

Sophia's Hearth Family Center Web Site

We invite you to sign up for our email and postal mailing list,
to receive updates about coming events and articles of interest.
Visits www.sophiashearth.org

Summer 2008 July 7–25 Professional Development Offerings

“The Child and Family in the First Three Years”

Planning for summer 2008 is underway for all our professional development courses. July 2008 begins a new cycle of our 13-month part-time training course for early childhood teachers, parent-toddlers and parent-infant group leaders, childcare providers, parents and expectant parents, and others interested in this period of life. Auditors are warmly invited to join.

SUMMER 2008

WEEK 1 AND 2 “NURTURING THE YOUNG CHILD FROM BIRTH TO THREE”

with program co-directors Jane Swain and Susan Weber. This is a two-week course. Students may enroll for one week only.

WEEK 2 course with Helle Heckmann.

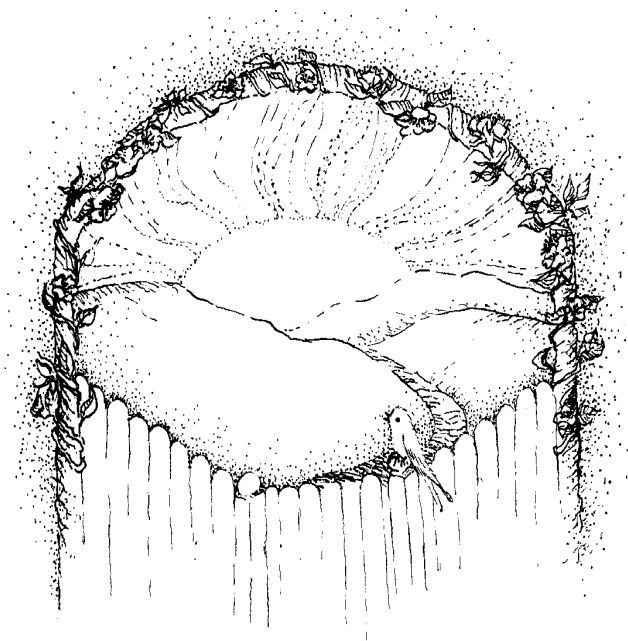
WEEK 3 “ADVANCED INSIGHTS IN WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN: AN EXPERIENTIAL COURSE”

with Ute Strub from the Pikler Institute in Berlin, Germany

Full descriptions of all courses will be posted on the website as soon as available. Print brochures will be available in early 2008.



Join us in beautiful southern New Hampshire, land of lakes and mountains, as part of a joyous learning community that will inspire and transform your work! More details on our website, or call us to register at 603-357-3755.



the Garden Gate

FALL 2007

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 1

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, beginning with conception. 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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Professional Development Offerings

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A letter from Susan Weber

November 2007

Dear Friends,

 It is always a special moment to gather together the materials for a new issue of *the Garden Gate*, for it is a time to reflect on the work of Sophia's Hearth Family Center—the many conversations, sharing of experiences and activity that have taken place over the past year.

The gift of reflection in this instance has brought to mind the depth of human encounter: the many steps each student, each parent, each staff member takes in gaining new insights, hatching new activity, overcoming obstacles and impediments in our personal journeys. As I revisit the research projects of our training course students¹, the depth of their experiences reminds me of the ripples in a pond from the dropping of a stone, which are streaming, radiating out through their work.

The times ask for courage, for clarity of thinking, for changing our ways, and for focusing upon that which is most important. It is all too easy to become distracted from the needs of very young children—Sophia's Hearth's mission—amidst the many needs around us. But it is our devotion to them that brings the possibility for the future we all imagine.

A look into the future brings an announcement that we will soon be able to share occasional electronic newsletters with you, and we invite you to send us your email address if you would like to be included to receive news of

- Coming events
- Articles of interest
- Updates on activity at Sophia's Hearth Family Center

Organizationally, we stand at a tremendous crossroads. Our new facility is eager to be built so that we can take children into daily care while their parents are at work. Along with direct care will come an urgently needed *model* of high quality care, together with training, that will illustrate possibilities for the desperately needed changes in childcare in the United States. The time is **now** to share what we have learned and developed over nearly ten years.

And so, as you read through this issue, I believe that you will see how prominent the human encounter has been for our students in their various life roles. Perhaps a spark will be lit for bringing to all of us more focus on meeting one another. We deeply hope so!

Susan Weber, Executive Director

¹For those of you new to our work, you will read projects that are the fruition of a semester long study and research. This work arises out of participation in "The Child in the First Three Years", our part-time 13 month training program for early childhood professionals, parents, and others interested in deepening their understanding of this period of human life. Our website offers a full description of the program; *the Garden Gate* shares one aspect of the students' work.

