

How to Use this Course

There are two manuals in this course: *The Heart of Learning* and *Learning Processes*. *The Heart of Learning* explains in greater detail why we suggest the processes in this course. We want to help you understand better the needs of your child so that your experience as a parent can be as enjoyable as possible.

It is important that you read the following in *The Heart of Learning* as soon as you receive this course. This will give you the basic understanding necessary to proceed with the course. Read the remainder of *The Heart of Learning* at your leisure, but an understanding of the following sections in *The Heart of Learning* is necessary for a fuller understanding of *Learning Processes*.

“Preface”

“Change and Transformation”

“What is a Child?”

“The Bonding Process”

“Cycles of Unfoldment”

“Shifting the Focus”

“Expansion and Contraction”

Learning Processes contains a description of the many processes that bring fullness and richness to a young child’s life. It is important to read the following before beginning:

“Guidelines for Creative Processes”

“Morning Circle”

“Imitation Activities”

“Creative Play”

“The Bedtime Ritual”

Once you have read these, you are ready to create a daily structure that breathes comfortably with your child’s natural rhythm. The remainder of this introduction describes such a daily structure.

The Structure of a Young Child's Day

The young child needs lots of freedom to explore and express creatively. At the same time, there need to be special moments throughout the day when the parent shifts the focus from expansion to contraction and back again. When a child is contracted or expanded for too long a period of time, he or she becomes restless and irritable. It is very helpful to have a basic outline of a child's day to allow for an easier flow between expansion and contraction. We suggest the following:

- **Breakfast (Expansion):** Have a consistent rising time and breakfast time so your child establishes a rhythm to the day. There will always be exceptions, but generally a child should get up and eat breakfast at about the same time each day.
- **Circle Time (Contraction):** After the child has completed the morning routine of eating and dressing, create a Circle Time to bring about a reverence as well as a bond between parent and child. There is a full description of Circle Time in this manual.
- **Shared Experiences (Alternating Polarities):** After a period of focus, as established during the Circle Time, the child needs to work through his or her will. Will is discussed in *The Heart of Learning* under the section called "Cycles of Unfoldment." This is the perfect time for imitation activities as described in "Imitation Activities" in this manual.
- **Creative Play (Expansion):** Creative play opportunities can finish the morning until it is time to focus again upon lunch. This frees the parent for his or her personal activities.
- **Lunch (Contraction):** Come together with your child to focus on the lunch ritual as described in this manual.

- **Shared Experiences (Alternating Polarities):** After the lunch period is a good time for a special activity. There are many to choose from in this manual. The important consideration is that you share the experience with your child. Remember it does not need to take all afternoon, and you both need time to be separately engaged in your own activities.
- **Creative Play (Expansion):** Creative play activities give both of you some independent time.
- **Evening Meal (Contraction):** Come together for the evening meal ritual.
- **Creative Play (Expansion):** More creative play.
- **Bedtime Ritual (Contraction):** The bedtime ritual is a special time to share with your child. Bedtime should be a set time each day, and your child will look forward to it. Many of the bedtime struggles are eliminated with this ritual. In addition to spending an hour with your child at bedtime, you are giving yourself several personal hours for the rest of the evening. A child who goes off to sleep peacefully does not usually wake up and demand more attention.

Read the remainder of both manuals slowly and thoughtfully so you can digest the material at your own pace. You will probably want to read over the material at least twice if it is new to you.

Chapter 1



Guidelines for Creative Processes

In choosing activities as focal points for the experience of process, it makes a tremendous difference what we choose to focus upon. Parents and children have always done “creative arts” together, and there are countless books available that demonstrate how to do an infinite number of crafts projects. Any of these projects could be used as a focus for a process, but some are more beneficial than others. It is important to know which kinds of activities provide greater opportunities for a deeper experience and which are extremely limited in the opportunities they offer.

Of course, here we are talking about outer activities, which are only part of what goes into a meaningful learning experience. Although it is certainly important that we choose activities that offer greater opportunities for expression, we must never forget that the real key to the success or failure of any such experience between parent and child lies within the parent, and not within the project.

