

Practice

A Therapeutic Kindergarten Class

Ann Pratt describes a recent visit to the Great Oak School in Illinois

Visiting a colleague is always a pleasant experience. It is also both affirming and reassuring to see pioneer work in progress, and my visit to Barbara Patterson's kindergarten therapeutic class at The Great Oak (Waldorf) School was just that! The children had just come in from outside. They hung up their clothes in the hallway, used the bathroom and washed hands, then came like quiet mice into their room with their teachers, sat on chairs placed by Barbara, and were obviously anticipating this moment with great expectation.

While Barbara sang, she and the teachers helped the children take off their shoes and Barbara rolled short copper rods under their feet, saying a verse and looking up at each child. A most reverent moment! Have you ever had the soles of your feet treated with gentle pressure? You become quite inwardly attentive. You sit quietly. A dreamy look appears on your face. You are at peace. This was so for all ten children. After everyone had had a turn, socks or tights were removed, and Barbara placed a beeswax stick crayon between each child's big and second toe. Then she laid a piece of paper on the floor in front of each one and they "drew" with their feet – again, in silence and with great determination. "I did it!" or "Let me try again," were some of the phrases that occasionally broke the satisfied silence.

After this, with their socks or tights still off, marbles were placed between the big toe and second toe. Small baskets were held underneath their feet by a teacher and the children

wiggled their toes to free the marbles. This was repeated several times, with joyful giggles echoing in the room. It was the moment of breathing out after the concentrated toe activity.

With socks and tights on again, the next activity was taking turns being rolled into the "burrito wrap" while Barbara said a charming verse about Samuel Whiskers. Barbara chose one child to be the helper with her, thus involving each one before it happened for her or him. This increased the anticipation and brought security – a very important element for these young children.

Then, standing opposite each child in turn, Barbara engaged in a slight forward and backward leaning motion while passing a small eurythmy rod back and forth to the rhythm of a poem. This gave Barbara another moment for exchanging eye contact and individualizing the motion while encouraging the stretching and reaching of the children's arms over their heads into the space of light and warmth, as Dr. Rentea recommends.

Barbara finished by rolling a red ball to each child while they were seated in a circle on the floor with legs spread so they just touched. The act of receiving the ball and sending it back to her was done to the following verse composed by her: "See my pretty rubber ball. Rolling it's not hard at all.

Roll to (name) now you see, how she rolls it back to me."

Then a goodbye circle was formed and everyone said, "Goodbye, friends, until we meet again." Barbara said this was more formed than she had done previously, but I saw that the children were totally with her and looked forward to taking their turn. It was a relaxed and joyful time for everyone.