The Modern Baby Shower

Kristin Fiegl graduated from our training course in July. During the course of her studies, she birthed a new baby and moved her family's home. She and her husband Jay live in New York state with their two children. Each summer during her studies, the family came to Keene together and Jay cared for the children while Kristin joined her classmates.

My beloved mother-in-law loved hosting parties. After managing to avoid both an engagement party and a bridal shower, I reluctantly consented to a baby shower, under the condition that my husband be present, particularly during the gift-opening stage. Being a party lover like his mom, Jay agreed. We decided to have a “Jack and Jill” shower, with both men and women present.

My vision of all of us gathering together for some food and casual conversation didn't quite manifest itself in the way I had imagined. A few hours before the shower, my father-in-law started carrying platters of food downstairs to the garage. Once the transfer was complete, he disappeared, greeting everyone as they pulled into the driveway. Most of the men never made it inside. Instead, they spent the afternoon deep-frying a turkey and drinking beer. The one exception was my husband's best friend's father who had managed to curl his long legs in the corner chair next to Jay and somehow got stuck there for the gift opening. My husband seemed to enjoy himself. I recently found a picture of that day to prove it. He's sitting on the couch, opening gifts with the delight of a child on Christmas morning. Next to him is a woman, rather full in the face and clearly in the late stages of pregnancy. She is wearing a gigantic lopsided corsage, a stained magenta maternity shirt, and a forced smile. The woman is me.

I think it was this failed attempt at a co-ed shower that made me decide to stick with all-women showers for a time. Soon after the birth of my first child, I discovered Blessingways. While these can be attended by both men and women and even entire families, the ones I've been invited to or hosted have been for women only. Blessingways come from the Navajo tradition. Often described as “a mother-centered baby shower”, they are meant to bless the woman's path into motherhood. They tend to focus more on the spiritual and emotional aspects of pregnancy, although some Blessingways feature “gifts of the heart” such as handmade, found, or hand-me-down objects, and some even include the more traditional baby shower gifts, particularly for a first birth.

There is something about calling it a “Blessingway” that changes the men's perspective on these events. Instead of avoiding the gathering, the men seem drawn to it. At a friend's Blessingway recently, it took us a while to herd the men out the door. Later, one of the women said: “My husband was wondering what happens at Blessingways. He asked if we would be naked and chanting.” In reality, our Blessingway was not quite so mysterious. We gathered in a circle and lit a candle, taking a few moments to set the mood with a welcoming and an opening verse. Each of us presented the mother-to-be, Emily, with a bead for her birthing necklace, which would be a reminder of our love and support during labor. We put our hopes and wishes into a group art project for the baby as we painted a tapestry together. We also gave Emily the opportunity to express her fears and concerns in a safe place. And of course, we shared food, laughter, and lots of memories.



I was at a very different shower this weekend. It was a very lovely “ladies-who-lunch” sort of event, the type where the hostess called those of us who are moms of little ones a few days before and asked politely if we wouldn’t mind leaving the children at home. Truthfully, I wasn’t sure how I felt about this. I wasn’t planning on bringing my children anyway, but I was a little surprised since I tend to associate babies with baby showers. I did appreciate the hostess being open about her request—and when I got to there I understood why she had called us. My friend and I ran to the door in a deluge of rain, each of us bearing a case of Seventh Generation diapers, which I had hastily wrapped in butcher paper with the assistance of my four-year-old. I stumbled through the doorway, barely acknowledging the hostess and guest of honor and barreling through two rooms in my haste to get my package to the gift pile. As the weight slid from my hands onto the beautifully-wrapped boxes and shiny gifts bags, I noticed the white carpet. Everywhere. I nervously looked down at my shoes—a pair of casual flats—muddy. I parted with them in the mudroom and walked around barefoot for the rest of the party, while women in heels and swishy skirts moved past me.

The dining room table was laden with stacks of delicate china and platters of tea sandwiches and canapés. A number of us commented on the white linen napkins, lying in a neat pile like freshly washed pre-fold diapers. When one of the guests complimented our hostess on her creativity, it soon transpired that the resemblance was not intentional. Some of the events’ formality fell away though, as it generally does when a group of women comes together, once we gathered together for the gift-unwrapping. There was the passing down of baby care wisdom from one generation to the next. There was the informational update from the younger set. (For those of you who haven’t heard, it’s now known as “toilet learning”, not “potty training.”) There was the stuff of legends. (Both baby cries and adult conversations can apparently be transmitted over neighbors’ monitors set to the same frequency.) Our mom-to-be was both entertaining and endearing, and as she modeled her new burp cloths—which were, in fact, pre-fold diapers with designer embellishments—we all agreed they would make beautiful kitchen towels.

