

Summer 2012 one and two week Summer Institute Courses

Mark your calendar.

July 2–6 Supporting Integration of the Primitive Reflexes in Children, Birth to Six: Practices and Interventions with Jane Swain

July 2–6 and 9–13 Advanced Studies in Child Development, a two week course

July 9–13 Child Development I (formerly, Nurturing the Child in the First Three Years, Week 1)

July 9–13 Building Family and Community Relationships - Creating Programs for Parents and Infants formerly, Creating Programs for Parents and Infants)

July 16–20 Child Development II (formerly, Nurturing the Child in the First Three Years, Week 2)

Summer 2012 Child and Family in the First Three Years 13 month Training Course begins July 9



See our website for more information.

We invite you to sign up for our email and postal mailing lists, to receive updates about coming events and articles of interest.

Sophia's Hearth Family Center

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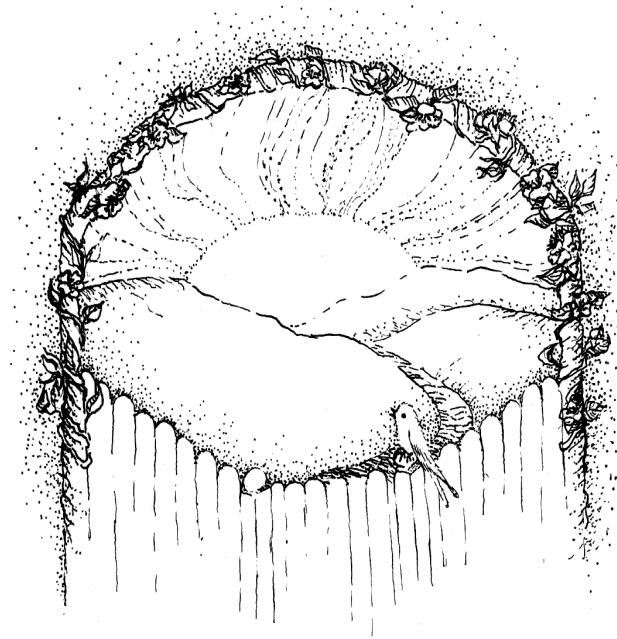
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SOPHIA'S
HEARTH
FAMILY CENTER



Tenth Anniversary Retrospective Issue

the Garden Gate

WINTER 2012

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the journal of Sophia's Hearth Family Center

Sophia's Hearth Family Center educates and nurtures families and professionals in their care of the young child, out of the resources of Waldorf education. Our vision is that every family be supported to create healthy family life so children develop and flourish with joy, strength, and confidence.

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A letter from Susan Weber *Welcoming the New Year!*

January 2012

Dear friends,

THE ENTRANCE OF A NEW YEAR is always an opportunity, as the calendar lies before us with pages whose stories are not yet written. Some days and weeks will inevitably feel lengthy or arduous, as other fly by in a heartbeat. Some will be momentous, others less so and perhaps even 'ordinary'. But in reality, each day will be a blessing if we see the gifts that lie within it. We send you our warmest hopes for the coming year—that it strengthens our families and offers joy and enthusiasm for life to all of us.

Twelve years of living activity have unfolded at Sophia's Hearth Family Center, and for ten of those years, we have shared *The Garden Gate* with our friends. At the publication of that first issue, our first website had been newly launched. We were working out of our first actual community space, a small office on Roxbury Street in Keene.

By 2003, we were writing about our move to Carpenter Street, where our programs found a home for seven years. Along the way, we wrote about the flood that interrupted Suzanne Down's puppetry course. Each issue is a bit of history of Sophia's Hearth – from the editor's reflections to the writers and topics themselves. Dads, moms, students, faculty members—all have become writers in these pages.

The Garden Gate has had several editors—Adriana Elliot, the founding editor; Bruce Barlow, who shepherded it along into the next phase; Amy Robertshaw, who stepped into Bruce's shoes; and Lindsay Evermore who came forward to develop the 2010 issue. Our gratitude to each of them!

Many pieces have found their way to our website 'articles' page. Others are there for those who still have hard copies of past issues or read from the website archives. For our twelfth anniversary and a decade of *Garden Gate*'s, we are selecting pieces for a retrospective journey of the themes of importance to families and early childhood teachers. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we have enjoyed our journey into the past to create it for you.

Susan Weber, Director



View From the Branches

Adriana Elliot

When my first-born child was a few months old I wrote a letter to *Mothering Magazine* about how I did not identify with the smiling, radiantly happy and well-adjusted models on the cover of their publication. I can no longer find a copy of my letter, but I think that I described my own new-mom experience as a kind of second adolescence, complete with acne, mood swings, and intense bouts of fear and self-loathing. My heart had been split wide open, I was helplessly in love with my tiny infant, and I felt incredibly vulnerable, bewildered, and alone.

Fast forward a bit, my son is 9 months old, and we're at my in-laws' for the holidays. I get a phone call from the husband of a good friend who had delivered her first-born only a few weeks before. He's apologetic about calling on Christmas Day, and asks if I could please speak with his wife. She gets on the phone sobbing so hard I can barely understand her words. She's telling me she was lying in bed with the most recent *Mothering Magazine* and was tearfully reading a letter that expressed exactly what she was feeling—she turned the page—and discovered the author was me. "All I ever wanted was a baby, but I didn't know it was going to be so hard! And I didn't know anyone else felt this way until I read your letter this morning!"

