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Sophia's Hearth Family Center Web Site

www.sophiashearth.org has an overview of who we are, schedules of upcoming events, and more! Come visit!

Summer 2006 Professional Development Offerings

Planning our professional development courses for the coming summer is well underway. Courses begin July 3 and continue through July 21. Please join us for these excellent early childhood classes!

PREVIEWS OF SUMMER 2006:

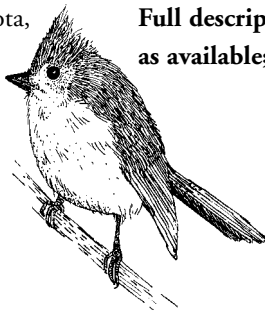
Week 1 July 3-7 "The Child in the First Three Years." with program co-directors Jane Swain and Susan Weber; Helle Heckmann returns from Denmark for an advanced early childhood course including mentoring for participants' individual projects.

Week 2 July 10-14 Bernadette Raichle joins us from New Zealand where she founded Awhina, a Waldorf education based childcare program in a home-like setting for infants through kindergarten-aged children. Joining her will be Connie Manson of Sarasota, Florida who will bring music, puppetry and handcrafts.

Week 3 July 17-21 Advanced course on the young child with Jane Swain and Susan Weber.

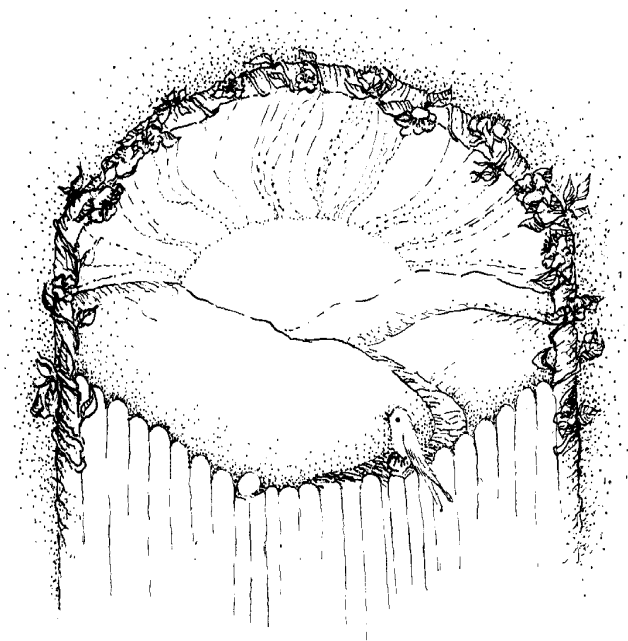
A new **Training Course** group for our 14-month part-time program will begin July 3 for its two-week summer residential course, with auditors warmly invited to join for one or both weeks. Week one (July 3-7) will be led by Susan Weber and Jane Swain; instructors for the second week will be Connie Manson and instructors to be announced.

Full descriptions of all courses will be posted on the website as available; full brochures will be available in early 2006.



It will be a full summer.

*Please plan to join us as for a new experience, or as a return visitor.
More details on our web site, or call us to register at 603-357-3755.*



the Garden Gate

FALL 2005

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1

the journal of Sophia's Hearth Family Center

Sophia's Hearth Family Center is a national organization for education, research, study and observation. Our family center is a living model for community building. We nurture the holistic development of families and professionals in their care of the child from conception through age three.

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A Resounding 'Yes!'

Susan Weber and Aurea Davis

For ten years the vision and mission of Sophia's Hearth has not wavered: to create a protective sheath around young children that extends far out into the world, thereby also embracing parents, unborn children and caregivers. A recent affirmation of our work was the warm response by the Crotched Mountain Foundation to our purchase offer for a piece of property located in Keene.

It is said that all things come to those who wait. Sophia's Hearth has received confirmation that this is so in a dynamic progression of events over the past months. The first was a call from a friend during our summer courses who offered financial resources to create a permanent home for the long-awaited childcare program and for all the other activities of Sophia's Hearth. This was a remarkable moment – a free spiritual offering out of a belief that 'this was something important for humanity'. This donor has chosen to remain anonymous so that the work can speak for itself, and so that the gift might inspire others to join in creating a community of giving to enable this project to come to birth. Our donor's gift is threefold: an outright contribution of \$100,000; a second \$100,000 challenge (a matching gift to be given when Sophia's Hearth has raised \$100,000); and a loan for a portion of the construction costs.

This extraordinary gift awoke in each member of our board of directors a renewed energy in the search for the right place. Several properties were explored, none of them quite right. Then in late August, on an early morning bike ride, our board president, Lucy Ryder, came upon the unimaginable—a perfect building site with a "For Sale by Owner" sign beside the road. She quickly called the number to describe Sophia's Hearth, to express our interest in this property, and to explore possible next steps. Lucy and Susan Weber spent a beautiful September afternoon visiting the owner of the property, the Crotched Mountain Foundation in Greenfield, NH. There we met with board president Don Shumway and administrator Michael Terrian. We described our vision, our hopes, and dreams for a center to serve very young children and their families, and our joy at discovering and exploring this wonderful site.