Like birth, baby showers never quite turn out as planned, and like parenting, there is no one formula that works for everyone. Sometimes they are a little cluttered by materialism. Sometimes you make dutiful small talk. Sometimes you ruin someone’s white carpet and can only be grateful you didn’t break the china too. But when you get down to what’s underneath it all, baby showers, Blessingways, whatever we might call them, are about

hope, expectation, and celebration. And they are ways for us to connect with and support families-- moms, dads, and the new babies making their way to us—at a time when this is sorely lacking. We may offer and accept this support a little clumsily, but it’s nice that it’s there all the same.

Last month, on the day before our friend Kristin’s baby was due, a small group of us planned to meet for a quiet dinner. Kristin, in her resourceful way, had managed to assemble most of the essential baby items and had requested only a small and quiet gathering of women to send her off on the path to motherhood. That morning, she called and calmly shared the news that she wouldn’t be at the dinner since she was in labor. We decided to gather without her, and were so glad we did. It was a circle of four around the table that night—Cena and I, who had been through the birth experience twice and found each birth both familiar and unique, Emily who had been through it so recently that the memory of her son’s birth was foremost in her mind, and Erin, who was looking ahead to her first birth just weeks away. With a mix of laughter, wondering, and well-wishes, we gathered for Kristin and Mark and the baby and held them in our thoughts and hearts. Baby Jane made her entrance soon after our dinner, bringing hope and building community, born into the world on a path of celebration. 🌱



Parent Education through Imitation

A graduate of our 2007 training course group, Nancy Richard lives and teaches near Ottawa, Canada. She is the mother of two young children, and worked formerly in financial services. She leads parent-child groups at the Parsifal Waldorf School in Ottawa, Canada. She was deeply interested to find her path as a playgroup leader in a way that would be respectful to everyone. As an observer, she learned much about herself and the group. What follows is the text of her project for the course.

Introduction

Wonderful families come to gather at our Waldorf School every Monday and Friday morning for the Parent and Child group that I teach. This year was my first year as a teacher by myself in the program and I was considering the following question: "What is the best way to share with parents the insights that I have gained on the development of the young child in both my formal training and my practical experience?"

I was aware of different ways that one could go about sharing with parents including providing written information to parents on specific topics, engaging in discussion about different topics during the Parent and Child class and speaking to the group in a parent evening forum. However, anthroposophical doctor Michaela Glöckler's comments at the 2006 WECAN (Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America) conference kept resonating with me. When asked by one of the participants at the conference how to "slow down" parents, Dr. Glöckler responded (quoting my notes from the conference): "We need to give an example. We need to be spiritually present. You live in this time and you have the time." She proceeded by saying: "PLEASE DON'T TEACH ADULTS. They will most appreciate a role model. Imitating. Why is this, is a questions that can be raised."

This topic became the guiding thread for my journey in this research project. I wanted to discover if Dr. Glöckler's statements would hold true in my classroom. Could families learn from my program if I provided them with a role model to imitate, rather than engaging them directly in a discussion about these topics?

Method of Investigation

With the intention of collecting information to answer this question, I kept an attentive ear and eye to observe any comments made by my families on their journey in the program. I specifically did not question any of them about any changes that they had brought about in their daily lives as a result of our program, but I was patient and I continuously observed.



Data

1. Sense of Touch

I remember vividly my experience at Sophia's Hearth Family Center in the summer of 2006 with the experiential work on the nurturing of the "I-thou" meeting in a care-giving situation. The care that I received while I had my hands washed and massaged was so powerful that I felt very strongly that I had to share this experience with my families. I decided that I wanted to provide a good role model for the care of the sense of touch: What better way than to wash the child's hands and face after our communal snack?

Way of proceeding

As described above, my goal was to focus on the child's sense of touch. When I could see that the children had almost finished their snack, I would arrange lukewarm water in a large glass bowl. I added Dr. Bronner's magic lavender soap to the warm water. As the children finished eating their snack, I would invite them to come to me to have their hands washed (I was seated on a child's size chair at the table). I had a big basket with lovely plush white face cloths from which they could choose. They gave me their chosen face cloth and I would then wet it in the large bowl of water. I was very conscious to not let anything distract me from the children and our moment together. I would lay the cloth on my hands and say, "Let's wash your hands." The child then usually set his hands on my cloth and I proceeded, always maintaining eye contact with the child. After washing the hands, I would say "I see some porridge around your mouth, can I wipe it off?" Once we were finished, I would thank the child and proceed slowly to assist the next child. All of this was done while the parents and other children were at the table finishing their snack.