That experience taught me the importance of sharing our stories with one another. I had been hiding the hard parts of my parenting journey—even from my good friends—because I felt guilty and ashamed for being anything less than joyful about my baby. One of my closest friends didn't know until she read it in a national magazine! By keeping the hard parts inside, though, I was isolating myself and denying others the opportunity for mutual support, as well. The "View From the Nest" articles were born from that understanding, and the desire to share honestly about what it was like to be home with my kids so intensively.

The decision to "stay home" when my kids were little was not made rationally. I simply couldn't imagine doing it any other way. And though I didn't always enjoy it, I am grateful now that I was home with them. I was told, at the time, "the days are long but the years are short" and in retrospect, I agree. In many ways, I wish I'd waited longer to re-enter the workforce "outside" the home, so I could have savored even more of those early years in the nest with my youngest child.

But the fact is, I hit an emotional wall. I didn't know how else to feel myself as a separate, worthy being—in spite of dancing, personal development work, support groups, knitting groups, play groups, and occasional babysitting while I went off and cried or wrote or both. The economic structures that validate work for pay had become wired into my psyche, and I, for one, did not figure out how to switch them off sufficiently to continue to feel "good enough" without pay and a public role, of some kind.

In addition to economics and ego, though, perfectionism and fear of the world were also poisoning my attempts at maternal happiness. Much of my early maternal neurosis resulted from a crippling fear of failure running headlong into an equally intense fear of the world. I wanted to protect my children from all that I feared outside our home, yet within the walls of our home I had to reckon with my own imperfections, and my consistent failure to live up to my own outrageous expectations. Nothing was good enough for my children - inside or outside our four walls. I had painted myself into an impossible corner, which I continue to puzzle over, 14 years into this parenting journey.

Like all parents who wish to make conscious choices—to protect our families from things like, oh, consumerism, materialism, artificial ingredients, violence, and premature sexualization of children, to name a few—we are balancing the need to do right by our children, and the need to relate to and integrate ourselves with the rest of the world. I suppose this is the paradox of living with diversity of any kind. How do we respect and honor the choices of others, while remaining true to our own convictions? How do we be selective in our own choices, without building an arsenal of negativity and fear against the very world we live in?

When my kids were still tiny my dad gave us a CD copy of an album I had loved as a child. It was a musical re-telling of the *Cowardly Lion of Oz*, and he added a recording of Dylan Thomas reading "A Child's Christmas in Wales," at the end of the CD. At the time, I wasn't playing any recorded media to my children. My husband and I sang and told stories regularly. We believed in giving our children an authentic human experience, to maximize their own potential to inspire, imagine and create, without dependence on the seduction of the electronic obsession. In retrospect, however, the CD was a loving, thoughtful gift, and I wish I had showered my dad with gratitude during the few years he had left on this earth. Instead, I left the CD on a shelf, neglected, to collect dust. He felt hurt and unappreciated, and I felt frustrated that he didn't understand and respect my parenting choices.

Don't get me wrong: I am glad that we sang all those songs and told all those stories. I am grateful for the time I have spent with my children baking bread, taking walks, playing in water. What I would like to do more of, though, is to make choices from a place of love, rather than fear. I'd like to move toward what we choose for our family, rather than pushing back against what we reject. Not only is it more fun to follow the joy, it also communicates to our children that we are part of the interconnected web of this world, helping to shape our collective future. As my children move into adolescence, I want to model healthy relationship to life outside our home, so our children can step from the nest out into the branches of this tree, ready to spread their wings with confidence. 🌿

Festivals of Autumn: A Teacher's View

Barbara Nardone

The weekend of November 2–4, 2001 dawned more beautifully than one could have ever asked. The incredible New Hampshire weather allowed us to experience first hand working out of doors and reaffirmed for me how significant the relationship with nature is to our work. While the theme for this meeting was weaving together the festivals of the autumn, what I came away with far exceeded this intention.

We began on Friday morning with Helle speaking about Nøkken and sharing slides of her work with the children. What became apparent to me was that Helle brings intense love and devotion to her art. Her thought, planning, and follow-through in every aspect of her work delighted me. She inspired me to be ever more conscious and attentive. This was only the beginning of a soul-inspiring experience.

What set this weekend in such a special light was that we worked. Talking was minimal with regard to Helle lecturing and what she said was so succinct and concentrated that a sentence captured it all. We began by counting off into four groups—one for each of the festivals—Harvest, Michaelmas, Lantern Walk, and Advent Spiral. Helle believes in bringing nature back into the Kindergarten as much as possible. This was so very evident in her festival table and all that she does. Her dance with the natural world is ongoing. Our first step was to create windows of color depicting imagery of our festival. The Michaelmas group gifted us with a room to which I cannot in words begin to do justice. I'm sorry to say that it had to be experienced. On a physical level the colors, objects and arrangement were a feast for the senses. As I stood in the space, bathed in this atmosphere, my inner self slowed to a moment of utter peace and tranquility. I felt myself to be in a sacred space permeated by the Divine. For me the whole weekend was a series of such powerful impressions.

Our festival journey began with the Harvest. In slides and words Helle transported us to the Danish island of Fejo, and then invited us to sink our hands and wills into activity. We winnowed, threshed, ground, wove, baked, ate and experienced the bounty of the Harvest. Helle believes in using all that one is given and the fruits and vegetables that graced the table became the characters of a story and the ingredients for soup. I kept reflecting on the point and the periphery. Helle is so attentive to each and every detail and nuance, and so able to bring that attention back out to the whole. I personally challenged myself to wake up and strive for such awareness.

With each festival Helle walked us through her understanding and manifestation of its essence and then set us to work creating the tangibles—crowns for Michaelmas, paintings for lanterns, gathering boughs for the spiral. We worked individually and in groups, and as hours passed each festival came to life. There were two very moving experiences that I would like to share. One of them is a knighting for each child on Michaelmas.