Our long scheduled autumn board retreat occurred three days after this visit. Saturday, September 24 became a festival of affirmation for the board of directors of Sophia's Hearth as we visited this special place. Beneath a brilliant cobalt-blue sky we wandered through the golden meadow and woods full of filtered sunlight, discovering a bed of ferns, a small ravine carpeted with pine needles, and the Ashuelot River. Our imaginations found fertile ground there, our dreams expanded, our hopes soared that it might be our privilege to develop and protect this special place for children and parents. We imagined the distant future. The land sang to us, we found courage for decision. Deeply inspired by a sense of place, we resolved to do all in our power to make this site a home for our work.

On September 30, one day after the Michaelmas festival day, we received word that our purchase offer had been accepted with enthusiasm. It is difficult to describe the joy, the mood of ebullient celebration that live at Sophia's Hearth at this moment. Four new board members have joined us for this enlivening and demanding project, bringing a broad range of skills and experiences that are just right for the task ahead. We will immediately work to select an architect who shares our vision and to develop materials for presentation to the Keene Planning and Zoning Boards in the coming months.

What else can we share about this property? The three acres are located on Court Street, 1.7 miles from the center of Keene. Two acres stand in open rolling meadow and one wooded acre slopes down to the Ashuelot River. The roadside is lined with tall, mature maples and oaks; deer have laid in the meadow and woodchucks have made their homes in the woody banks. The land awaits the presence of joyful children, their parents and caregivers.

We express great joy and gratitude to all who have been a part of bringing Sophia's Hearth to this moment: parents and children, board members past and present, teachers and caregivers, colleagues and friends of our work from near and far, Monadnock region community members – all those who have woven the tapestry of relationships and interest in our vision.

We invite you all to become our partners in realizing this moment in whatever ways you can.

The Flood

Susan Weber

Addendum: Following the writing of the previous article, Keene suffered a major flood. The following describes our current situation.

Columbus Day weekend had promised so much—a full to bursting enrollment for a workshop on language development for very young children with internationally renowned puppeteer Suzanne Down of the Juniper Tree School of Puppetry from Vancouver. We thought the day was ideal for joining together as the forecasted rains began late Friday evening. What could be more inviting than a cozy weekend indoors at Sophia's Hearth with colleagues? But Sunday morning brought a very different picture as the now 10.5" of rain had created rising floodwaters that engulfed our building. It stood like an island in the water that reached up to the windowsills. Workshop participants, returning to continue their work on Sunday morning, could not reach Sophia's Hearth. Our utilities were severed, Suzanne's teaching materials—books, her collection of hundreds of puppets and silks, hand dyed wool fleece created with special dyes collected in the tundra—all floated in the inhospitable flood waters.

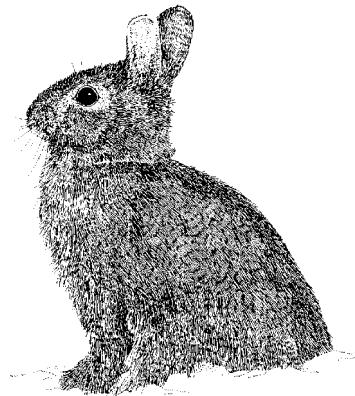
Able to reach the building with a canoe, we ferried most essential materials and puppets still above water to safety. (Isn't it ironic that among those most 'essential materials' of our times are our computers and databases?) With 20" inches of water throughout our building many materials were already damaged beyond any rescue. A devoted team of volunteers helped Suzanne all day long and into the evening as every puppet was lovingly washed and disinfected. Each ball of roving was delicately rinsed and hung to dry before the wood stove. Jack Be Nimble, Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater and his wife, The Cow who Jumped Over the Moon all laid together before the fire. A larger boat was offered that parents and friends paddled numerous times back and forth, rescuing other precious belongings, bringing them to dry ground and temporary storage. Our space is probably uninhabitable and our work will now, of necessity, seek a temporary home. By the time you read this story, we will have created a transitional home and will be actively planning for the future. Our November conference will be in full swing and families will once again be coming together.

Six days later:

- Bonnie, our Office Manager, and I have completed an inventory of losses and needs.
- Friends and local community members continue to respond most warmly to our situation with active help and prayers.
- We are visiting possible temporary sites.
- Our November conference is right on track.
- Our newest infant group is able to meet without missing a week.
- I am meeting with our development consultant to plan the process for the permitting and design of our new facility.

Keene, being still under thick gray clouds for seven full days now, reminds me of the creation story! Tired though we are, all files have now completed their drying process before the wood stove and are ready for copying and re-filing. It is extraordinary and liberating to realize how much paper one doesn't really need after all! Most powerful was a visit to the memories of creating our Carpenter Street home through soggy, then dry, photos. It was tremendously inspiring to recall all the friends and board members who helped and worked so hard to create this wonderful space for families, little children, and colleagues. Reconnecting with creating that first home has given optimism and confidence for the future. Now, alongside picking up the pieces after this devastation, we know that a strong community surrounds our impulse to build a facility built specially for our work.

For Sophia's Hearth, much of the past has washed away in the floodwaters, but a strong future lay before us. We now find ourselves warmly welcomed into the building of Keene's Early Intervention Program, *RISE for Baby and Family*, just on the edge of the downtown square. We have an office and shared use of RISE's lovely playroom for the coming weeks while miracles are being worked at our Carpenter Street home. With good luck and lots of hard work, it is even possible that we will have moved back home by the time this issue arrives on your doorstep!