Dr Emmi Pikler was very much an inspiration to my way of proceeding, when she wrote:

How different it can be, what a different picture of the world an infant receives when quiet, patient, careful yet secure and resolute hands take care of her—and how different the world seems when these hands are impatient, rough or hasty, unquiet and nervous. In the beginning hands are everything to the infant. Many mothers believe that they are caring best when they do everything as fast as possible: “One, two, three and done!” That’s not the way to be. Whenever we are doing something with a child, we should never be in a hurry. Even in the speed of our motions we should adjust to the child, who prefers it when we are calm and take time with him.²

Observations—Children

In the first week of the program, all of the children showed some uneasiness with the process. I could empathize with their feelings and did not have great expectations for their participation. But as the session evolved, I quickly noticed that the children were fully engaged and thoroughly showing great enjoyment, in the process. The young child could sense that my outmost desire was to imbue them with the feeling that the world is good. A deeper connection was established between the young child and me.

As the Parent and Child program progressed, I observed that the children had greater and greater comfort with the washing routine, and actually began to look forward to our special time together. Also, it gave me a better sense of their health, temperature of hands, and presence of eczema. The children were usually very keen at communicating how they enjoyed the snack. At the start of my process, some parents would actually come with their child and mention that their child did not like to get his or her face washed. However, very quickly their children would allow me to wash their face. The children showed no resistance and gave me permission to wash them by not moving as I proceeded ever so gently. Some would also stick out their tongue to further experience the tactile sensation and showed the desire to continue to have their faces further washed, but with nothing left to be cleaned. Out of my two Parent and Child programs, I only encountered one child who did not want me to wash his hands. Perhaps this was due to the fact that he did not speak English (German was his only way of communicating verbally).

Observations—Parents

The parents did notice that their children were getting their hands and faces without any discomfort and grimaces. They saw that their children had become active participants in the process, beginning with the choice of their very own face cloth. The parents could observe these developments, but it took a while

before I received any feedback from them. This exercise provided a great example of imitation. One child came to like it so much that she would stop her snack and come to get her hands washed. I mentioned to her that she could continue eating and that I would be there for her when she was done.

Various parents shared their experiences with me, as illustrated by the following:

- I heard many comments from parents similar to the following: “My daughter never lets me do that at home. So, I have started to say to my child that I am going to wash your face just like your teacher does.”
- A mother commented that her 20 month-old daughter actually told her that she should wash her face like Madame Nancy [Nancy is French Canadian – ed.] does. The mother mentioned that she now makes a conscious effort to slow down when she washes her daughter’s face and take this special care time slowly and with great intentions.
- A father shared with me that my work was changing their lives at home.

As these parents spoke openly about their discoveries and experiences, I observed that the parents were getting to have a better understanding of the sense of touch and sharing that new insight with their little ones.

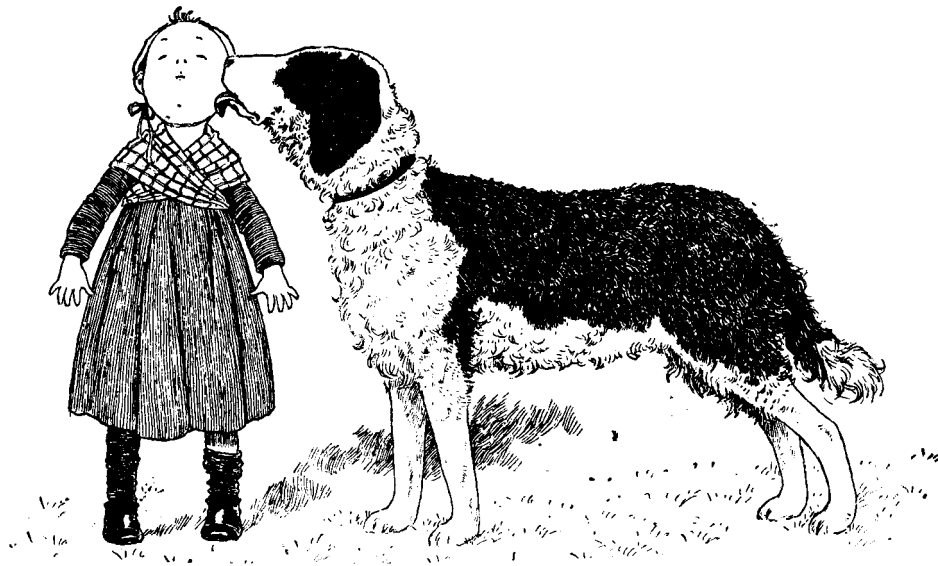
2. Snack Preparation

As my Parent and Child programs progressed, I noticed that the parents were asking many questions about our daily snack. I had put much thought into the food that I was going to serve as a snack, but I had decided to serve simple foods. Therefore, I was very astonished when the parents began to ask questions about what I was serving! The families wanted to learn how to make applesauce, porridge and bread. Unbeknownst to me, I was providing another role model that I had never thought could be so powerful.

