



ROBIN'S NEST

EARLY YEARS SETTING

NEWSLETTER
Autumn Term 2018

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Life at the setting

By Hannah Roberts

We began our Autumn term welcoming and settling new children into our setting, establishing good habits and making time and space for new connections to unfold. These very simple steps are vital for the healthy relationship between child, setting and teacher; a relationship that will serve the child's wellbeing over the next three to four years.

The younger children are still following me around, looking for guidance and imitating my every move. The children between two and three are still in a phase of dreamy consciousness and still very much at one with their surroundings and so it is important to stay close, connected and present with them. Our four and five year olds are moving into the realm of fantasy-play, now creating sophisticated structures, able to demonstrate their new acquired skills and capacities to measure slightly more challenging risks. Our rising sixes are now entering a phase of cognitive development, their etheric forces now freeing up for a capacity for thinking and separating slightly now from their parents. This can be a challenging and painful time which Rudolf Steiner described as the six year old crisis. It is a necessary transition into their next phase. Teeth are now wobbling, and with that comes a feeling for more symmetry and form. We begin to prepare them for class 1 readiness and formal learning with longer and more intricate projects, daily work and responsibilities. We are no longer answering their questions with "I wonder" and instead are giving them a little more food for thought to ponder upon.



The smallholding this term has provided a nurturing environment in support all of these phases of development, offering varying challenges to extend the children's learning while providing a nurturing space out of which the children can happily unfold – never too far from myself or my co-workers who are all busy in real, purposeful work. The harvest this year was abundant and the children were all in one way or another involved in the celebrations and preparations. While pulling potatoes you should have seen the children's faces when they were unearthed, an endless supply of different golden shapes and sizes inspiring and strengthening the children's imagination and creativity. With the looming sunflowers hovering over them the children took great delight in measuring themselves against them and standing on my shoulders to carefully cut them down to adorn the yurt.

We've been harvesting leafy greens and finding a myriad of different beautiful hairy caterpillars munching away. This has inspired questions about metamorphosis and change. Rolling great big pumpkins up the field sometimes needed at least three or four children to navigate the pumpkin's weight and destination. In a single observation I witnessed a myriad of learnings that will serve and strengthen the formative years: team work, problem solving together, strengthening gross motor skills, dexterity, measurement and math, joy, gratitude and sheer delight. These learnings continue when the children, loaded with produce, come back to the warmth of the setting and continue the process of seed to plate with washing, peeling and chopping vegetables.

This has been an integral part of our daily, weekly and termly rhythm and has provided our daily nourishment of both food and work. I ask you to pause now and take a minute to reflect on the learning that is happening in these moments, in these processes. I would say these are fundamental teachings and ones that are necessary in order to create the world that we all need and want to see today.

Taking care of nature and of each other cultivates both empathy and ecological responsibility. Furthermore it grows a love for nature and the interaction between humans and nature, and will prepare children for a healthy and sustainable future. Society today has lost many processes, and with that has created an inability to relate to the world and to each other. Children learn through experience and the learning is deepened through repetition.



A seed is sown with the hands, nurtured by the soil and sun, turned into food to nourish our beings. Each impression touches the child who relates through process in awe and wonder – a connection is forged.

I believe that the daily walks, encounters with nature both in the visible and invisible realms, are essential for the healthy development of the growing child and will be the counterbalance in times of frantic technology, stress, consumerism and continual stimulation through televisions and computers. The latter only dull the sense and limit the child's movement and imagination, often resulting in attention deficit disorder. I see far too often children that are hindered in their connection to nature, as they simply haven't been given these opportunities but have been exposed to the above, displaying hyperactivity, nervousness and an inability to concentrate. I am now calling our daily walks "a walk in gratitude", as that is what the children have been experiencing and expressing in their conversations with one another: curiosity for learning, deep observations and connection to the changing seasons.



With winter on its way and the smallholding now sleeping, we are harvesting and drying seeds and are continuing to develop our play space with mud kitchens and evolving pits. We turn inward now to prepare for Advent, waiting and anticipating the coming of Christmas. We have slowed down instead of speeding up and begin with the children to prepare the environment. Wreaths will need weaving with our foraged collections of pine branches, cones and berries. Beeswax will be sculpted and wool will be washed, carded and felted. While the smallholding sleeps we will return to the woods where a different quality and gesture awaits us. Shelters will be built, trees climbed, banks and streams jumped over and a fire will glow at the heart of our work, keeping us warm during the stiller activities. I have really scaled down this term in the amount of individual crafts we do with the children. The focus has been on process, using the resources and natural materials around us and creating collective projects for all to benefit from, particularly around the festivals.