Budapest and Two Weeks in Loczy at the Pikler Institute

Susan Weber

Our Susan spent two weeks at the Pikler Institute, with gratifying results.

I had long anticipated the Pikler Institute's two week training, and in June had the opportunity to attend this course. Traveling to Budapest I joined a group of 14, including fellow students from Australia, Spain, Brazil, Holland, and the United States, to experience daily life at the Institute as well as to study with the training faculty of physicians, therapists, psychologists and pedagogues. The combined years of faculty experience must have been over two hundred years! The training wove together experiential explorations, lecture, study from the Institute's remarkable archive of photographic and video material, as well as seeing the daily rhythms of the children and their caregivers. We were the second English language group to complete this first of two training modules. Each of these two groups has included a cadre of Waldorf early childhood teachers from several countries.

What was most special about the experience? Several aspects stand out: the mood of sensitive caregiving (although the children are carefully protected from visitors, and we visited their living and play environments only when they were not in them); the delicacy of sustaining the sheath of protection and joyful well-being for the children in residence; the devoted faculty from a range of professional disciplines that extend back to the founding of the Institute (through the emeritus pediatricians who are still today actively researching) stretching forward to master caregivers who demonstrated and taught us techniques for caregiving. Contact with these extraordinary people brings forth tremendous gratitude. We each came away changed from our experiences with them.

It was special to have the opportunity to learn from the three extraordinary archives that reside at Loczy.

First of all is the **photographic archive**—the thousands of photographs made by Miriam Reisman over many years under the guidance of Emmi Pikler, that illustrate the development of very young children and give an opportunity to study carefully many, many details of their development. As one studies these exquisite photographs, one becomes aware of experiencing children who are unveiled and fully natural, showing us the essence of infancy and childhood.

Second, the **video archive**—only a small portion of which has been professionally produced with narrative. Most material is archived for teaching and research, some of which is available for purchase. We observed minute developmental phenomena, and we could revisit small segments of film to extend our understanding.

And finally, the archives include **detailed records of each child's daily life**, recorded by his caregivers in a highly structured format, with logs stretching back to the 1940's. This aspect of the

archive has served as the research material for study after study carried out by Emmi Pikler, her daughter, present director Anna Tardos, the staff pediatricians and other staff pedagogical members. As course participants, a number of these research projects were shared with us—from motor development to play to the identified stages of attainment of sphincter control (they found 20!)—each study enlarged our understanding of young children.

Also special to me was research on **attention** and how the young child learns in many different ways through differing modes of attention. Loczy researchers have identified and described a number of phases in the child's attention to her environment. We worked to be able to recognize a continuum of types of attention in the child, from dreamy and unfocused to highly focused. The research has documented highly focused attention occurring in much shorter, intensive moments, in contrast to the long spans of dreamy, unfocused attention, all of which contribute to cognitive growth. I was deeply struck by Anna Tardos' comment that conventional education requires far too much focused attention of the young child, working against the natural tendency of how the young child learns best. The Waldorf early childhood setting came to mind, in which the somewhat older child is still given much freedom to explore the environment through dreamy focus rather than pointed expectation of the adult for focused attention; where highly focused attention is developed sensitively over time. The awareness that the child requires protection from externally imposed highly focused work has been a bedrock of Waldorf early childhood education. At Loczy, phenomenological observation of infants uninterrupted at play has documented this bedrock. It was only one of many moments at Loczy when I felt that this capacity for skillful phenomenological observation and conceptualization had found practical affirmation for the foundations of Waldorf early childhood education.

To spend two full weeks as a student where professionals from multiple disciplines can meet, study, share and enrich one another's efforts with such sensitivity, with openness, with interest on behalf of the children of the earth was truly a gift.

I was given a chance to share a slide presentation focusing on our playgroups of the work at Sophia's Hearth. The Pikler Institute staff expressed delight to see our wonderful families and lively children. They were especially interested in the special elements of singing, lap games, and simple puppetry that are a part of our program.

I look forward to November of 2006 when the second part of this training focused on social development and aggression in very young children will be offered.

This summer we hosted part-time faculty member at the Pikler Institute, Ute Strub, as a guest instructor. Ute attended the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Germany as a child. The fruits of the summer—along with our first graduating class of training course students—truly include the cross fertilization of Sophia's Hearth and the Pikler Institute.

Sophia's Hearth: Graduation Remarks, July 2005

Laina Clugston

Laina Clugston gave these remarks representing our first graduating class this summer. Well worth a read for a sense of what these women accomplished, and feel, as they take what they learned into the world. Thank you, Laina.

It is a privilege to represent to you, our community of friends and supporters, the first graduating training class of Sophia's Hearth—where simple gifts are in abundance!

To be simple and free—this is the domain of childhood, a state more and more illusive in the modern world, and yet yearned for in the hearts and souls of all humanity.

It is these gifts we came to Sophia's Hearth seeking in this training course. We are teachers, some with 20 plus years of experience—some just beginning. Working in Waldorf Schools; as directors of childcare programs; as Parent-Child teachers; and as beginners of new Parent-Infant programs.

Sophia—goddess of wisdom—we find her in the word philosophy—lover of wisdom.

