

Protection for the Forces of Childhood

Although it is highly necessary that each person should be fully awake in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination in which his early years of life are passed. For if we allow his organism to grow strong in this non-intellectual way, he will rightly develop in later life the intellectuality needed in the world today.

—Rudolf Steiner, *A Modern Art of Education*

The lively, waking dream of the little child's consciousness must be allowed to thrive in the early childhood group. This means that the teacher refrains as much as possible from verbal instruction; instead, her gestures and actions provide a model for the child's imitation, and familiar rhythms and activities provide a context where the need for verbal instruction is reduced. Simple, archetypal imagery in stories, songs, and games provides "digestible" experiences that do not require intellectual or critical reflection or explanation. Here we may ask ourselves as educators:

- *Does the atmosphere in the room foster an imaginative, not-yet-intellectually-awakened consciousness* 6 □ *WECAN Classic Reprint Series in the children?*
- *Are the children allowed to immerse themselves fully in play without unnecessary instruction and verbal direction from the adults?*
- *Are play processes allowed to run their course, or are they interrupted?*
- *Does a "group consciousness" prevail in group activities, or are children singled out for special privileges and "turns" and offered choices?*
- *Do the sequence and rhythms of the day carry the children along, or do the children ask what is coming next?*
- *Does the teacher invite children to participate in activities such as rhythmic circles or finger games through her own activity, or does she wait to see if children are "ready" or verbally explain what is coming?*

An Atmosphere of Gratitude, Reverence, and Wonder

An atmosphere of gratitude should grow naturally in children through merely witnessing the gratitude the adults feel as they receive what is freely given by others, and in how they express this gratitude. If a child says "thank you" very naturally – not in response to the urging of others, but simply through imitating – something has been done that will greatly benefit the child's whole life. Out of this an all-embracing gratitude will develop toward the whole world. This cultivation of gratitude is of paramount importance.

—Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*

Out of these early all-pervading experiences of gratitude, the first tender capacity for love, which is deeply embedded in each and every child, begins to sprout in earthly life.

If, during the first period of life, we create an atmosphere of gratitude around the children, then out of this gratitude toward the world, toward the entire universe, and also out of thankfulness for being able to be in this world, a profound and warm sense of devotion will arise. . . upright, honest and true.

—Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*

This is the basis for what will become a capacity for deep, intimate love and commitment in later life, for dedication and loyalty, for true admiration of others, for fervent spiritual or religious devotion, and for placing oneself wholeheartedly in the service of the world.

And so we may ask:

- *How do gratitude, reverence, and wonder live in the kindergarten?*
- *Do they come to natural expression from adults and children?*
- *Are they spontaneous and sincere, or sentimentalized?*
- *Or if these qualities seem to be missing, how does their absence manifest?*

Joy, Humor, and Happiness

The joy of children in and with their environment must therefore be counted among the forces that build