Way of proceeding

In order to respect the rhythm and the young child’s need for a routine, I decided that I would serve the same snack for the entire eight-week session of the Parent and Child program. For the Fall session, the snack was bread with butter and applesauce. When children arrived at the beginning of each session, the apple mill was set up and I would work at peeling the apples with an apple peeler. Once peeled, the apples were cooked, creating a pleasant aroma for everyone in the classroom. After the apples were cooked, I prepared the applesauce with the food mill. All of these steps occurred while the children were playing and the parents were engaged in their manual work. As the weeks progressed, I encouraged the parents to take over some of these tasks.

² Sensory Awareness Foundation Bulletin Number 14, winter 1994, page 21.



In the Winter program, I served oat porridge with maple syrup and bananas as a snack. This was a very special process, as we would roll the oats from oat groats and then cook the oats during the session.

Observations—Children

It was clear to me that the children and their parents had discovered that the snacks prepared were wonderful and nutritious food and that they enjoyed very much. The children were engaged in the preparation of the snack: they participated in preparing the ingredients, and they touched, smelled and explored this new food both before and after it was cooked. Over both my Fall and Winter sessions, I did not experience any children refusing the snack. All children showed great delight and ate what was served. There were very few leftovers, if any. One child even started to say to his dad that he was going to the “porridge” (i.e. the Parent and Child) class!, reminding his parents how this simple food was so important to him.

Observations—Parents

Parents frequently commented on the taste of our applesauce and porridge, indicating that they had never tasted so good. The parents began to report to me that their children were eating porridge at home, even though some had never wanted to eat it previously. Some parents indicated that they had never thought of serving porridge to their children. However, to my great astonishment, the parents actually had a great interest in learning how to make this great applesauce. All parents at one time or another came to ask me how to make the applesauce! They did not know how to make it. This came as a great surprise to me. Although I had not previously considered this, through these experiences I learned that the snack preparation provided another great opportunity to serve as a role model to parents.

Conclusions

The parents in my classes were keen observers for the purpose of learning how to care for their young child. The process of observation allowed them to gather all the information necessary for them to successfully imitate my actions once they were in their homes. Through my experiences in my Parent and Child sessions, I have confirmed that Dr. Glöckler has provided us with very powerful insights. Indeed, providing a role model in our Parent and Child programs is a valuable means of educating parents.

As Henning Köhler mentions in his book, *Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children*:

In my consultations, I am consistently impressed with how important it is to give useful advice to parents in the form of mostly practical, regularly repeated acts and exercises, based on anthropological findings. This creates the transparency needed, so that what has to be done at home is carried out with insight. That takes time, consciousness, and effort for all concerned. But it is worth it, as we see by the fact that the better these practices and exercises are understood, the more disciplined will be the manner of their being carried out.³

Furthermore, this enables the teacher to deepen their connection and build a trusting relationship between teacher and parent, teacher and child and ultimately parent and child. We need to continue our work and continually find the opportunities to provide our families with positive role models for caring for the young child. What a wonderful opportunity to be able to work with both the parents and the children, before they enter the “Early childhood programs of our school”. Our opportunities to educate will never be as powerful; the situations to be a role

³ *Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children*, page 50.

model will no longer be as available to the parents. Based on my experiences described above, I believe that Dr. Glöckler's statements about imitation as a means to educate parents are true. Imitation did provide the parents with a clear example of how to care and feed their young child. I certainly feel blessed by this insight and how helpful it will be in guiding me in the education of the parent with the young child in the future. I also think that the ability to act as a role model to these parents may be especially important in this day and age. For example, I noted that 70 percent of the parents from my Parent and Child programs are living in communities where they are isolated from relatives. It is becoming increasingly common that families have little or no contact between generations. As a result, modern day parents are often left to decipher how to raise their children with the help of books and television talk-shows, rather than relying on the assistance of their parents and grandparents. Perhaps this is yet another reason why the Parent and Child program can play such an important role in the lives of these parents. As Henning Köhler mentioned: "A skin which is shining clean in every pore is by no means a well-developed touch-sense."⁴ 🌱

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⁴ *Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children*, page 50.