Hearth—the Heart of home, where fire burns providing warmth and light, nourishing our souls with community and our bodies with food while sending its smoke heavenward—the center of activity in the home.

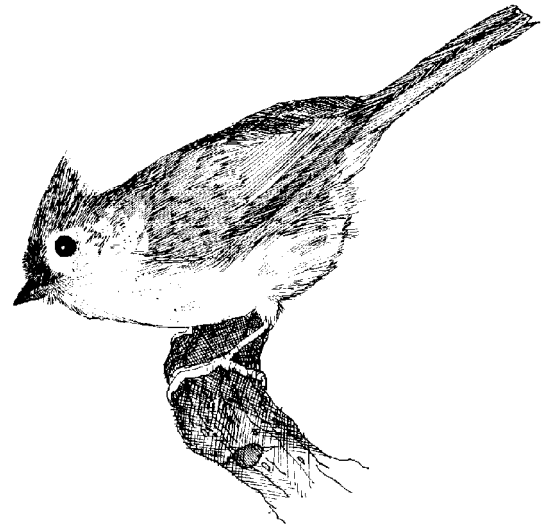
Sophia's Hearth has been this center for us this past year and, we hope, for many more.

Our experience as students has been rich—we have met Sophia through our teachers, our colleagues, and our inner transformative work. We have been cooks and we have been cooked. We have also been fed—we have been storytellers, crafters, artists, dancers and movers, singers, researchers, conversers, listeners, comrades.

We have moved from our centers out to experience the edges of our souls and the delights of mountain hikes, swimming ponds and campfires.

All fires need wood gatherers—we gathered from our experiences both here in Keene and at home moving out from the center and returning—bringing more and more of our movements, feelings, words, and thoughts to consciousness.

But most importantly we have learned with conceptual clarity, heartfelt delight, and activity, the world of the child and the skills needed to be an adult in the garden of love and delight.



Go Play—find a way to play—the simple gift of childhood is the capacity for play. Our children are often robbed of this. The question has arisen, what is play—the work of the child? We have looked at this question through many lenses, and have been brought by Ute Strub into profound experiences of play ourselves. I offer my best definition through a story told to us by Ute. It is the best because it includes a child and an adult. The story concerns a small boy and his mother. Ute was observing the child. He was crying and nothing the mother did could comfort him. Ute suggested that they go outside to the nearby park. There the boy went to the sand and began to fill his mother's hand with sand. When it reached capacity and was starting to overflow, the mother began to pat the sand to hold it in place. Ute asked her to wait and see what he did and the mother left off patting the sand. The boy turned her hand over and the sand fell out. He continued to fill and dump sand from her hand thirteen times. Then he found a small digging tool and filled her hand and dumped the sand out an additional five times. After that, he ran off and played elsewhere, completely satisfied.

Play was giving him the time to do what he needed to do without interference until he was satisfied and had accomplished his task. Then he was able to move on to something else.

Simple gifts are not easily gotten. They require time, patience and relationship. Right relationship includes careful observation and accurate speech.

Parker Palmer tells us in *Courage to Teach*—good teaching requires self-knowledge: it is a secret hidden in plain sight.

There are many ways we have come to know ourselves better. Interestingly, self-knowledge and home are the same word in ancient Greek. We seek the center of the home—the hearth on our journey for self-knowledge. This inner journeying was a

large part of our student experience as we brought our concepts into real experiences. For example, we have all carefully bathed babies. But an experience with Ute brought us to a new level of awareness. We touched water blindfolded and took time to feel it. It was indescribably tender and soft. The time we took transformed our relationship with water, and now for us, putting a baby into a bath, we will have much greater consciousness in our hands, although our outward gestures may not be noticeably different.

Always there was space for honoring our self-observations as well as our child observations. Self observation was supported by the group experience, hearing others speak.

Hearth—the center of the home—where we can learn about ourselves—making us better teachers. We have all been affected by the fire we found burning on this hearth—we have been kindled, sparked by different things, bursting into flame in our own time—being together helping us to burn brighter and stronger. Since our first day together, we have been burning—building a conceptual framework, transforming and changing inwardly, outwardly enriching our programs with new knowledge and skills, actively stretching our bodies and minds, hearts and hands. We have been inspired to move out into the world with this important work.

We have gathered the courage, inspiration, and skills to make a difference in the lives of children—they are our most precious gift. We cannot thank Susan and Jane enough for all they have been to us—as they have worked tirelessly to bring their wisdom to us. This is the only training of its kind that I know of—unique in working the ground shared by Steiner and Emmi Pikler. We are so proud to be the pioneer class of this training and will take care to nurture and share these not so simple gifts.

And so we will go forth with:

Self-confidence and humility

Self-control and gentleness

Presence of mind and perseverance.

Rudolf Steiner

Thank you.

A Teacher's Perspective on the Summer Course

Elizabeth Sustick

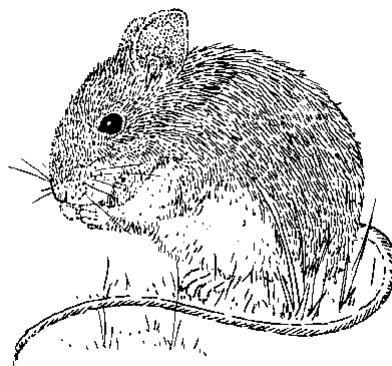
Elizabeth Sustick, from the Hartsbrook Waldorf School in Hadley, Massachusetts, shares a teacher's perspective on our summer course. Thank you, Elizabeth.

