come into being in a natural unfolding. Jaimen McMillan's approach to movement education through Spatial Dynamics is touched on frequently in describing the child's development through self-initiated movement.



This will be explored more fully in a planned second volume.

While *Free Movement* describes key insights in the foundational development of children, it is also helpful for those working remedially with older children. It is filled with modern, up-to-date images depicting Pikler's self-initiated motor sequences and of children in the various stages of gross and fine motor development. Photos of caregiving moments capture the sacred relationship between the child and adult. There are also numerous photos illustrating

key aspects of the four lower senses. Each chapter is divided into sub-sections that feature particular aspects of each topic. For example, in Chapter 2, The Sequence of Self-Initiated Motor Development, subsections describe that sequence in its typical unfolding order.

Free Movement is a clarion call, urging adults to allow babies and young children enough time to come into their own internal rhythm of development. It is about the child's deep need to move and to be in relationship with caring adults. Honed by her many years of observing babies' movements, Jane's approach brings us closer to the child's experiences, inviting us to be curious and allow for a child's inborn abilities to unfurl. This book is an antidote to the hurried pace of life, showing us a way towards deepening our understanding of the unique needs of infants and toddlers. ♦

Adapted from the Introduction by Dr. Debbie Laurin, Pikler Pedagogue Candidate and Early Childhood Co-director, West Coast Institute for Studies in Anthroposophy

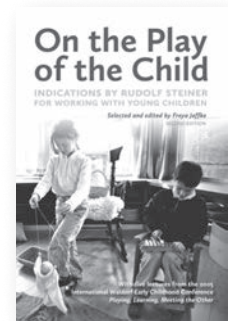
Recommended Reading

The following WECAN publications are highly recommended for further exploration of the topic of play and imitation.

On the Play of the Child: Indications by Rudolf Steiner for Working with Young Children

Second edition, edited by Freya Jaffke

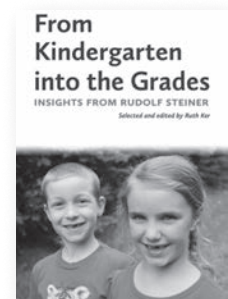
This new edition combines two resources that came into being just before and after the international gathering of Waldorf early childhood educators in Dornach, Switzerland, in 2005. In *On the Play of the Child*, Freya Jaffke compiled statements about play and related topics to serve as study material for the conference. *Playing, Learning, Meeting the Other* collects five of the lectures that were given at the 2005 conference on the themes of play, development and learning, and the all-important encounter with other human beings. This rich compilation provides important insights to inspire and inform our work with young children.



From Kindergarten into the Grades: Insights from Rudolf Steiner

Edited by Ruth Ker

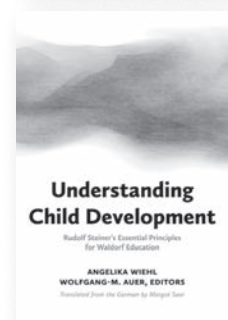
This collection of selected excerpts from Rudolf Steiner's writings and lectures offers insights into the great transformation that takes place in children, around the time of the change of teeth, as they make the step from kindergarten to school. Prepared as study material for the 2015 international Waldorf educators' conference in Dornach, Switzerland, it serves as an important resource for early childhood educators and their colleagues in the grade school.



Understanding Child Development: Rudolf Steiner's Essential Principles for Waldorf Education

Edited by Angelika Wiehl and Wolfgang-M. Auer, translated by Margot Saar

Understanding Child Development is the result of the editors' many years of experience as Waldorf educators and leaders in teacher training. Translated from Angelika Wiehl and Wolfgang-M. Auer's *Kindheit*, it presents a selection of Rudolf Steiner's source texts on childhood, scholarly commentary, supplemental essays on sensory development and imitation, suggestions for studying the texts, and a discussion of the future of childhood. Steiner's selected source texts on early childhood are here collected in English for the first time.



Supporting Self-Directed Play

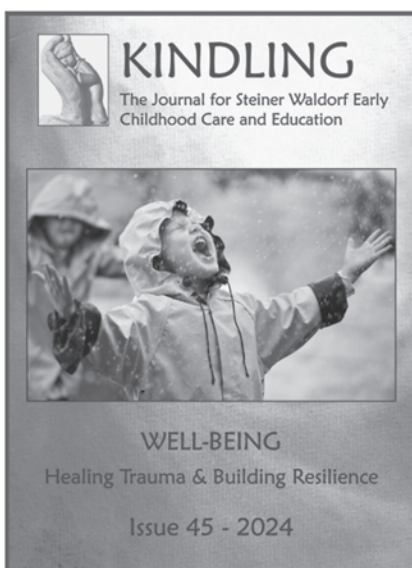
by Renate Long-Breipohl

Self-directed play is the cornerstone of the Waldorf early childhood work, one that is threatened from many sides in our time. Yet what is the true nature of such play? How can we learn to observe and understand it? Drawing on research originally conducted in Australia, Renate Long-Breipohl indicates a path that all early childhood educators can travel in their journey towards a deeper understanding of children's play. At the heart of her study is the section on "Types of self-directed play," extensively illustrated with photographs and narrative examples from Waldorf early childhood settings.



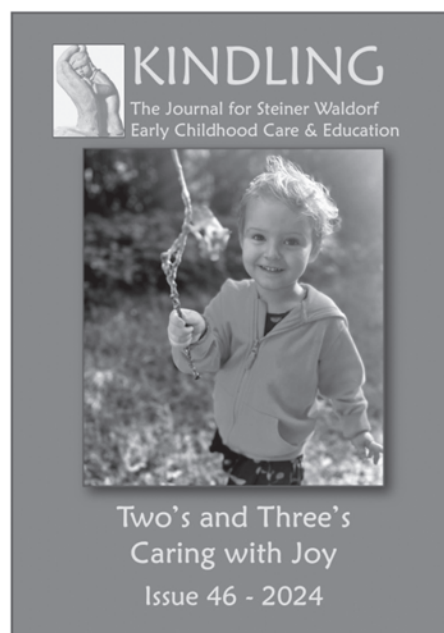


KINDLING, Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood



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theme, songs,
stories, crafts,
research, health,
information and more...

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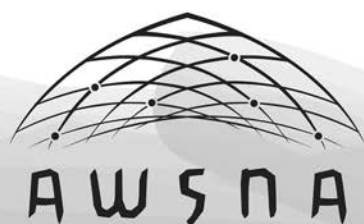
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For more information

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