If the parent is truly capable of entering into a process with his or her child, any activity will do, including the most mundane, for it is the amount of loving awareness flowing through the parent and child which determines the depth they will experience, and not the specific activity they engage in. Each of us sometimes struggles with pouring ourselves wholeheartedly into activities with our children, and we are not always filled with love or awareness. Therefore, we must consider what kinds of activities are more helpful than others. Certain kinds of activities actually have the ability to draw parents and children into a deeper experience, even when they’re not feeling up to it, while other activities, by their very nature, seem to thwart the very possibility of deeper

experience. There are several components which are common to activities that provide opportunities for deeper expression. Some activities have all of these elements, while others have only one or two. Having more of these components does not necessarily make it a better activity than those with fewer of them, but for an activity to offer real opportunities for deeper expression, it must have at least one of these elements present:

• *The Activity Is Rhythmical*

This must be understood in a broad sense, and does not mean the activity must include drums beating in the background, or only involve singing and dancing. Rhythm has to do with the repetition of a particular motion numerous times, eventually resulting in a finished activity. This includes such activities as knitting, sewing, weaving, singing, dancing, swinging and running. The repetition of a particular action creates an opportunity for focus not available in other, more erratic activities. It offers the mind and body an activity which is steady, consistent, and non-threatening (because it is familiar), and this permits them to become still. This allows the heart, which is the gateway to the experience of process, to open. In activities that are not rhythmical, the mind is faced with having to constantly make a new decision, and this keeps the attention focused in the analytical mind, rather than freeing it to become poised and still.

• *The Activity Is Creative*

This includes such activities as clay modeling, painting and drawing, building with blocks, and playing with sand or water. In these activities, there is a flexible medium present which allows the child to give form to an inner impulse. Such an activity widens and strengthens the channel between the child’s inner nature and his or her physical expression. This enables the child to more fully express his or her innate abilities through the physical manipulation of materials.

It is important to mention the significance of the particular medium which is used in the creative process, for this influences the nature of the experience. As we mentioned before, if the parent is capable of entering fully into the experience of the process, any medium can be used. However, since we are

all limited in this respect, it is helpful to use a medium which tends to encourage, rather than discourage, a deeper experience. Generally, media which are softer and more receptive (poetically speaking) tend to be more conducive to a deeper experience than those that are harsh and brittle. Usually, this corresponds to natural instead of artificial materials. For example, if you are doing a modeling project, clay or homemade bread dough would be better than commercial Play-doh. If you are drawing, crayons generally are more flexible than magic markers. Natural colors are more conducive to a deeper expression than “day-glo” colors, and wood is more “alive” than plastic.

- ***The Activity Embodies Archetypes***

The concept of archetypes was originally formulated by Plato, and basically suggests that all physical forms and activities are actually reflections of deeper realities (which Plato called archetypes), in much the same way as the image we see in a mirror is not the reality itself, but a reflection of that reality. By observing the events that occur in the world from this perspective, we can begin to understand and experience the deeper realities that lie behind these forms. We will go into greater depth about the concept of archetypes in the section on storytelling, so if you wish to read more about them now, turn to that section.

These are the three important elements of a creative process. If a process contains these components there is a very good chance the activity will be both beneficial and enjoyable for the parent and the child. Even with the very best activity, the most important aspect of any process is the amount of focused responsiveness which exists between the parent and the child, because this is what creates a sensitive relationship and opens the door for deeper communication.

Chapter 17

Socialization

One of the most common concerns of parents is socialization - the process by which children learn the social skills of interacting with others. The process itself is very simple, and children have been doing it quite capably for centuries - but in our present culture, parents have been led to believe that socialization is something that requires expert guidance and specially arranged situations.

It is helpful to recognize that there are two kinds of socialization, positive and negative, and that each type is the natural outcome of a particular approach to the socialization process. Positive socialization occurs when the child develops patterns of social behavior which are beneficial to himself and to others. Negative socialization occurs when a child develops patterns which are destructive to himself or to others.

Positive socialization starts in the home, where the parents provide opportunities for the child to share in the life of the family, and to interact with the parents sensitively and meaningfully. For example, a mother may have her child “help” her around the house, doing simple things that have real meaning. When the mother is sorting laundry, she may ask the child to help her separate all the socks into one pile. Or, when the father is washing the car, he can give his child a sponge and ask him to “help” by washing the front bumper. These simple tasks can expand as the child grows, providing a growing challenge for the child and a sense of belonging to the family.

Obviously, the mother and father can do these jobs themselves quite easily, and could even do them much faster without the child’s participation. However, “getting the job done as fast as possible” is not always the best approach, particularly when it comes to developing positive socialization. Even though it may take a little longer to do certain jobs, the benefits to the child far outweigh the disadvantages in time lost. Thus it is best if the parents view some of their tasks as educational opportunities and ways to include the child in family chores, and adopt a different attitude about these tasks.