The setting is the park which the children and teachers go each day. One by one each child stands before Helle and is knighted. She is given a cape with the words “With this cape you will be protected and you will be able to choose good.” She is given a crown of copper with the words, “With the wisdom of the stars you will be guided in life.” She is given a bulb with the words, “With this you will plant a seed for the future.” Lastly, she is given a sword with the words, “With this you may guard the one who needs guarding.” We witnessed this ritual through slides and Helle's recounting. I can only imagine being a child and participating in such an event. Years later when she reflects back, how strengthened will she feel, and how deeply touched by such a moment? For many children might such an experience be a salvation? This too will never be forgotten. The second experience we actually took part in. Helle offered a basket of bulbs to the first person, asking her to choose the most beautiful. Then the person with the bulb was asked to turn to the one next to her and give the bulb away. Each of us had a turn to receive and to give. This was done in silence. When everyone had a bulb Helle invited us to go out and plant them. Camp Glen Brook will be well graced come spring!

While these were two exceptionally poignant moments, I felt the entire weekend was a collection of life-changing experiences. The working together that spanned the time was so rich and uplifting. I came home searching for ways to take the children out of doors more and to surround them daily with the ongoing preparation for the festivals. I find myself always asking why I do what I do and trying to be ever clearer in my striving to surround the children with real life, authentic experiences. Helle put before us several questions that I refer to often: How do we find a way for the young child to have a sense for life? What does the child imitate in the outside and what is the work of adults? How are all of the festivals connected to each other?

What I have said here is only a fraction of what Helle spoke about some festivals being cosmic and others being of nature. She spoke of the festivals as processes where the preparations come into the daily, practical work of the kindergarten. She spoke about purpose and purposefulness in all that we do. More so than ever I require of myself to know why. While Helle came to speak about festivals, for me what she said was much more far-reaching and encompassing. Something in me was moved during this conference that has offered new possibilities. I feel blessed and grateful for having been at Camp Glen Brook for this meeting. One last image to share is that while we stand in a festival, at that moment we bring something of the previous with us and we take something from it into the future. 🍂



View From the Nest: Parking Lot Fantasy

Adriana T. Elliot

As I leave the grocery store, the clerk holding the door open for my entourage asks with concern, “Are you folks okay or do you need a hand?” He is, of course, not the first one to ask me such a question. Hardly a day goes by without a concerned stranger reminding me how full my own hands are. Occasionally a kind soul will offer me some practical assistance, which, if I accept, I usually (and somewhat defensively) tolerate as a gracious gesture, not a necessity. These two hands have managed well enough so far, thank you very much, I'm doing just fine.

But today's cold wind inclines me to lean just a little more on the world, Mr. Grocer. I only wonder at what point, sir, I would stop needing your assistance. After you'd pushed my shopping cart to the car? Or perhaps after you'd unloaded the baby into her seat and wrestled the toddler into his? Or once you'd patiently waited then mandated takeover from a five-year-old who's insisting he can buckle himself in but he can't. Yet.

Perhaps, sir, you ought to just get in and ride home with us because it is snowing, after all. The boys will want snacks handed back to them and they'll need coaching to keep the crackers and raisins in the bags. Someone is sure to spill something, and you could be there to pick the apple off of the sandy car floor and wipe it with a hanky wetted from the water bottle. Once cleaned, you could return the apple, reaching back between the seats to give it to its runny-nosed, red-faced, exhausted rightful owner. You could manage water-bottle patrol, keep track of the lid, and de-escalate squabbles between siblings before they turn into brawls over baggies of peanuts and which song to sing.

Come to think of it, sir, you could sing for us, too. And then make up an entertaining story for the eldest child once the other two have fallen asleep. You could adjust their sleeping little heads back against their car seats so they don't hang forward, bobbing up and down with every stoplight. That way I could just drive safely home and negotiate the slushy roads with full maternal attention.

Then, since you'll be there anyway, you could help us get inside the house, unload the groceries from the car, carry the sleeping toddler to his bed, and make lunch. That way I could get the baby changed and nursed and put my feet up for a minute while I sip that nice cup of tea you'd make for me.

That way I could collect myself, inside and out, enough to breathe to full capacity. Then maybe I'd know what to do next, when you have to go. Because you will have to go, won't you, sir? There will undoubtedly be other customers waiting for you back at the cash register, and a time card to punch.

Before you go, perhaps you could do me just one more little favor? Because the baby will have fallen back to sleep at the breast and there are mounds of dishes to wash. There is laundry to be folded, laundry to be put away, laundry to be washed, laundry to be dried, and laundry to be gathered up from underneath beds

and behind doors. And dinner, of course, has to be planned and prepared. So, since I know you won't be able to stay long, perhaps you would just rub my feet for a few minutes. There is this sore spot under the ball of the right foot, and I sure would love for you to give it a little attention before I get back on the domestic treadmill. My husband won't mind a bit, I'm sure. I'll just tell him I needed a hand, and you offered yours....

“Could you push the cart to the car for me, please?” I say out loud, as the baby latches on again and nurses in the sling, and I cross the parking lot with a little boy holding tightly onto each of my two hands. The clerk unloads the groceries, I thank him, and we say goodbye.

From inside the car I watch the clerk disappear into the store, pushing a long line of wire shopping carts. Snow gathers in soft whispers against the windshield, and for just a moment, there is complete silence. In the grace of silence I remember that I will never complete every task before me. The stillness of this moment is all I really have. I feel my heartbeat sounding inside my chest. I see my hands on the steering wheel: capable, fragile, wind-chapped and human. In spite of nearly constant motion, these hands never tire. My feet may be perpetually sore, my back may ache from carrying children and burying anger, my head may pound from anxiety and exhaustion, but these hands, these very full hands, are my most faithful servants.