I am very grateful for the opportunity I had this summer to study and play at Sophia's Hearth in the course "The Child in the First Three Years." I especially enjoyed working with guest teachers Helle Heckmann, a Rudolf Steiner pedagogue, and Carol Pinto, a RIE™ (Resources for Infant Educators) teacher. In addition to these marvelous women, Sophia's Hearth co-directors Susan Weber and Jane Swain added their special wisdom to each day, leading art and craft activities and movement games.

With the Waldorf approach, Rudolf Steiner gave four principles to teachers. First, teachers must be people of initiative: they should stand in full consciousness of what they do in the classroom, and how they act toward the child. Second, the teacher should be one who is interested in everything happening in the world. Third, the teacher must be one who never compromises what is untrue. Lastly, the teacher should cherish a mood of soul that is fresh and healthy. This course at Sophia's Hearth was an expression of these principles!

Each teacher, while working with their particular approach to caring for the young child, embodied these golden rules of teaching. From each presentation, though there was a difference in method, I expanded and deepened my understanding of meeting the needs of this sensitive and magical time of development. My awareness of the importance of word, gesture, mood, attention and movement increased. My respect for the growing child, and her task of incarnating into her body in a healthy way, was deepened. The feeling of responsibility was powerful.

I look forward to working with this sense of truth so carefully and lovingly presented. I have been nourished by this experience to work with the principles Steiner described for teachers, especially the fourth principle, calling on teachers to never grow stale, but be fresh and healthy in our teaching.



The Development of the Hand

Jane Swain

Jane Swain is the co-director of Sophia's Hearth's training course, "The Child in the First Three Years."

This article describes some of the intricacies and the abundance of amazing stages through which infants and toddlers progress in their fine motor development, so that professionals familiar with the basic concepts of motor development can begin to recognize these movements in their work with children. I chose to use the female pronoun. I avoid giving specific ages for motor milestones, since each child will wisely progress at her own pace, and the quality of the movement is what is most important, not the timetable.

While each child develops uniquely, I am presenting an archetype of development. If the child skips a stage or two, all is not lost. All of us, at any age, have potential for further growth and development! I do not wish to support a deficit model or a fix-it mentality on the part of teachers and caregivers of infants and very young children, but rather to help them see the genius of the child at work in the unfolding of her fine motor development. I encourage professionals to concentrate on honing their observation skills for a short period of time each day.

Her position in the womb influences the newborn. It gets quite tight in the womb during the last several months so that at birth, the baby is overstretched on her backside and somewhat contracted in her arms and legs. Her shoulders are elevated toward the ears, so that it looks as if she doesn't have much of a neck! Her hands are generally held in fists when she is resting. Her head is rotated to either side with the neck extended. The newborn cannot keep her head in the midline position.

The newborn may have tremors, as myelination is not yet complete. Random movements of arms and legs are jerky, unsophisticated, and without voluntary control. The baby moves in undifferentiated total patterns. For example, if her arm moves out to the side with the elbow straight, the hand will usually open too, as this completes the total pattern. Similarly, when the baby nurses, occasionally the hands also perform a sucking pattern, as if the entire body is sucking. The grasp reflex is in full force; if one touches the palm of the hand, the fingers will curl. Her Moro and startle reflexes are also strong, so that if her head drops backward slightly or she hears a sudden loud noise, she will cry, her arms and fingers will extend (or open), and then flex (or close across the body) in a two-part response.

One really can't speak about the hand without commenting on the eyes and the breathing, because these are also related. The newborn's eyes can focus at about seven inches, which is the distance to the mother's face when she is being held in the nursing position. The newborn is a "belly breather." While breathing actually occurs in the chest, we see the in and out motion in the abdomen.

Time passes, and the baby is not so flexed up anymore. At rest, the arms and legs are more rolled out and a little farther away from the body, and the elbows are straighter. The arms are moving more, in a windmilling sort of motion. The hands are open more, although the grasp reflex still manifests strongly if something is placed in the palm of the hand. The baby still can't keep her head in the midline position, and the neck is still extended. In fact, the baby is even more asymmetrical than she was at birth. This is when the asymmetrical tonic neck reflex influences the baby's movements. In this reflex, if the head is turned to one side, the face-side arm and fingers straighten, and the skull-side arm and fingers flex, or curl. Now the baby begins to notice her hand and spends much time looking at it. What is this? Could this possibly be part of me? Gradually the vision and the movement become more integrated.

Time passes, and early stages of head control emerge when the baby is lying on her back and her head can come to midline and stay there. The baby learns to tuck her chin, instead of keeping it extended, as in the earlier months. This new head position is liberating! Now the eyes start to converge, better tracking occurs, and the baby can shift her gaze more easily between two objects. The shoulders come down lower, and the neck starts to be revealed! The hands come to the midline position. The grasp reflex fades; the hands are predominantly open at rest, and the very early stages of a volitional grasp are starting. The baby still can't combine reaching out with grasping, however. Grasping is a flexion pattern, and reaching is an extension pattern. Combining the two is too complicated, but the baby can grasp at her clothes at her chest, because here the fingers and arm are both flexing.

