
Free Movement from the Very Start, Volume I

Jane Swain (WECAN, 2025)

Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

Families with younger and younger children are coming toward our Waldorf programs seeking care which will nurture their children and help them grow well. Our society values speed and accomplishment, so most early education tries to accelerate development in all ways.

But Rudolf Steiner shared with Waldorf education a different picture. Little children need gentle and unhurried care and accompaniment as they enter life. They are not miniature adults who want to be pushed. The consciousness of children three and under is dramatically different than that of their older peers. Rudolf Steiner emphasized the very special nature of the first three years. How these years are supported for the child will be critical for the whole of life. Out of this wisdom Birth-to-Three as a focus is developing as a new specialty. Yet no matter what age group we work with, all educators need to know as much as we can about this opening phase of children's lives.

Free Movement from the Very Start gives the most comprehensive consideration to these unique years that I have ever seen. Years of study, experience, and research are shared in these pages by author Jane Swain. Her credentials include being a pediatric physical therapist, Waldorf movement therapist, adult educator, and mentor. Mainstream studies of sensory development, reflex movement patterns, and sensory integration are combined with anthroposophically inspired Spatial Dynamics, and Pikler care for infants and toddlers. Jane makes evident how each of these streams confirm, inform, and give confidence that the developmental plan each child carries into life as a spiritual gift is wise and valid for these years. Unhurried time and space are needed for these developmental intentions to be fulfilled. The child needs to be allowed "free movement from the very start."



The journey into movement is well described and documented in the book's first section. Early reflex movement patterns to standing and walking—and the gross and fine motor accomplishments in between—are thoroughly discussed and illustrated. The text is supported by many, many delightful photos of children doing just what the text has explained.

The next major section is devoted to the twelve senses, as described by Rudolf Steiner, and emphasizes the important work of supporting the child's foundational senses of touch, life/well-being, movement, and

balance. This section is particularly impressive with the references drawn from Steiner lectures and mainstream research that validates the practices of we already use and are further developing in Waldorf programs.

Appendices offering a bounty of practical suggestions for how to provide an inviting, developmentally appropriate environment conclude the book. Toys, furnishings, arrangement of the room, and outdoor experience in all seasons are just a few of the topics discussed.

Free Movement from the Very Start is painstakingly researched and enlivened with examples from Jane's personal and professional experience. Suggestions for setting up an inviting space where children can explore through their own self-initiated movement make this volume practical.

Volume 2 will complete this developmental journey through age seven. I personally can hardly wait to have the full set. The thorough research, the clear of discussion of concepts, plus the warmth, respect, and honoring given toward the developing young child make this book series exceptional. In my personal view, this will rise to be the new gold standard within child development publications. It will be an important resource for everyone's library. ♦