What are we doing here (at Sophia's Hearth Family Center)? *Thoughts from a board member...*

Margaret Ris is the board of director's co-president. She lives in Boston, where she volunteers with the Jewish Family & Children Services' program for mothers at home with their young children, and also volunteers with Horizons for Homeless Children in Boston.

The other day I met up with a mother of three children whom I hadn't seen in a few years. She and each of her three children had attended a parent-child program I had co-taught for several years. They were precious years to me and, as I found out in our conversation, to her as well.

She shared something with me that clarified the whole purpose, the whole mission, the whole raison d'être for our family and parenting programs at Sophia's Hearth Family Center.

She said "You know, Margaret, I got the whole foundation for my parenting from what you shared with us in those first few years."

I was honored and gratified to hear her words, but most of all as it shone a light on our mission at Sophia's Hearth.

We recognize and honor those precious, formative years when a parent is just setting out on the path of parenting, sometimes feeling unsure and on new ground. We recognize her need for companionship and support and we provide a place where she can learn by exploring, by being gently exposed to new ideas. We gently show ways of speaking and relating to young children and how to structure daily rhythms. We do it in the context of other parents and children, by creating an atmosphere of warmth and trust.

We give parents the time and space, the information and encouragement to find their way and to fashion a foundation for their parenting. As the branch is bent, the tree will grow. We recognize the parent as gardener, and offer tools and knowledge to fashion a garden in the family.

Creating Quality and Meaning in One's Daily Life as a Parent

Fern Dorresteyn lives in Temple, NH with her son Laurian, husband Michael, and new baby Seriena Rose who was born late this summer.

My intention in this research project is to explore simple activities that deepen the relationship between parents and children and bring moments of inner nourishment, peace and joy to their daily lives. In order to explore this question I drew on the insights of Emmi Pikler, RIE™ (Resources for Infant Educators) and Waldorf education and designed an evening washing activity and a morning creative activity that I engaged in with my two year old son over a period of one month.

The washing activity consisted of creating a calm, candle-lit environment in which I sang songs, washed my son and allowed

him some quiet play, all centered around a ceramic washing basin. The morning activity took place for one hour on weekday mornings, and included a day each for painting, outside play, craft activity, music and household chores, and baking.

The original impulse for this research project came out of a feeling of dissatisfaction I had in my life as a parent. I felt that I was not finding the kind of quality time I wanted to have with my son, nor was I feeling nourished on a deeper level in the realm of my inner and creative life. I wanted to bring a spiritual stream of energy into our daily lives together. I was also feeling very inspired in my studies at Sophia's Hearth and was asking the question "how can parents, including myself, integrate these beautiful teachings into our lives?"

Preparation and Resources

I learned about Pikler's work through classes I had taken which included lectures, writings and videos. Pikler discovered through her work with orphans that you can give a child a very fulfilling experience of relationship within a small amount of time if you have a high quality of presence and attention. You use gentle speech and touch as a soothing and healing embrace around the child, and offer a high level of respect that helps them to have self respect and healthy relationships with others. I also applied her prescription to simply observe and learn about children, rather than over-controlling them, giving them space to explore and grow.

In the stream of Waldorf education I read numerous books and consulted persons working in the field of Waldorf education to research the elements of rhythm, bedtime ritual, bathing, and how to share artistic activities and daily household tasks with young children.

I also drew on my own training in mindfulness meditation and wrote several verses and songs that I included in our activities.

I used Torin Finser's book *Research* as a guide for my research method. I carefully observed and noted Laurian's and my experiences, both during the activities and in our overall life, and also asked my husband what he observed, to learn if the activity I designed was helpful in fulfilling the goals of this project.

Evening Washing: procedure, experiences, observations and reflections:

Outline of evening washing activity:

- Prepare room with candlelight
- Invite Laurian in, sing water song and pour water over his hands
- Laurian's free water play
- Wash with a washcloth and song
- Closing verse

Detailed description of evening washing activity:

I prepared the bathroom with a children's size table covered with a cloth. On the table I placed a ceramic basin, a glass pitcher, a few small crystal stones and a bottle of relaxing essential oil. Before I invited Laurian into the room, I lit candles and filled the pitcher with water. Then Laurian came in and I sang a soothing song I

wrote about water as I filled the basin slowly from the pitcher and poured water over Laurian's hands. Then I dropped the fragrant oil in the water and stirred it in a lemniscate, making a gentle and pretty pattern in the water. I sat beside Laurian and observed him as he enjoyed playing in the water with the crystals, pouring water like a little waterfall, examining water drops and the crystals as they shone in the candle light. In fact he named the entire ritual crystal bathing. We ended by putting the stones to soak for the night in a glass cup. Then I would undress Laurian and using a washcloth I would sing "this is the way we wash our... face, cheeks, eyes, hands and feet". Then we would get his jammies on and recite our closing verse.