As more time passes, the baby comes more fully into this glorious stage of symmetry and midline orientation, a noteworthy accomplishment. The head comes to the midline position for longer periods of time. The hands play together at the midline position, and everything goes in the mouth. The hands will also find the knees. In another few weeks they find the feet—which also go in the mouth! As the baby is playing with her knees and feet in the midline position, she may turn to look toward the side, and surprisingly plop over to lie fully on her side. This characteristically happens at first by accident, and then the baby learns to do it intentionally. Time passes and she will learn to roll all the way over into the prone position (on her tummy), and also from prone back onto her back.

At this time of symmetry and midline orientation, the baby reaches out for toys. The reflexive grasp fades as the volitional grasp comes more and more into the picture. This early volitional grasp is a primitive pattern whereby the baby grasps from the pinkie side of the hand with no involvement of the thumb (ulnar palmar grasp). She reaches with poor aim, and overshoots when she reaches. The cerebellum has not yet developed fully; it will later correct the reach in midstream and fine-tune her aim.

The reach is visually directed, i.e. she must see her hand and the object. She needs vision because her sense of where her body parts are in space and what they are doing (proprioception) is far from fully developed. Spending more time bearing weight through her hands in the prone position and in crawling will help her to develop this sense of proprioception. The baby now bangs objects with a strong downward motion. She can't yet control how hard the muscles are contracting. With all this activity of the hand, the baby begins to develop the concept of cause and effect: she purposely reproduces an interesting result that occurred initially by chance. This is a lovely example of the intimate relationship between movement and learning.

When she lies on her back and plays with toys, the baby starts to work on more complex hand skills. Transferring an object from one hand directly to the other is too hard, so she uses an interesting strategy with her mouth. She takes an object from one hand, puts it in her mouth, holds onto the object with her jaws, pulls her hand off the object, and then grasps the object with the other hand!

Once she has the capacity to roll to her tummy, the baby explores the prone position. She learns to push down into the supporting surface. It is very important to know where down is. In fact, it's vital! Think how disturbed we feel when we lose this fundamental relationship to gravity, for example, in an earthquake or on a carnival ride. Older children who have poor balance and are fearful of movement very often have difficulty finding their orientation to the supporting surface beneath them. Initially the baby pushes down through her forearms to come up on her elbows. With time she shifts her weight onto one side in order to reach for a toy with the other arm. After a while, she pushes down and comes up onto extended arms (straight arm). In this position, she experiences deep pressure into the base of her hand, and begins to work on wrist control. On extended arms, she gradually learns to shift more onto one side in order to reach with the other arm. Soon she pivots around in both directions.

All this work in the prone position lengthens and strengthens the muscles that stabilize the shoulder blades on the rib cage. The shoulder blades can gradually hold themselves in various positions on the rib cage, depending upon where the hand is used in space. This work in the prone position also provides the brain with wonderful deep pressure and joint sensation coming from the hand and especially from the thumb side of the hand. So the baby's brain knows more accurately where her thumb is and what it is doing, which in turn promotes more coordinated use of her thumb. Now the grasp changes from the pinkie side of the hand (ulnar palmar grasp) to the thumb side of the hand (radial palmar grasp), which also has no opposition of the thumb yet. With improved proprioception, she has less need for visually directed reaching.

The grasp is voluntary now, but the baby has no concept of pressure when she grasps. She will grasp objects very tightly. This primitive pattern sometimes still remains in older school-aged

children and can be observed when they grasp the pencil with excessive pressure. At this point the baby has mastered the extremes of grasping and reaching, i.e., she grasps too tightly, and she releases a toy with a fling of the entire arm (a total extension pattern.) Now she scratches at a surface—such as the crib sheet or the carpet—with her fingers, and this activity works on the midranges of grasp and release!

The baby employs her new hand skills by exploring toys and objects. She is using judgment, spatial perception and is learning about the qualities of objects. Cognitive development does indeed go 'hand in hand' with fine motor development.

As the baby masters rolling and uses rolling to get from one place to another, she rotates her trunk, activating the abdominal muscles. In the newborn, the ribs are initially horizontally oriented. As the abdominal muscles become more active, they pull on the ribs, and this changes the orientation of the ribs to slant downward (as in the adult ribcage). The activated abdominal muscles also stabilize the ribcage, and this alters the interplay of the breathing muscles. As a result, the baby's breathing gradually changes to a thoracic breathing pattern. We see the in and out motion of breathing now in the chest, rather than in the belly, and the baby's lung capacity increases. She can cry louder and longer! He also has more lung capacity for babbling, and this favorably influences speech development. All this work in the horizontal position helps the baby to control her trunk, so that she has a stable base from which to control her head. Good head control contributes to coordinated eye movements, which in turn affect eye-hand coordination.

The baby becomes more and more active in the prone position. She assumes the "airplane" position with arms and legs up off the floor, and then "swims" in this position. She crawls on her belly. She comes up onto extended arms, and pushes her body backwards. During this motion, the shoulder blades glide downward on the ribcage, and the muscles and tissues are further elongated. This is an incredible transformation when one remembers how the newborn's shoulders were elevated toward the ears.

