

Creating A World Family at Advent Time
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For the last two years in our kindergarten, the children and I have created a new way to mark the days between Advent and Christmas, which I would like to share with you, my kindergarten colleagues. It began with a desire to re-enliven the journey for the whole class and to honor the diversity of the backgrounds of the children in our kindergarten. The image that kept recurring to me during the Fall was of a wreath on which there stood a circle of children representing all the different parts of the world.

While I realized that I could make the figures and dress them appropriately, what I really wanted were authentic dolls made out of a variety of materials and which carried something of the soul quality of the country where they were made. So, on the weekends in November I began scouring the ethnic shops and holiday markets in Seattle. (The most difficult requirement was the size - between 2 and 5 inches). My first find was a pair of exquisitely sewn woolen dolls from Bolivia. The girl was carrying a black lamb in her arms and the boy was playing a wooden pipe. After that I looked for pairs of dolls, and they came made of woven straw, carved wood handmade paper, cotton and silk from every continent, including North America.

Every day during Advent, one of the children opened a wooden box in which the new dolls were lying wrapped in a small piece of blue silk. We began with the oldest child. The youngest ones who had watched last year now had their turn to "bring out the dolls." Even in this second year, the mood was incredibly reverent, more so than my experiences with the tissue paper advent windows (as beautiful as they are). The new dolls sat next to the candle during morning verse. As we walked singing, to the table, the opener of the box took the position at the end of the procession, so that he or she had a free hand to carry the dolls. Then they were placed (with a sewing pin or toothpick) on the straw wreath in the middle of the table. The family grew every day until the wreath was full.

This year the first two dolls were handmade paper angels with corn silk hair from India. They "flew" above the wreath on short branches stuck in the straw on either side of the wreath. The Advent candles stood in four star-shaped holders, which were set around the perimeter of the wreath along with a few sprigs of cedar and some tiny alder cones. I watched in particular the responses of the children whose other than American cultures or ethnic backgrounds were represented by the dolls. Although they did not say much, I had the impression that they felt met by this experience. Wonder at the "cosmic child" in every child was certainly there for all of us, as well as a picture which I believe our children also need.

Thank you and blessings on your Advent journey, whatever form it takes.