Experiences, Observations and Reflections:

I intended to create the spiritual atmosphere that I was looking for first through the quality of mood set with the candle light, the beautiful presentation and my own quiet and reverential orientation. Then I used several songs and a verse. I have found that special songs and verses that I can say with meaning helped us to be in touch with an awareness of the sacred. Here is the song I wrote about water:

*Water, sweet water, peaceful flowing life
Water, sweet water, bringing joy and light.
Trickles down a mountain stream,
Making trees and rocks so clean,
Washes hands that may feel weary,
Making all feel bright and cheery.
Water, sweet water, bringing joy and light.*

After Laurian was washed and dressed we would conclude with the verse "here I stand clean and bright, here I stand child of light." Then Laurian would look into my eyes and smile a very sweet uplifted smile, and would seem to brighten inside. When I recited this verse I always pictured Laurian as a child of light. I found it was meaningful for me to picture Laurian in this way every day.

While bathing Laurian I had my husband turn off all the lights in the house except for a candle and we would go straight from our activity to saying goodnight and going to bed. All of these elements, in particular I think the quality of authentic calm, presence and respect within me, made this a very special and peaceful end to our day.

Prior to doing the evening washing bed time was marked with resistance and demands for more and more stories. With our new routine we were able to go straight to bed without any fuss and I found he began sleeping better through the night.

Much of the inner content for this activity was created by applying the teachings of Pikler. It took some real concentration to hold back my habitual responses to Laurian. For example, as I went to wash him I realized I was used to moving him about and washing him without consulting him. It was a very different experience to tell him what I was going to do and not to rush him through the experience, to wait for his readiness, and to use very gentle touch.

While Laurian was having a few minutes to play in the water I would sit back and be peacefully present with him. I practiced not projecting what I think I already know about him, rather I opened myself to observe him with new eyes. I was surprised to find that I did experience him in a new way, and that this opened my heart to a new depth of appreciation, compassion and respect for him.

When I had studied Pikler's practices several months before I wholeheartedly agreed with them, but had not managed to integrate them into my real interactions with Laurian. That changed when I started to have this set time every day during which I was practicing them.

On a whole I found that these practices had a profound effect on Laurian and me. My husband noticed rather quickly that it brought a new sense of stability and calm to our daily life. Laurian seemed happier and more secure. I attribute this both to the new quality and depth of relationship between us and also to the sense of predictability and experience of peace we all came to at the end of our day.

Morning Activity: procedure, experiences, observations and reflections

Outline of Morning Activity:

The second part of my research involved spending one hour each weekday morning with Laurian. Inwardly I practiced the same principles as with the bathing. Outwardly I chose to do a different activity each weekday, according to the chart below:

<u>MONDAY</u>	<u>TUESDAY</u>	<u>WEDNESDAY</u>	<u>THURSDAY</u>	<u>FRIDAY</u>
Painting	Nature	Wool Felting/	Music and	Baking
	Appreciation and	Craft	House Chores	
	Outdoor Play			

This brought into our daily routine the kind of activities that would nourish my joy and creative side, as well as Laurian's. These kinds of activities never seemed to make it into my life that was driven by practicalities.

In this part of my project it took me longer to get all the detailed information I was looking for, so many aspects of the project evolved during the month. For example, I was interested in designing these activities in relationship to the daily qualities as used in early Waldorf Education. However, I was unable to find such information until many weeks into the project. So instead I set them up according to Laurian's and my inspirations and rhythm. Later when I spoke with Susan Weber about this she enthusiastically encouraged me to enjoy creating rhythm that really worked for us.

Both my reading and speaking with Susan Weber emphasized the importance of simple household chores at this age. Thus I dropped one of my "creative activities" and began to enjoy the same spirit of inner practice while doing chores, and found it was just as meaningful for us. The schedule of a 9:30 am activity every day also created a rhythm of doing household chores before the activity and the same spirit found in the activity naturally spread to our chore time.