The baby plays freely on her side, on her elbow, and also up on her extended arm. Only now does she come into the sitting position on her own. She transitions through various positions, for example from sitting, to being up on her hands and knees, to lying on her side.

The baby starts to crawl, and tries a variety of crawling options. She may crawl using her arms in the normal way and bend her trunk to the side so that her legs are not really engaged. She may crawl with the same-side arm and leg moving together. And she will crawl reciprocally which involves a complicated counter-rotation in the trunk whereby the upper trunk rotates in one direction and the lower trunk rotates in the opposite direction. During all this work in the prone position and on her hands and knees, the weight of the body is transferred through the hand in various patterns. This weight transfer helps to develop the arches of the hand.

The reciprocal crawling especially, and the transitions through the various positions, shift the baby's weight through the thumb side of the hand. The shifting of weight "enlivens" the thumb; the brain receives further proprioception and deep pressure from the thumb, and now the baby begins to master thumb opposition in a variety of ways. In one pattern, the thumb pad opposes the side of the index finger (lateral pincer grasp). In another pattern, the thumb pad opposes the pad of the index (inferior pincer grasp). In a third pattern, the thumb pad opposes the pads of the index and long finger (three jaw chuck grasp). The baby now becomes very active in exploring and picking up every piece of fuzz around the house!

The crawling specifically elongates the index finger tendon, readying it for more coordinated work. The baby learns to point and poke with her index finger. She can isolate one finger from the others, rather than use the total patterns of the newborn period. The baby frequently crawls with a toy in her hand, which further stretches out the tendons of the wrist. Crawling also offers the opportunity to enhance coordination of the eyes. The baby looks from one hand to the other and back again when she crawls, in the same pattern that the eyes use for reading. The baby looks down at her hands and then across the room and back down again in the same pattern that the eyes use for copying from the black board to the paper on the desk.

At this time, the baby picks up objects of different weights. Her arm initially falls and then readjusts according to the weight of each particular object. She can release an object into a container if her wrist is stabilized on the container's edge. She no longer needs to fling her arm or use her mouth. With more time, she releases an object in the air without needing to support the wrist.

The baby masters bear walking. She pulls herself up to a standing position, first using mostly her arms, and then increasingly using her feet. She cruises along a coffee table or other surfaces at a helpful height and then learns to walk freely. Her shoulder blades pull back with her arms out to the sides and her hands up in the air when she initially stands alone and walks freely. This helps to stabilize her in the upright position. Gradually the arms relax and come down as the child's balance improves, and the hands are freed for activity in the standing position. The toddler masters a more sophisticated form of opposition where the tip of the thumb opposes the tip of the index finger (superior pincer grasp) rather than using only the pads of the fingers.

Toddlers love to give an object to another person and then have it returned. This game celebrates the capacities of the hand. Giving and receiving are archetypal movement of the hands that she has worked so many months to master. Fine motor development continues as the child grows older, but at this point, she has achieved an incredible amount, and has laid a solid foundation for all that is yet to come.

FOOTNOTE:

I write this article out of my experience as a physical therapist, and specifically out of my postgraduate pediatric training in the neurodevelopmental treatment approach, or NDT approach, as it is commonly referred to. Berta Bobath and Karel Bobath, MD, developed this approach, and I am indebted to their genius. I also gratefully acknowledge my NDT instructor, Judy Bierman. Additionally, the work of Emmi Pikler has deeply influenced me. Her work is a healing balm supporting infants and young children in the development of healthy fine motor skills. In Pikler's approach the caregiver gives the infant generous floor time for self-initiated gross motor and fine motor movement, because the caregiver understands that the child has an innate capacity to guide this unfolding motor development, if given the time and space to do so. I also acknowledge my Spatial Dynamics training under the direction of Jaimen McMillan, and my study of sensory integration, originated by Jean Ayres.



A Mother's Experience as a Student

Danielle Penasack

This summer I attended one week of the Professional Development seminar at Sophia's Hearth. I am the mother of two boys, Noah (3 years old), and Jonas (7 months). I came to develop a better understanding of my children's experiences, and to better support and guide them. I got that and so much more. My week away from home turned out to be the catalyst for profound change in my life, as well as a deeper understanding and greater compassion that will have a lasting effect on my family.

I attended the workshop with Jonas, five months old at the time. It was fantastic to listen to Susan and Jane describe early development as I observed him. I became aware of all the miracles that he accomplishes every day. The experience affirmed my belief that there's no rush for children to crawl, walk or talk. The work of babies and young children is to "learn to learn." I feel grateful that I somehow came to this on my own with my first child, and I am even more sensitive now to creating a rich sensory environment for Jonas. It is so important to really see these children, to observe them as they acquire a new skill, and to respect their endeavors.