These hands are the ones my children pull on and fall into. These hands perform the intimate buckling and unbuckling of their world, in safety seat and high chair, bed and changing table, each piece of laundry folded and unfolded in an endless ritual of sacred maintenance.

Within me I hear an echo from our nighttime prayer: “From my heart to my hands, I feel the breath of God.” Now the voices of my children stir my hands into motion once again, and we are riding home to the music of our blessedly resilient hearts. 🍂

Fleeting Moments

Steve Ryder

While sitting with a colleague at work several years ago, I was told that my coworkers were glad that I was not a coffee drinker. He said the last thing I needed was caffeine.

Finding time to live in the moment is a challenge for most of us these days. It is no wonder that children are often unable to cherish quiet time, when all too often adults are moving them on to the next event.

While working I rarely find idle moments, yet I cherish how much I learn from my two year-old daughter Lauren. The time I spend with her allows me time to stand still. While sometimes this is tough, I try my best not to think of other tasks during these moments.

I have been very blessed to spend a great deal of time with her. This has allowed us to have many special moments. We have a two-sided fireplace and we have created a game called “let's be silly”.

The game consists of running around the fireplace in one direction and then changing directions quickly, while each of the players says “going to get you”. The game ends when Lauren wants to do something else.

This is usually followed by the infamous airplane ride. Lucky for me she is a good sport on this grueling event as it usually ends when dad gets tired creating turbulence in flight at the request of the passenger.

What child can resist string cheese? I only wish I had invented it, or at least bought stock in the company that makes it. This is a very special time, as the cheese may only be eaten at the dinner table or “sit on daddy”. The other key component of this ritual: Lauren likes to have “this kind juice”, which is a juice box with the little straw. Of course for this snack time the dinner table is never chosen.

Once we gather up the cheese and “this kind juice”, the best part for both of us is sitting on daddy. This is about the only time she sits still on my lap. And she enjoys every last bite of the cheese and most of the juice. I cherish this time with her and spend it observing. In addition, it also makes it special when Mom offers to have cheese and juice, and Lauren prefers “sit on daddy.” In essence, Mom can only take advantage when I’m not home.

While I do my best to enjoy each moment, there are times I have other things on my mind. Just last night she was not feeling very well. I had several things I needed to get done and was hoping for a speedy bedtime routine. We did our typical brushing of the teeth, reading of books, and then said some prayers. Alas, it was time to lay her down and kiss her good night.

Since she was not feeling too well, she began to cry and I was thinking this was the last thing I needed, since I had some work to finish up. Nevertheless, I began to rub her back, which did not seem to help. On the inside I thought “Am I going to be here all night?” yet doing my best to not convey these feelings of frustration.

I began to think of what a wonderful child she is and how seldom she is fussy. In addition, I was thinking of when I am not feeling well, how difficult and even miserable it can be to fall asleep. Suddenly, I was no longer interested in finishing my projects and focused on the most important task at hand, which was to enjoy this moment and do my best to be with her during this frustrating time.

As a calm came over me while rubbing her back, her little hand reached out to touch mine. She gripped my index finger and held it. She suddenly stopped crying and within five minutes, she was sound asleep. Fifteen minutes earlier, I would have run out of the room thrilled that I could get some work done, but now, I no longer wanted to leave.

I stayed for another ten minutes just thinking about how self-absorbed we adults are at times. I believe she began to feel me relax and focus on her, which in turn had a calming affect on both of us. Finally, it was time to try and release the grip she had on my hand and heart. It was just another fleeting moment I will remember, since I may never have it again. 🍷

In Praise of Crawling

Susan Weber and Jane Swain

There are so many magical moments that greet us as we watch our babies grow and develop! At birth, greeting one another with our eyes is a profound moment. Some weeks later, our child’s first smile brings us great joy and reinvigorates us to continue the long sleepless nights.

Day by day, week-by-week, new capacities unfold and we are continually awe-struck at the miracles of our children’s development. Our babies discover their hands, they wiggle their legs, they roll from back to front and front to back. Why, then, choose crawling as such a moment for celebration? Watch babies crawl! They are so joyful, up on all fours, free from the gravity of the earth just a bit more, traveling to new corners. Crawling is a very special capacity, brilliantly designed by its creator to strengthen our babies in many important ways, and laying a firm foundation for the developmental stages that follow.

What skills does a baby need before she can crawl? She must have strong muscles all along her back, sides, and tummy, so that she can lift her trunk off the ground. For example, it takes several months before the baby, while lying on her back, has enough strength, coordination and body awareness to lift her bottom off the floor and put her foot into her mouth. If we remember back to those earlier days, not so long ago, when we carefully supported the baby’s head whenever we picked her up, we realize how far she has come, and how much effort it has taken to build up those now-strong muscles! And then, balance... Raising her head as she lies on her tummy, lying on her side, rolling from side to side all are small but mighty steps in learning to balance herself, and they all build the skills for crawling.

We know from the scientific research of the last decade that the baby’s brain grows greatly in the first two years. So we know at the same time that much must be happening in these precious 24 months. And it is true. Each different movement—rolling, balancing on the side, pulling themselves along with their arms, lifting their heads—each movement and all its variations creates new and more complex roadways in the baby’s brain. And as anyone knows who has needed to negotiate city traffic, the more different roadways we know, the more success we will have in reaching our destination, especially if traffic is heavy. The brain is no different and it, too, greatly appreciates the diversity of its roadways.