We had had to say goodbye to dear Finian as the setting was unable to meet his needs. We wish him well on his journey and hope to stay in touch with the family.

The Importance of Warmth

By Eva Gonzalez

It was a freezing afternoon in a city in Spain. I was well wrapped up in my little coat, hat and mittens and I was holding my grandma's hand, unaware of where we were going. We arrived at a square and heard the voice of an elderly lady drawing people into the succulent chestnuts she was selling in a corner. As we came closer, inundated by the smell of the chestnuts on the fire, a sense of warmth took over my whole body. Thirty-five years later, I can still feel warmth as I remember peeling the chestnuts, and how a simple chestnut tasted like the most delicious sweet for a little girl. The memory still evokes in me the experience of physical warmth from the fire and the emotional warmth from being with my grandma. As parents we are the guardians of our children's physical and emotional warmth. We wrap them well, in woolen jumpers, hats and socks and extra layers, but sometimes we wonder why it is so important when the children seem to not care and to keep taking layers off. The young child is unable to regulate their body temperature. They depend on the adult to dress them in the appropriate clothes for different weather conditions and it is not until the school years that the part of the brain that controls body temperature develops. The child cannot hold heat and they lose it mainly through the head. This is the reason why a hat is essential during the early years. During the first seven years, the child needs warmth because all their energy is invested in the processes of growth and adaptation. The ego is preparing the physical body (growth of the organs) to be the instrument through which the soul and spirit can function later in life. It is therefore essential for the body to be warm, as the child who needs to spend energy to combat the cold has fewer forces available to grow a healthy body. A child whose physical warmth is taken care of will be more rested, less distracted and more available to explore and play freely. In addition we provide emotional warmth through any warm activity we engage in with our children that we imbue with love. And we do this all the time through activities such as cooking warm food together, sharing a nice cup of tea, washing their hands with warm water, bathing them, changing their nappy, helping them get dressed for a walk, tucking them in a warm bed or playing, singing with them, kissing them and hugging them.

These are the special moments when we are fully present, in no hurry and full of love for our children. Their body will store the warmth, the soul will store the feeling and the child will keep that memory forever. In our *parent & child sessions*, I am aware that caring for the physical warmth is essential for the children to feel free and secure to explore, play and keep an open attitude toward the world, so we come indoors when the weather gets too cold.



There are many special moments when we nurture the emotional warmth too, such as when we wash hands gently and one by one, when we knead our bread and each child hears his name while singing 'Pat a Cake', when we hold hands and bless our food, when we sing and dance together or when we feed our chickens, rabbits and birds. But especially when we treat each other with respect, with our soft voices and our smiles, when we create the warmest environment for the children (and adults) to grow. Warmth supports life, and it is the foundation for all health and development, so remember the tips for the coming winter:

- Woolen hats, vests, socks and jumpers;
- Snow boots (they are high and have plenty of space for two socks);
- Warm food and teas;
- Loving touch, hugs and kisses;
- Joy and laughter.

Mum and Baby Group

By Una Archer

I love what D. Winnicott said about the bond between the mother and her baby: 'The baby becomes the mother's idea what the baby is'. It also reminds me of the question we have been asked at the very beginning of our Waldorf training: 'What makes a Waldorf educator?' When nobody was able to answer that, the tutor (lovely Lynne!) explained to us that it is in how the person sees in the child. We don't often talk about things like that. We are too busy or it might be too overwhelming to even open that door. But it does not have to be. Our mum and baby group is a gentle space to explore your ideas about bringing up your baby and to spend some quiet, agenda-free time observing and getting to know where your baby is at right now.