Experiences, Observations and Reflections:

During the first two sessions of watercolor painting we used numerous colors. After interviewing Katherine Young, an experienced Waldorf craft teacher, I learned it is better to introduce fewer colors at a time and to really allow the child to live deeply into the experience of each color. I decided to use only one color each session, and to practice myself to live into the quality of the color. This drastically changed our painting time, making a much richer experience for both of us. I could see Laurian calm down, concentrate and simply enjoy giving life to the color as he danced it around the paper

As with the washing experience, I found that initially I easily forgot to practice inwardly. Using Pikler's methods during the morning activity is what gave quality to the experience. I applied the teachings inwardly in the following way: First I needed to remember my intention. Then I would release all other agenda, bring my energy down from my head and ground myself in my body and in the present moment. I would allow myself to relax, letting go of expectations and tensions. Contentment would then begin to seep into me. I would begin to slow down my speech and move consciously, naturally bringing a feeling of grace and harmony to my movements. Then I would turn my attention to Laurian, truly meeting him as we spoke, quietly observing him. Sometime there would be moments when I would start to react with agitation, rooted in my habitual idea of perfection or outcome of the activity. Then I would remember the real purpose of our time together and practice to address the situation with calm and lightness.

The effect this activity had on our life was larger than I had expected. It continued to strengthen my relationship with Laurian and began our days with peace, harmony and joy. It inspired me to stop and reflect on how I was living the rest of the day as well. How was I listening to Laurian? What kind of presence did I have as I went about my daily activity?

Taking this time to do creative activities fulfilled a need in me to be artistic, bringing me so much joy and a feeling of contentment to my life as a whole. Laurian also really loved this addition to our daily life. He began to ask me each morning "What we doin' today? Paintin'? Makin' wool?"

Additional Observations and Thoughts:

In my research I found a lot of information about the importance of rhythm in the daily life of the child, and once I began to form this rhythm for our family I found this to be very true. Now, several months after completing the project I continue to use the morning activity schedule, and continue to experience the same results. When we do happen to go off schedule for some reason I definitely see the sense of peace and harmony in our daily life disintegrate, and Laurian becomes more agitated and dispersed.

I also found it is essential for me to continue to be diligent with the inner quality of this time; otherwise I begin to slip into old habits. It is a bit like training to run, if you stop exercising you loose your strength and the vibrant health you had enjoyed.

I need to train myself often if I want to keep this kind of peace and meaning in my consciousness.

Interestingly I have found that using the Pikler approach in my interactions with Laurian doesn't take cons to get somewhere. When I relate in this way Laurian is more at ease and in harmony with me, so he doesn't feel easily frustrated and lost in my busy activity, therefore there is less resistance. Whatever we are doing unfolds smoothly, and we both emerge feeling calm and well.

I also found that although I was taking more time out of an already busy day, the day seemed to become much less busy. I feel this is largely due to my own inner change in approach that carried into our daily life. It also gave me the sense that something very important had already been fulfilled, so I felt more relaxed as I approached the rest of the day.

Another area affected by this was weaning Laurian. The process up to this point had been difficult. I was slowly reducing the number times he would nurse each day. During the first month of the evening activity I dropped his nursing down to once a day, and this went very smoothly. About a month later, after I had also begun the morning activity we completely stopped nursing and I was so amazed that there was no crying or difficulty. In fact he only asked one time about it and after he asked he looked at me and laughed and said "nahha" as his own answer to the question. I think that the new feeling of security and connection brought about by these activities helped this transition to be so smooth.

I see, especially now that I am a parent, how important it is for parents to feel nourished in their daily lives, not only for themselves but also for the children. If I have a pattern of feeling restless, dissatisfied, or stressed in my daily life I will transmit that pattern, that orientation towards life to my child. That is why I designed the time to nourish both Laurian and myself. I found that when I was delighted or became peaceful during an activity, he naturally experienced the same.

I think that it is very helpful when sharing teachings, such as Pikler's findings, with parents, to provide experiences where they can witness these practices being modeled. If we can help them

to learn little routines they can integrate into their day that they can intentionally use as training ground as I have done, it will help them to make real changes.

Conclusion

I am very excited about my experience. Having a specific time in which to apply the Pikler's teachings brought them from an intellectual to an experiential level. Each session enabled me to deepen my quality of presence and attention, and explore how to use gentle and respectful speech and touch. This has changed my relationship to my son. It has lessened my tendency to react insensitively to him and has developed a deeper level of appreciation, harmony and rapport between us. In addition to what developed between us, I also witnessed that the regular activity brought stability to my son's emotional life not only during the activity but throughout the day.

This structured, uninterrupted time together has brought much more joy and fulfillment to our daily lives. This is the kind of relationship I had always imagined I would have with my child. I found this has been my happiest time since Laurian was born.

The three most significant elements of this project that I feel other parents can also apply and benefit from are: 1) the concrete method of applying Pikler's discoveries in daily life so as to improve parenting skills and deepen parent/child relationship, 2) emphasizing how it is equally important for both parent and child to create refreshing and meaningful moments in daily life, and 3) how to use rhythm to bring stability and ease to the home life and to assure that the two above mentioned elements are present. 🌀

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"To dream big, start small"