For the baby, each new movement is an adventure in brain creation, in building an increasingly complex repertoire of life strategies that will later be used for academic learning, social problem solving, and creativity.

To praise crawling is to recognize that this complex skill has given the baby a new freedom. She is learning how to learn, and this carries her through her entire life. Try, fail, try again, persist, try again, make a tiny, almost unnoticed bit of progress, and finally integrating so many little elements we cannot imagine, to succeed!

Not only the joyfulness of crawling is a gift. There is much within the activity of crawling that is important for later learning. Crawling is very important for eye focusing and tracking (following an object with your eyes). It lays one of the foundation stones for reading and also for working with our hands, guided by what our eyes see. Crawling helps to integrate the upper and lower body, the right and left sides of the body, and exercises the trunk in increasingly more sophisticated ways. And the transitional movements from crawling to sitting further develop balance!

The baby’s hand, at birth just a curled fist like a spring fiddlehead fern, has a long journey to take to be able to hold a pencil and crayon, to tie a shoe, to butter toast, to use a saw or screwdriver. How does the hand learn to do all these wonderful things? Interestingly, crawling is very important in the development of the hand. The weight that passes through the hand as we are up on all fours serves to ‘wake up’ the muscles of the hand, to stretch out the tendons of the wrist and fingers, and to develop the arches of the hand. (Did you know that we have arches not only in our feet but also in our hands?) Crawling also helps to integrate primitive movement patterns so that the hand can move on to more sophisticated, coordinated, and complex movements.

And if your baby hasn’t crawled, but has scooted past this wonderful and important stage of development? Actually, this is an increasingly common occurrence. In fact, today kindergarten and nursery school teachers commonly encourage crawling in a variety of ways in their classrooms in order to help children who have skipped or spent limited time crawling. As parents, we can get down on the floor and play crawling games with our children for example, playing “London Bridge” by having children crawl through an arch instead of walk through.

We can encourage activities like drawing with chalk on the driveway or driving little cars and trucks on roadways on the floor, where children will be on their hands and knees and will crawl as part of the activity. We can also create spaces that children will naturally want to crawl through; for example, tunnels with sofa cushions and blankets or crawling spaces through the forsythia bushes or in the snow banks. When the child is still an infant, we can provide an inviting, clean and safe area on the floor, and we can allow the child to spend sufficient time in this environment so that crawling has the possibility to unfold.

Crawling is an important part of the infant’s development in the first year of life. It is a rich activity and provides the infant with many foundation stones for later life; this movement in particular has tremendous bang for the buck! It is important to note, however, that there are children who develop perfectly well who skip crawling, as there are other avenues that can provide the child with the same important capacities that crawling does.

For example, cross-country skiing and climbing up trees and on playground equipment provide some of the same components that crawling does. However, crawling is a wonderful, natural movement activity for the baby. No other activity is so all encompassing in providing all of the aspects mentioned above. 🍷

The Gift of Observation

Chantal Lamothe

“You have to be very patient,” the fox answered. “First you’ll sit down a little ways away from me, over there, in the grass. I’ll watch you out of the corner of my eye, and you won’t say anything. Language is the source of misunderstandings. But day by day, you’ll be able to sit a little closer...”

... One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.”¹

The Little Prince, Antoine St-Exupéry

My research project looks in depth at observation as a tool in the context of a mother-child or parent-child relationship. I began my project with the question: Does the mother’s observation abilities affect her connection with her child and, if so, how? First I felt the need to look at the more theoretical aspects of observation. Then I wanted to experiment with observing as objectively as possible on a regular basis. Through that, I wanted to refine the use of the tool itself. In fact, I finally enjoyed pushing the process even further: observing myself observing.

Then, I questioned mothers who experimented with observing in the parent-infant program. And I worked with three mother-volunteers who agreed to do a daily observation exercise. Following these experiences, my question changed: Why is observation so important? What is hidden behind this process?

I will conclude with my reflections and discoveries about the process of observing and its importance, not only in the mother-child connection, but also about the insights that this tool can give us.

The theory

From the theoretical concepts I studied, I found that there are many ways to observe. In our context, mothers observing their children, three functions are relevant:

- The descriptive function: “we observe to describe a phenomenon”. In this context, the phenomenon will mostly be the child’s development.
- The formative function: “we observe to retroact” since observation can be used to adjust one’s intervention toward a child.
- The evaluative function: “we observe to evaluate”. Even if it is not the first goal, observing one’s child with other children gives us the chance to evaluate or compare some aspects of personality.

Several more points seemed important to consider in the context of parents observing their children. First I wanted to consider *inference*, or what conclusions the observer deduces from what he sees. Secondly, I wanted to look at the *situation* as a significant part of observation. A situation can be natural or created, manipulated or free. Finally, it was worth noting how we choose to observe, and why. Postic and Ketele conclude this way:

“There are many possible ways to observe. The analysis of the research process, the many possible functions of observation, the many possible biases linked to observation, the very diverse ways to observe, all that must prevent us from the preconceived idea that there would be a “good” way to observe. There is not right or wrong way: there are only more or less adequate ways according to different situations.” (Free translation.)²

These theoretical ideas helped me shape my thoughts about observation.

Some answers

I found many answers by practicing my own daily observation. At first I wanted to observe people around me, particularly children. But Life took me on an unexpected path. My very sick mother was hospitalized while I was completing my school year and my practical training, and her severe condition brought me to her side every day. I chose her to be the subject of my daily observation.

Day after day I visited my mother and took care of her, washing her, dressing her, dressing her hair, helping her to the bathroom. And apart from that, I simply sat with her as she was half asleep, half awake.