Eurythmy in the Kindergarten

By Kelly Williams

I really enjoy my job in the kindergarten because Eurythmy with young children is a lovely experience. The children are playful and receptive and often able to put themselves wholeheartedly into the movement - it's joyful and fun and I feel very lucky to be able to play like this. Eurythmy in the Kindergarten is primarily the embodiment and expression of language and music through movement and in this way we can teach and learn so many things. Language is one of our highest human abilities, through which we can communicate our thoughts, feelings, wishes and ideas and encounter those of another. Through movement we make ourselves visible. In Waldorf education we often speak of a child growing down rather than up, incarnating onto this earth, into this body, family, community. What an enormous task – becoming human. I feel that my job is to play a small part in that process by creating an experience of the world that is good and true and beautiful. I love it when the children don't know a word they hear in a verse or a song because that's where the learning happens. They might ask out loud 'what's a scythe?' and if another child does not answer for me it soon becomes clear through the movement and story what 'a scythe' is and how it is used. Last week I brought them a rosehip to examine and some were convinced that it was a tomato, when someone else asserted that it was a rosehip and I confirmed it, 'rosehip' had been added to the lexicon of those present. Autumn's fruits include rosehips. My own father had an extensive vocabulary and his use of language was very skilled, he was a travelling salesman and as young children for many years my sister and I would go to work with him in the school holidays. We met a lot of very different people in many environments and I often thought I understood what a word meant simply by hearing it in context: through my senses of hearing, thinking and concept I was able to work it out. In working it out for myself I had greater ownership of it. Isn't this what all development is about—encountering the world and making sense of it? Through the senses the physical body receives sensations and impressions from the world and the soul relates to these impressions through sympathy or antipathy.



The impressions I bring through the stories and music are filled with imagination and often the children 'become' the elements they hear about, they love the work gestures of chopping or sawing or digging and their experience of gross motor movement gets a good work out with a rousing song to accompany, and then by contrast we will quiet down and play finger games to work the fine motor movements and bring their breathing back to a peaceful state. This breathing is life, taking the world into ourselves, transforming and digesting it and giving something transformed of ourselves back out. In those quiet moments we often experience something wholly intangible, a moment of wonder that is very precious. If a child isn't able to imitate I immediately want to find out why – do I need to change something? Is my material suitable? Is the child out of sorts or unwell, are there sensitivities I need to be aware of? What's happening outside with the weather?

Through the Eurythmy the child is showing us something of themselves. Maybe they can't manage with loud singing or clapping and stamping, perhaps they can't hold themselves upright today but are falling and flopping around – needing to lean on a friend or just have a rest. We can see how their life sense is, or their sense of self movement. We are working with the senses, we are sensitive to their needs. As the physical body needs rhythm and nourishment, so too do the soul and spirit. What the soul transforms through its experiences becomes fruit for the higher self. Soul food I guess. It's extraordinary really how much can be perceived in such a small thing as 20 minutes of poetry, singing and dancing together. We can see which of the children can balance on one leg, can imitate a small sequence correctly, can skip, can jump with two feet, can listen, can wait, can find their place in the circle, can remember the songs. The developmental milestones can be referenced and we can see how the children are growing and if we need to help them in any area. Finally of course the children themselves are our greatest teachers and it is a great privilege to work with them.



Cosmic Mother

By Uija Docherty

This painting came by way of invitation. Thank you Dear Robins Nest community, in particular Hayley and Hannah, for asking about my collection of Madonna paintings of Christmas 2017 and if I could imagine any one of them hanging in the kindergarten space. I passed on this question to the paintings themselves. No, none of these paintings were quite right for the Robins Nest space and purpose. But, there was another, slightly larger in dimension, and with slightly bolder colours waiting to be born.



'Cosmic Mother' was painted in Summer 2018 with the children of Robins Nest in my mind and heart. It is entirely painted with hand made water colour paints (made in SAOG Studios by Daniel and myself). I have used the wonderfully mysterious colour of natural indigo for the 'sky'; lapis lazuli for the veil; madder root for the dress and skin; Persian berry for the cosmic child's body; earth colours from both England and Australia; black made from Oak Galls gathered from the beautiful Ashdown Forest; and a touch of real shell gold...

The Twelve Holy Nights

Christmas Eve, the 24th of December – Epiphany, the 6th of January.

By Luke Barr, priest at the Christian Community Church in Forest Row

These days, one can often have the feeling that Christmas is over by Boxing Day. It can feel disappointing—like a balloon one was blowing up has suddenly slipped out of hand, and lost all its air! But there is time to savour Christmas.

For centuries, people were aware that the strange and beautiful mystery of Christmas—what we popularly call the magic of Christmas—needed time to digest and take in. All the preparation of Advent—practical and inner—came to fruition on Christmas Eve. And then one needed time to live in the mood that had been created. The Holy Nights provided this time.

At night, when we wish to sleep, we have to become peaceful and quiet. Our thoughts and feelings have to become subtly different to how they are during the day. We reflect then quietly on the day. We can do that best if we do it without judgement. And we can anticipate the coming day. This we do best without fear. This way, in preparation for the night, we can feel more our 'true self'.

Night can take us away from our 'everyday self' which functions and gets by in the world; and give us a glimpse of who we truly are—and where we are at right now.