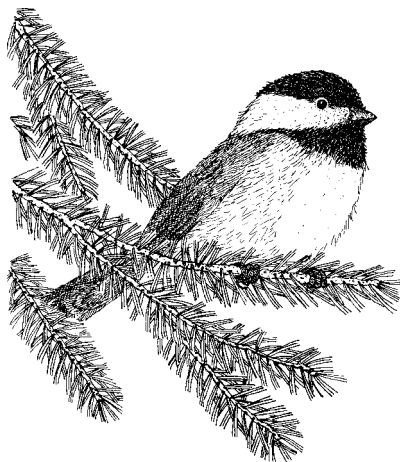
I also learned of a new way to welcome and care for children, and the profound effect of this loving care. I have never experienced anything like the peaceful, loving and intimate care of infants that was demonstrated from the work at the Pikler Institute in Hungary. If caregivers are deeply present while diapering, bathing and feeding, and completely focused on the child with respect and love, then the child is satisfied to play on his own and explore his world confidently and contentedly. The caregiving builds a sheath of protection around the child and the child basks in the afterglow of the love.

The experience brought more consciousness to the unspoken relationship that I share with my children. We talked a lot about

how the thoughts of the parent influence a child. As a result of what I learned this summer I now understand that children perceive our unspoken thoughts and feelings. So I wonder, what is the impact if I am replaying an argument with my spouse while nursing the baby? Or grappling with my complicated feelings about my older son starting preschool as we head out for the first day? It troubles me that my mind is so often occupied with struggle, conflict and self-doubt. I want my children to have the opportunity to observe and model parents consciously striving toward betterment, but presented to them in a deliberate and thoughtful way. This new awareness encourages me to be present in the moment and more mindful of my thoughts.

When the workshop began, I felt intimidated and fearful that my ways of being a parent would be judged by a roomful of experienced mothers and educators. But I am still moved by the way I was met with compassion, understanding, respect and support. This was a huge lesson for me. I can see that it takes confidence and courage to let others take their own path—to acknowledge without judgment. With respect to my children, I have greater reverence for their intentions for this life. I don't know what they bring, but I am encouraged to let go of the results—they will become who they intend to be.

Like most mothers, I work hard to balance the demands for my time and attention. This workshop met my needs on so many levels; it gave me the opportunity to learn more about my children, and how I can nurture them in a holistic way. In the past I've been hard on myself for the "failure" to fit yoga and meditation into my schedule, but for now I take comfort that my "practice" is to be truly present with these tender beings who have entrusted themselves to my care.



The Dads' Corner: Becoming a Storyteller

Bruce Barlow

Become a storyteller for your child. Reading books isn't good enough, and storytelling is remarkably easy.

Hair and Teardrop are two Beanie Babies. Hair is a koala bear, and Teardrop is a kitten. You wouldn't know it to look at them, but these two pals can fly airplanes (jet fighters and helicopters), swordfight, kung fu fight, and their tank has figuratively circumnavigated the world. They are Good Guys, always fighting evil, and always winning, even though, amazingly, no Bad Guys ever seem to get hurt. They wear capes. Sunflash, their buddy, is a little boy. Hair and Teardrop, in their days, had many adventures involving all sorts of daring-do, after which they would always come back to tell Sunflash over a root beer, cold glass of milk, or ice cream.

These days, Sunflash is fourteen, Hair and Teardrop, dressed in the capes Mommy made them, ride a stuffed shark like the cowboys they have been. It's been a long time since Daddy lay in the lower bunk making up a story that Sunflash had asked for as a means to settle in and get to sleep, Hair and Teardrop sharing his pillow.

Stories weren't entirely on-the-spot, however.

"Daddy? Will you tell me a story?" I always knew it was coming, and so I was usually thinking about it well in advance. Mommy and I used to trade off putting Sunflash to bed. She told better stories than I did, which I know because we compared notes often to trade ideas. And sometimes we'd pick up where the other left off. Note: that's not always easy. She left ME to get the tank across the Pacific Ocean (it floated on pontoons, rode big surf in Hawaii, was almost melted by a volcano, and fought off cannibals and sharks before landfall in Thailand). Tanks can be really amazing things.

In a storytelling workshop, our instructor read us a story, and then told it to us. No contest. We need to remember that "media" refers to "mediating" which means "coming between." A book is a medium (the proper singular of "media"), and when read aloud it does come between the reader and the listener. Hearing the same story told, without a book in between has an entirely different feeling, even if (or perhaps because) the language is not as eloquent as when read. Don't misinterpret me, I love to read out loud, but it is a different experience for my listeners. Telling becomes a more intimate experience for all.

Plots need not be complex, characters need not be well developed, although Hair and Teardrop were fascinating little guys by the time they were driving their tank. If your child is fairly young, say, five or under, the stories need not be very long. I preferred familiar settings, such as the backyard, or the local playground, that were familiar to my audience. Buzzing the back yard in a fighter jet to scare off a skunk put Sunflash, tucked in above me, to work imagining what our yard would look like from the cockpit, stretching his view of the familiar (it worked, by the way, that ol' skunk was scared off, but unharmed—take it from me).

And I remember one night telling the most lame, silly, dumb story I had ever imagined—something involving Hair and Teardrop flying their helicopter around in circles over the back yard because they (or maybe the storyteller...) could think of no place else to go—and finishing with them telling Sunflash about it over chocolate milk. I was embarrassed by my awful effort.

"Daddy, that was AWESOME!" Followed, a minute later, by the deep breathing of sleep. Mission accomplished. I had the nerve to feel smug, if only for a moment.

I miss those days. Tell stories while you can.

Our longtime editor, Bruce took on the major task of developing this issue through the impediments of the flood crisis. For his tremendous patience, we are extremely grateful!