Confronted with the general intensity of my life, I soon realized that each time I arrived at the hospital, I had to become centered, calm and peaceful. I would adjust my voice tone, the speed of my movements and my breathing. Even if I was in the hurry of the school year's end, whenever I entered her room I had to slow to another rhythm, her rhythm.

As her sleeping periods got longer, I had more time to observe her. One thought was always present: my mother is going to die. I felt it deeply in me. I lived many emotions because I had not seen this coming. It was so sudden and brutal. I decided to observe her intensely to discover what in her behavior or attitude made me think she was dying, since no diagnosis had been given. Here are some excerpts from my daily observations.

Day after day, I visit my mother at the Palliative Care Unit. Most of the time, she sleeps or half sleeps, and I am close to her. I generally observe her from the foot of her bed. I surrender to simply be with her. I feel that her life is leaving her physical body. But on what grounds do I conclude that? My observation process begins.

- *Her skin. Her skin no longer has the same color, the same life. Her skin seems thinner, more transparent and pale.*
- *Her breath. Her breath is more superficial and less regular. Sometimes it looks as if she is not breathing at all. Then suddenly, it seems a little better. Breathing in and out is clearly not easy.*
- *Her eyes. Her eyes are probably the most noticeable sign. The color of her eyes has changed. The white part is yellowish, and they are more fixed, less mobile. When she looks at something, her eyes are more rigid. Instead of moving her eyes, she turns her whole head, or even her whole body. When she sleeps, her eyes are not completely closed.*

- *Her body. She has lost a lot of weight and is now much thinner. Her entire skull is more apparent.*
- *Her movements. It is surprising to see how her movements are slow and carefully calculated. Each step, each movement is planned. The sequence of moves has to be decided and deliberate.*
- *Her bearing. My mother is getting shorter day after day. Is it really what is happening? I observe that when she is standing, her head goes down, as if it is too heavy for her to keep it straight. (Just as when a child is sad or moody. This posture makes her look so melancholic.) Her shoulders are rounded. When I wash her back, I can see this new curve in her shoulders.*
- *Her balance. It is fragile. She requires a lot of assistance when moving. We must watch her carefully and be on the alert for possible imbalance*
My observations give me the opportunity to be much closer to her, to see and understand these changes. The more I observe her, the more I am profoundly with her. A new communication appears: I need less language and less explanation. When I put together all the elements of my observation, I realize that her body is moving in the opposite direction from a developing baby: her body is contracting and returning to a fetal position. This image of a birth into another world becomes clear and beautiful. I feel it is a moment of deep truth. I am clear that she will be leaving soon for elsewhere.

This experience with my mother not only brought closure, but it also gave me clarity. I was able to describe “how” to observe: be calm and centered inside in order to be fully available, and then observe what is there. It also answered the “why”: to let her reveal herself to me, slowly, with simplicity.



The mothers and their children

I wanted to use this observation process in an experiment with some mothers. Three mothers accepted my invitation to observe their children on a regular daily basis for three weeks. The children were three boys: Mathis, 18 months, Émilé; 14 months and Dorick, also 14 months. At first, they all had the same questions I had: What should we observe, how and why?

I purposely chose not to impose a precise frame, because I wanted to discover the answers with them. We decided together to leave the observation free for the first week. The only rule was to observe for five minutes each day and to write down the results. Here are some of the elements that appeared most important:

- **The questioning of the mothers: what, how and why do I observe?** Depending on the reason I observe, I will not observe in the same way.

- **The inference issue.**

Frequently the mothers would interpret their children's behaviors. When I asked them how they had come to this or that conclusion, they were surprised to notice that they were indeed inferring, without even noticing it.

- **The mothers became aware of the acuteness of their observation.** “I now specifically observe my child apart from the specified daily five minutes; I am generally more watchful.”

Even if it seemed difficult for the mothers to do the exercise regularly, each realized that she was more and more aware of the moments when she was observing her child. After the three weeks, they all had enjoyed the experience and were happy to discover characteristics of their child that they had not noticed before.

More mothers

To deepen the scope of my question, I put together the comments of ten mothers concerning their observation experiences at Sophia's Hearth Family Center. I was surprised to see how much they deeply benefited from their observation time during the parent-infant program. Their comments reminded me of the theoretical answers that Magda Gerber and Emmi Pikler give about the “How” and “Why” to observe. [Editor's note: Emmi Pikler was a Hungarian pediatrician who founded the Pikler Institute in Budapest in the 1940's; Magda Gerber was her colleague who brought their insights to California through RIE™.]

How?

“Observation is a state of quiet and focused attention that cannot occur when the mind is in motion. The less you do, the more you observe... To observe means to be open and detached so that you can see the situation more clearly...”

As you observe your baby, relax and focus on what you see and hear. Look at your child. Look at her face, her arms, her legs. What is her body language saying? See what she responds to. See what holds her interest. See what bothers her. The process becomes easier as your child grows because she gives clearer signals and you get better at reading them.”³

Why?

“As you carefully observe your newborn, you will discover her unique personality. You will see your real child as she is

rather than the “imaginary child” of your own creation. You observe her so that in time, you will understand her likes and dislikes, moods and abilities. And understanding these things will help you to better care for her, communicate with her, and improve your relationship.”⁴

Dr. Pikler writes in *Peaceful Babies-Contented Mothers*: “What is essential is to observe. Get to know your child. If you really recognize what your child needs, if you feel what is causing him grief, feel what she needs, then you will respond in the right way. You will guide and bring up your child well.”⁵

“Human beings tend to project their own feelings upon other people, including their children. For instance, if a parent is hungry, he may project or assume that his crying child is also hungry. This is where observation is important. Instead of projecting or assuming, why not observe your child for the answer? Over time you will understand her needs.”⁶

Conclusion

If I come back to my original question “Does the mother's observation abilities affect her connection with her child and if so how?”, the answer now seems obvious. By observing her child, a mother learns to answer to the needs of her child in a profound way. The connection is based on mutual confidence. All the mothers that answered the questionnaire said it in their own words.

