

THE IMPORTANCE OF RHYTHM, ROUTINE AND PLAY IN THE KINDERGARTEN/PRESCHOOL

In Kindergarten, the security of *knowing* and *being* is grown through the rhythm of the day and the repetition of the familiar. The rhythm and repetition of how things are done, where things are kept, as well as a rhythm in the appropriate response of the teacher all contribute to the development of the child.

In his series of talks to the teachers in the first Waldorf school, Rudolf Steiner referred to the need to teach the child to breathe rightly in the widest sense and on a number of levels. The general meaning to give the child a daily breath-like rhythm so we can live as we breathe. There is a rhythmical flow of contraction (breathing in) and expansion (breathing out).



When we are sitting quietly and are still, we go inward, returning to ourselves to gather strength and find a sense of self. When we expand, we actively go out to meet the world, revealing our social, communal and expressive, interacting nature.

Our physical and emotional wellbeing depend on a balanced interplay between the polarity of contraction and expansion. This balance is beyond the conscious choice of early childhood. The responsibility for this element in the life of the young child belongs to the adults who care for them.

Our Kindergarten routine rests firmly on this rhythmical principle. Rhythm helps to guide the child when it is time to contain or exert energy until such time that it comes naturally.



Steiner commented that by directing the will impulse of the children not by telling them once what the right thing is, but by getting them to do something today and tomorrow and again the day after.

This early experience of regularity is the seed for self-discipline in the future. This flow between in and out breathing in the daily rhythm helps children to steady their emotional responses.

In the Kindergarten, waiting for the candle to be lit and singing before eating or story time, washing hands and putting on an apron for baking or painting are small doses of delayed gratification that strengthen self-control without resorting to bribery, threats or punishment.

Rhythm by its very nature has an innate logic – it has a natural order. The steady, returning rhythm is healing and instills a feeling of safety and trust as it lifts the burden of the children wondering what is going to come next and what be expected of them.

Once this balanced routine is in place, the children can take a step into creative play. They role play in a world without boundaries, rich with imagination and learning opportunities that are essential at this preschool stage of their development.

In the Kindergarten class, every effort is made to provide conditions in which free play can flourish, such as sufficient time, appropriate space (indoors and outdoors) and a variety of undefined natural objects and equipment. Whilst playground equipment usually provides plenty of opportunity for physical vestibular stimulation, imagination tends to be developed in a less ordered environment. A wilderness of long grass, trees, ditches, and stones opens

up endless possibilities for hide and seek, building a den, hearing the lions in the jungle or sailing to a desert island.

Most of all an attitude of respect needs to be present, toward this most magical and imaginative time of learning in childhood. In play, children can assert their competence to assume adult roles eventually. Through play with their peers they assert their social competence, as well as their ability to make and keep friends. Play is a transformation of reality into the true source of wisdom and the basis of all forms of creativity.

“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.” – Rudolf Steiner, Dornach lecture, 1923.

Caroline Joseph, Kindergarten teacher

Bibliography list:

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