

For the Classroom, Inside and Out

The Wandering Circle

— Rose Maynard

Recently during a workshop at our Gateways conference, I spoke about the elements of the kindergarten day. I suggested that many aspects within the early childhood curriculum are creative opportunities awaiting research and deepening. During this time I highlighted the various musical genres within our pedagogy, which led us eventually to circle. What are the intentions behind circle time? This is when we can consciously plan for specific therapeutic movement and integrate activity supportive of the foundational senses. Movements are placed strategically within imaginative, musical journeys. The pioneering work of Nancy Blanning and Laurie Clark continues to inspire Waldorf early childhood teachers to develop circles addressing the senses of touch, balance, life and self-movement.

A circle with therapeutic activity is worthy of incorporation into weekly if not daily routines. One challenge I have is that often the time designated for circle attracts other activity into its midst, all of it equally rich, but there are weeks when a traditional game or a dramatization of a story is the better fit.

Limited space can pose a challenge. It can be difficult to accommodate expansive movement. Nevertheless, it is important to incorporate movement that supports the foundational senses on a daily basis. After wrestling with planning and the important task of fitting in daily movement tasks, the following question may arise: Where else can I consciously plan for movement involving the whole group?

For me, the answer emerged slowly over a couple of years during the working and reworking of my class's daily walk. Even formulating a walk can be a creative activity. I realized that I could approach our walk as a wandering circle, incorporating activity and song as we journeyed along. Teachers in warmer climates have likely mastered the art of outdoor circles and activity. My challenge, as a Canadian teacher living

near the mountains, has been to embrace my outdoor environment and truly incorporate it into the day throughout the seasons. We are blessed to have grand spaces around the school to run across and hills to roll down. How better to ignite the sense of life than by galloping as fast as we can across the field? Why not embark on daily “puppy rolls” on the big hill by the garden? Is this not ideal for the sense of touch? And where else can twenty-two children comfortably circle round and crawl without bumping? Crawling while wearing winter pants on soft snow is actually more comfortable than the indoor equivalent.

In my mind, our daily walk is now a wandering circle. Songs, games and imaginations permeate this time. Stops along the way inspire new ways to move and may often provide balance challenges. Our wandering circle does not take away from outdoor imaginative play, nor does it replace indoor circle time. I suppose it could be viewed as a lengthy, intention-filled transition, one that I continue to shape, reshape and expand. ♦

Rose Maynard has been involved at the Calgary Waldorf School since 1991. Recently she attained her Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Alaska South East. The Canadian Association for Young Children published a piece of her graduate work entitled, “Computers and Young Children.” Currently she is in her eighth year as a lead kindergarten teacher and continues to build on her love for nature, children and movement.

Resources:

- Blanning, Nancy, and Laurie Clark, *Movement Journeys and Circle Adventures* (2006).