In this sense, night is holy. It can give us unparalleled access to the core of our being. Today, we increasingly recognise the importance of looking after one's self—as the pre-requisite for being able to look after others. This finding time for oneself is not merely to pamper oneself—to what purpose would that be? Rather, it is in order to re-establish contact with *the core of one's being*, and the sources of strength in one's life. Why do I do what I do? What does the world need? What values are important to me? How can I bring these into the world?

The 12 Holy Nights give us time to re-visit these questions in the light of the wonder of birth, and the beauty of giving gifts. In the Holy Nights, we let the profound questions of our lives come to us, and treat them with wonder and joy as if they were newborns; or as gifts from an unseen hand. Children notice whether we treat something as holy. The way we do things and treat things has a profound influence upon them, often for the rest of their lives. The way we treat the Holy Nights can be a gift to them, greater than all their presents!

If we can take time out of the commercialised hectic that has hijacked the Christmas festival, then perhaps these holy questions can begin to provide us with new impetus, new thoughts and new encounters that can bring us back 'on track' in life. *That* is the true magic of Christmas.



A Christmas play at the Christian Community 24 December at 3 pm

The Christmas play, adapted from the Gospel of Luke

Followed by lighting of the Christmas tree, and lighting of lanterns; some thoughts on the meaning of Christmas; and singing of carols.

Please bring your own lanterns (one per family) to enkindle a light from the tree, and to take home to your own tree.

Wellbeing

Two parents from the setting, Adriana and Zita, attended Susanne Fuller's workshop "Staying Well – an introduction to using home remedies", a few weeks ago at the Christian Community Church. They share here a few of the insights and recipes that were shared during that workshop. Susanne Fuller is an anthroposophical nurse who currently works at Michael Hall.

By Zita Gulyas

Children become strong if they get enough of the following in their early years:

- ◇ Warmth (keep feet warm with woolly socks on during on cold days);
- ◇ Rhythm and routine;
- ◇ Boundaries (and those to be firm and loving);
- ◇ Sleep and rest (which help to repair and recharge).

However, some typical sicknesses (common cold, earache and chest infection) can easily come during the cold season. So here are some tips to cure them using home remedies. The first symptoms of a cold are often a tickle in the throat, a runny or stuffy nose, and sneezing. Kids with colds also might feel very tired and have a sore throat, cough, headache, mild fever, muscle aches, and loss of appetite. Mucus from the nose may become thick, yellow or green. To loosen mucus in the head area small children can go under the steam together with a grown-up. Steam baths are suitable for older children. After the steam it is advised that the children are in bed to rest.

Earaches can be very painful and need time to heal. They can come with fever and a fever can come only later. Ear compresses can cure the infection and it is recommended to use them early and quickly. For the ear compress at night put freshly chopped onion onto a piece of gaze. Pin the gaze together and place it directly onto the ear. Wear an ear band or similar to keep the gaze in place and finally wear a cotton hat. Use one onion compress per night. Apply a chamomile essential oil compress daytime. To make this compress soak a washcloth with hot water and wring out, then add 3-4 drops of chamomile essential oils and apply to the ear in a similar way as the onion compress. Keep a warm water bottle at night too. (It is to bear in mind that earache can be a symptom of meningitis.)

A chest infection can take weeks to completely heal. The mucus can be loosened and cleaned out by taking five deep breaths and exhale at each out-breath with a 'h-h-huff' through an open mouth. Apply chest compress with Lavender or Thyme essential oil onto the chest area. To make this compress mix ideally Sweet almond oil with a few drops of Lavender essential oil. (If there is no sweet almond oil use olive oil as a base oil.) Pour the mixed oil on a cotton cloth. Place this cloth into a plastic bag and place it against a hot water bottle to warm it up. When the cloth is warm take it out of the plastic bag and place it directly onto the chest area. Wear a vest on it to keep it warm and in place. Apply also plantago for the lungs. I hope these tips are helpful. Keep warm and stay well.

By Adriana Calvo Civero

A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending a talk by Susanne Fuller. The talk was simple and warm, touching the issue of health and giving simple yet very wise guidelines to tend illness in a holistic way. One of the main topics was fever: how to treat them and how to understand why they are so necessary for the healthy development of the young child. Fevers tend to make us parents rather nervous as they can have such a strong and quick effect on our children. However, if a fever is managed well it can be a real gift to a child's physical and spiritual development. A fever helps the young child to incarnate in his or her body. It is in itself a process where the child takes a hold of his own body and inhabits it more fully.