But this answer is not enough. The observation process is more than a way to know how to respond to someone's needs, a child's for example. I think there is something more fundamental. Behind this process is hidden the question: Who are you? And asking this question means understanding and accepting that this being is truly different and unique. It means to make ourselves fully available for this encounter, so that a young child has the chance to become who she is, and that we stay who we are. Observation brings us to the most authentic meeting, the true meeting described by Saint-Exupéry: “One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.”⁷

NOTES

¹ Saint-Exupéry, Antoine, *The Little Prince*, translated by R. Howard, Florida, A Harvest Book Harcourt, Inc. (1ère édition 1943), 2000, p.60–63.

² Postic, Marcel et Jean-Marie De Ketele, *Observer les situations éducatives*, pédagogie d'aujourd'hui, 1ère édition, Paris :Presses universitaires de France, c1988, p.77.

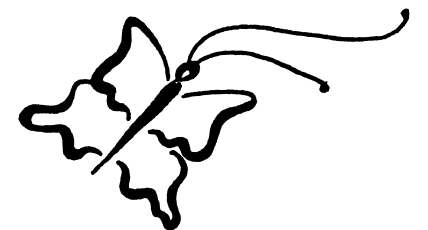
³ Gerber, Magda and Allison, *Your Self-Confident Baby*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1ère édition, 605 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y., 1998, p.26.

⁴ Ibid, p.26.

⁵ Ibid, p.26.

⁶ Ibid, p.84.

⁷ Saint-Exupéry, p. 63.



I Love Recipes

Amy Fredland

I love recipes. One of my favorite things to do is to sit down with one of my many cookbooks and a bowl of cereal or turkey sandwich and simply read recipes. It's best if there is a photograph that shows the finished product so that I can see what the end result is supposed to look like. After years of doing this I'm now quite good at concocting many recipes in my head and imagining the finished dish. I'm quite sure that I have only made one small fraction of the thousands of recipes I've collected, but I've read most of them at least once.

You see, I love to cook and to eat and a recipe shows me what I need to do in order to achieve my goal. If I want to bring a basket of warm blueberry muffins to a friend's house for brunch the recipe is what will get me there. A good recipe is clear, concise and orderly, and gives exact measurements and proportions. With a good recipe, a few ingredients and some simple kitchen tools I can be an artist—a creator.

As of August 12 of this year, in addition to being a foodie, I am now a new mother. My son, August Jeffrey, was born 2 weeks beyond a predicted due date by cesarean birth. He weighed 11 pounds 15 ounces and was 21 inches long.

Since August was born I've had time to reflect upon my pregnancy, his birth and his first few weeks of life. I find myself slightly worried. Why? Not because I rarely find the time to read a recipe let alone try to make one, but because there doesn't seem *be* to a recipe for mothering! I find that I question myself countless times during the day and night:

“Should I let him sleep on my chest or try to transfer him to his crib, risking him waking up?”

“How often do I really need to wash him?”

“Is it ok to put him in a swing so that I can take a shower?”

“Should I wake him up to change his diaper that I know is wet, or just let him keep sleeping?”

“How many layers does he really need to have today?”

For the first few weeks of August's life, I was incredibly overwhelmed with this new responsibility of parenting. My reaction to those feelings was to read; searching for advice, guidelines, ingredients one could say, to the recipe of mothering. I read books on how to wash a baby, how to hold a baby just so when he's breastfeeding, how long I should wait until taking visitors. I read mainstream books, books from yogic traditions, books from 1970's hippie folks and countless articles from the Internet. I read until I was confused and tentative; always wondering, “Is *this* the right thing to do?”

Then I started to talk to people. I talked to other moms, to teachers, to caregivers, to dads, to friends and to strangers. I asked about sleeping patterns and eating habits, about how old their child was when they could ride in a stroller, about what kind of stroller is best for a newborn.... the list was endless. And so were the answers that people gave me.

But where was the recipe? You know, the one that tells you exactly how long to rock a baby before he falls asleep, what brand of soap is best for his skin and what temperature the water in his bath should be.

What does one, who is so used to following directions from someone else, so used to working off of somebody's else's trial and error and experimentation, do when she finds out that there really is no recipe? There's no recipe for ensuring that her baby will go to sleep every night at the same time, no recipe for making sure that a diaper will not leak, no recipe for knowing whether to vaccinate or not. Believe me, I've looked and it doesn't exist.

This is the question that I'm living with these days. Where can I find the exact combination of cuddling, singing, playing, washing, feeding and crying? How do I fold those ingredients together? And which tools will I use—cradle, blanket, breast, stroller, woolens? I ask again, “Where is my recipe?”

Recently my answer has begun to bubble up inside of me. It's usually when the only sound I hear is the sweet suckling from August nursing, or when he opens his little mouth for a deep yawn. Or perhaps while I cradle him in the wee hours of the morning as he struggles to find sleep again. This is when I allow myself to remember that my son came to me *because* I have these questions, *because* of the decisions I make, *because* of the searching I do, *because* of who I am.