It is important, in including a child in household chores, that the jobs be an integral part of what is being done, and not just obvious “busywork” to keep the child occupied while the real work is being done. Otherwise, the child gradually develops a mistrust of the parents’ motives, and is reluctant to do what is asked of him. If the jobs are real opportunities to participate in real work, then the child experiences the feeling of taking an active part in the family activities, and develops a sound sense of self-worth in the process. Opportunities such as these provide a child with valuable experiences in positive socialization, and help to establish a feeling of being an important part of the family; this is a real asset to the child as he grows older.

Negative socialization is the result of situations in which the child does not feel accepted by those around her. Sometimes this happens in the home environment, when parents constantly find fault with everything the child does, but most often this occurs when the child is prematurely thrust into large group situations, such as those usually found in schools or day care centers.

School teachers and administrators are quick to mention to parents the importance of socialization for the child’s balanced development. However, the socialization that occurs in many school situations is distinctly negative in nature. In such group situations, young children learn how to be critical, petty, deceitful, superficial and dishonest, at a time in their lives when they are most capable of absorbing all of the best that is in others. Given this perspective, one can easily understand the response of John Holt, the educator who helped give birth to the homeschooling movement, when asked by a concerned parent, “I want to teach my child at home, but I’m concerned about his socialization. What advice do you have?” John replied, “If there were no other reason to keep children out of schools, the socialization which they receive there would be reason enough.”

Does this mean that children must always avoid large groups, for fear of being overrun by the values of the group? Not at all. The key issue here is not large or small groups, but the age of the child. As we mentioned previously, a child in the first stage of unfoldment does not have a stable center of awareness. As a result, she absorbs the values of those around her. Thus, if she is placed in a large group of children on a regular basis at an early age, she is essentially defenseless against the values of the others in the group, and begins to rely upon the group for her support, instead of depending upon her own inner strength.

In an interview with Dr. Raymond Moore of the Hewitt Research Center, Janet Kastel, head of teacher seminars for a number of Israeli kibbutzim, discussed the effect that the early group exposure of the kibbutz has upon children. The children are removed from the parents when they are still quite young, and are raised in groups by members whose job it is to be responsible for the children; a situation not unlike American day care centers. According to Dr. Moore, Ms. Kastel noted that children in the kibbutz “do not even have a time or place to cry alone without the other children looking on and possibly making fun. So they accommodate. And they grow up, more and more dependent upon their peers in all social and emotional respects. Initiative and creativity are stifled. By adolescence the experience of making decisions on their own, without group approval, becomes traumatic, or they cannot make such decisions at all. Indeed, they make very good soldiers.”

This is the situation of most adolescents in this country. They are very dependent upon group approval, and are unable to take initiative or go against the opinions of the group. As Ms. Kastel pointed out, such dependence upon group approval doesn't begin in adolescence; it begins in early childhood. Once the child has reached a stage of development when his sense of self-awareness begins to strengthen, the dangers of being exposed to a group begin to lessen. It is vitally important that children not be exposed to large groups until they have begun to develop a stable sense of self-awareness. This coincides with the development of the cognitive domain, which occurs between the ages of approximately seven and eleven.

Prior to age seven or eight, the child should be allowed to remain in the security of the home environment and allowed to interact one-to-one with a close friend, or at most in small groups up to four or five. A good rule of thumb to follow in the early years is not to allow children to interact simultaneously with more children than the number of years in their age (1st year - one playmate, 2nd year - two playmates, etc.). This ensures that they will never be exposed to more children than they can handle comfortably.

As a final note, parents who are concerned that exposure to large groups of children is necessary to provide their children with enough stimulation to enhance the full development of their intelligence may benefit from considering the following quote from Dr. Harold McCurdy of the University of North Carolina.

Dr. McCurdy studied the childhoods of twenty geniuses - men and women from various fields of endeavor - and concluded that there were three common factors among these great individuals:

- A high degree of attention focused upon the child by parents and other adults, expressed in intensive educational measures and, usually abundant love
- Isolation from other children, especially outside the family
- A richly flowering fantasy life, as a result of the two preceding factors

Dr. McCurdy concluded that our educational system as it generally operates today tends to suppress rather than encourage genius, “reducing all three of the above factors to minimum values.”

We believe that parents who are concerned about their young children's socialization needs should give them a caring home environment, provide them with opportunities to help in the home from an early age, be selective in the choice and number of playmates allowed, and integrate their children slowly into group situations, avoiding larger groups until the children are ten or eleven. If these guidelines are followed, children will develop harmonious social skills and will move into adolescence with a secure sense of their own self-worth as human beings, able to uphold their own principles in the presence of group pressures.