Children who are allowed to experience fevers often come out stronger as if an important shift had been made within them. When a child has a fever it is most important that the child rests. So, as much as possible we should teach children to stay in bed as this, in time, will help them develop a sense for when they are not well and in need of rest. Also, it is a big strain for the heart to be running around when we have a fever.

Smell is very important when a child is ill. Rooms need to be tidy and aired, sheets changed regularly and the atmosphere of the room should be peaceful and calm. A child will heal faster in a fresh, clean and peaceful environment. When we are treating a fever we should notice whether the feet and calves of the child are cold or hot. Cold calves indicate that the fever is still raising and the child should be kept warm. Once the feet and calves are warm the fever has peaked and the child can be, gently, cooled down. If the fever is high one could cool the child down with lukewarm water on his/ her neck and under the armpits (a little lemon can be added to the water). At this point windows should be kept close as getting too cold could result in pneumonia. Lemon compresses can also be used to bring the fever down. To make a lemon compress fill a bowl with lukewarm water, take a lemon and cut it in the bowl under water (this helps the essential oils of the lemon penetrate the water). Then press the lemon with a glass to get all the juice out. Put a cotton cloth in the water and squeeze the excess of water out. Wrap the cloth from the ankle to the knee and cover it with a woolen cloth or with a towel. Repeat every 15 minutes. After four repetitions the fever should have gone down. If a child is managing the fever well on their own simply monitor him or her and allow lots of rest and plenty of fluids (herb teas and water). Apart from that a point was made for all families to get themselves a good thermometer, as a big part of treating a fever is being able to monitor it well. That and lots of trust!

What is Anthroposophy?

By Eva Davies, Kindergarten teacher, Mohala Pua Waldorf School, Hawaii - Upper School Arts & Crafts teacher, Michael Hall School (retired)

What is Anthroposophy? This is one of those questions—when put to a Steiner teacher—that can easily create the dilemma of where it is best to start. I think perhaps a good answer is: Anthroposophy is a path of discovery about what it is to be truly human—while living within the natural world consciously and at the same time unconsciously within the spiritual world, to which we return periodically between repeated earth-lives, to work on our own destiny.

There are three principles that carry a lot of weight—they are known as: Truth, Beauty and Goodness—and as this whole question can easily turn into a lifelong study, a good point to start is at the beginning, at birth.

I was recently in the presence of a small child in a pram and when meeting his gaze it felt like being scrutinized by this being, who looked at me and seemed to take me right into himself.

A newborn child comes to us out of the spiritual world and tries to adapt to being in this strange place—our world—and during his first three years of life this child just absorbs everything around himself and learns about this world through imitating what he sees and hears. Therefore it is of utmost importance that whatever surrounds him at home is as true and beautiful and good as possible, which, in today's life, filled with electronic gadgets, is a difficult choice to make.

The most important faculties of walking, speaking and thinking are acquired through sheer strong will and determination and frequently—at the age of two—with outbursts of angry obstinacy during these vital years of early childhood. Then, miraculously, that most important moment arrives when the child recognises itself as its own person and for the very first time says “I”. This is also the moment in time when the memory starts to form pictures—which happens mostly around the age of three or even four. To support these vital processes of the child’s development the early years education would ideally be like an extended home life, punctuated by a strong daily rhythm and many practical activities combined with stories, songs and seasonal celebrations.



Storytelling with Children

By Melody Brink

One of my most cherished memories from my early years is the story time that I had with my parents. I remember some of the books that they read to me, the books that I asked to be read from again and again. I’m grateful for the morning and evening songs that I received from both of my parents, for they enveloped me with comfort and warmth. What also remains as a vivid experience is snuggling up next to my father and having him tell me his invented stories of Sammy the Seal, the seal that would have all kinds of adventures and each time my dad told me a new story, or repeated an older one upon my request, I felt so much joy.

I’ve since taken up studying and teaching the art of storytelling and have so much respect for the story world, as what I find is that it nourishes the whole human being. It’s one thing to tell an already existing fairytale or other kind of story. And then there’s telling a made-up story on the spot, which can be quite scary at first. But if you can overcome that initial obstacle of fear, you will find that if you listen to the story itself, as well as the expressions of the people you’re telling to or the surroundings, the images will just come to you. It takes trust, interest, a listening and love to tell a good story! Start with noticing a quivering leaf in a tree or perhaps hearing the wind around you and see what characters and landscapes pop up in your imagination and trust the story as it unfolds! It might be just the story that your child, friends or that old bush in the garden needs to hear!

Autumn Term Picture Gallery