This is a humbling feeling that reminds me that there really is no recipe. How can there be? There can be suggestions, stories, sharing and research and philosophy from which one can consult. But as each child and every parent is an individual, and each day is new it seems that all parents will need to create his or her own recipe in every moment.

I suppose this is an opportunity for me to become not just a creator, but to become creative. This is a chance to part the waves of questioning in my mind in order to make space for listening to and observing my child; to find that much sought after bottle of Organic Instinct. From there I feel I can begin to understand the “right” thing to do or say. In doing so I am writing my own recipe for helping my son to feel safe, loved and cared for. 🌱

Dad's Corner

Noah Elbers

An unexpected favorite parenting experience of mine is putting children to bed. Who would argue what an exquisite feeling it is to have a relaxed little body nestling up next to you, steady light breath indicating he has slipped off to sleep. Of course this is not how bedtime always goes in mine or anyone's house. It can be a dreadful struggle. About a month ago my one year old and I had a bedtime that for me demonstrates not only the challenge of putting children to bed, but with a liberal use of metaphor, encapsulates one of the central challenges of parenting.

It was one of the rare nights on which I take Asher up to bed. Since I work most nights he is used to the gentle voice and calming

routines of my wife Dove, but on this night she asked if I could step in so she could read to our older daughter. I was happy to try.

It was a bit awkward for Asher and me at first. He was not sure of the way I was going about reading to him and I could tell, which made us both a bit restless. After two short books, we went together to his bed and as he lay down he began to fuss and squirm. I knew that holding him in bed would do no good, so I watched what he did. What he did was to crawl to the door and cry. I picked him up and we sat in the rocking chair again, not reading but just gently rocking while I hummed a lullaby. He continued to be less than impressed. After what seemed a long time to me, he began to settle down, now wet from crying induced perspiration. Since it was warm enough in the room I took off one of his layers of clothes, which he also disliked. Finally he was back in his bed, and beginning to relax. I lay on the floor beside him and listened for his sleep, watched for his closing eyelids. Just as the last of those breaths that come after crying had finished, and he appeared completely asleep, the portable phone in my pocket rang. We both sat bolt upright, Asher began to cry, and I clumsily pulled the phone from my pocket and attempted to turn off the ringer. Minutes more of crying ensued, followed finally by exhaustion and sleep...followed by a second phone call, and a realization that I had not turned off the ringer. AAARRRRRRGGGGGGG! At that moment I was sure either I or the phone was going out the third floor window right next to the bed. Asher recovered quickly from this second intrusion, due either to his utter exhaustion, or sympathy for his now crazed father. It took me hours to fully recover from the frustration.

Literally, this moment is but one of many small missteps among countless others and surely more to follow, but as a metaphor I think it illuminates something that all parents face; we live in an imperfect world. While this is not unique to our time, it is a rare person these days that does not feel as though unwanted intrusions of some kind or another happen on a regular basis whether it is on a screen, from another person, or just a billboard along the road. One of our greatest challenges as parents is determining when we merely act as a filter for our children when the inevitable intrusion occurs, and when something more like an impenetrable shield is more appropriate.

I don't think I'm alone when my urge is to bravely shield my children from anything and everything that is not to my liking. When I stand back and ask myself, however, if the goal of parenting is to raise children in isolation from the sometimes scary but always exciting world around us, I have to admit that such a childhood would just plain miss out on too much. How are we to determine which experiences really matter? Is it possible to share our hope and open armed enthusiasm for the world without embracing things we utterly disagree with?

I'm more of a questioning person than an answering one, and regardless, each family must find their own way, but with just a short eight years as a parent behind me I can see there will be no simple or single answer for any of us. 🌱

Finding Goodness

Susan Weber

Every child is born with a single vision: I am happy to be born, I yearn to find out what the world is all about, and I want to find a place for myself within it.

And yet, not every child is born ready to explore, ready to experience all the life around her or him. For some children, reaching this point in their lives takes a good bit of time. Meanwhile, we as the adults in their lives, stand there beside them. We lead them out into our world, we walk alongside. We have seen much, experienced much—and it is an amalgam of joy, of pain, suffering, discovery, celebration, disappointment—and fear, questioning. All have come to us by the time we reach parenthood. As adults, we have tremendous freedom to explore these feelings, to reflect upon our own experiences.

But for the child just beginning life, there is one single mantra that needs to guide those early steps and years: *the world is good*. No other belief will carry him forward through the tumbles and stumbles, through the mysteries of his encounters, with confidence and eagerness, without which children shrink back into themselves, lose the shine in their eyes, forgo the impulse to experiment, to see things as the adults around them never have, to imagine new solutions to the simplest experiments—piling blocks, washing a dish, dressing themselves upside down. *The world is good*—and therefore I will enter into it, explore it, wonder, stop and look, touch, encounter, meet what comes to me with confidence and interest.

If we as adults listen to the outer world as it often presents itself, how do we then find our own paths to believing in the goodness of the world? It is of utmost significance that we strive toward this belief, for our children look to us for signals, for pictures of where to begin seeking their places in the world. They imitate our deepest inmost feelings and beliefs. Take a walk, find your way into nature, and hold deep in your memory the most recent good thing you have encountered. Begin and end your day with gratitude for the good in your life—however it may feel at moments. Pick a tiny bouquet of wildflowers or seasonal things from the nature just outside our doors—the wonder of one acorn, one brightly polished apple—these things can remind us of the wonder of the universe. Find a poem, even if you have never thought of poetry as your interest—just a few lines—copy it onto a piece of paper and put it on your refrigerator. Recall a human relationship that has helped you along your way. And see if, step by tiny step, you can rediscover, in difficult times, that the world truly *is* good. 🌱

