

## OBSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES AT SNACK TIME

Betty Jane Enno

Betty Jane Enno has worked as a Class Teacher and a Kindergarten Teacher at AWS since 1984. She serves on the Board of AHE, is trained in Extra Lesson, member of the Board for the Pleiades Teacher Training initiative and a Licensed Pediatric Massage Therapist.

***As a matter of “economical preparation”, we can use our observational skills throughout the day in homeopathic doses with the children. These observations can then be brought into our meditations and sleep life to be used for future guidance. The following is an example of doing so at the snack table in the pre-school/kindergarten.***

In Waldorf Early Childhood Centers, one of the crowning events of the day is the morning Snack Time. The simple process of nurturing the children on a physical level with food is held with great pleasure, forethought and dedication in the Early Childhood Movement globally.

For many years, I have noticed a correlation between children's relationship to eating and sitting at the snack table and their sensory development overall, which then corresponds to other classroom activities. For example we can pay attention to how the child sits in their chair (or falls out of it ,or rocks in it), as this can be an indicator of their relationship to their foundational senses of balance, movement, life sense and touch. Or, we may ask, “Are there particular textures, smells, or temperatures of foods that some children shy away from that may indicate a sensory issue? “ Our attentiveness can then guide us to notice the duration, intensity and frequency of certain behaviors.

Hence, as a suggestion, I have created an observation check list (printed below). This can be utilized as another way of looking at the children to gain insight for determining the appropriate therapeutic activities. (It would not be appropriate to approach the children with a checklist in hand but instead to bring awareness on our part as we sit with our students at the table. Of course, the age of the child should be taken into consideration.) The following observations can be indicative of *but are not limited to* the assessment concepts noted:

**Sitting at the table: Assessment Concepts: will forces in relationship to space and gravity, balance, proprioception, upper body strength and gesture, Asymmetrical tonic neck reflex (ATNR) and Spinal Galant reflex**

- follows direction of where to sit
- ability to scoot chair in
- orientation of child to table (faces table directly or at an angle)
- orientation of chair to table
- wishes to sit upon one leg or two
- arm hangs around back of chair
- rocks in chair
- falls out of chair
- wraps feet around legs of chair
- places elbows on table

- posture in general
- respects spatial boundaries of others at table

**Position of bowl, plate, or glass:** Assessment Concepts: Crossing the midline, depth perception, convergence, proprioception

- bowl is in front of child
- bowl is in front of the child but more than 1 or 2 inches (from edge of table)
- bowl is to the side of child
- child is able to drink without spilling
- child spills drink (inadvertently when not drinking)
- child's ability and awareness to pass bowls, plates, glasses

**Ability to use utensils:** Assessment Concepts: Crossing the midline, fine motor skills, proprioception, depth perception, tactile sensitivity, eye-hand coordination, palmar reflex, body geography, elements of stretching and lifting

- handedness
- correct grasp
- immature grasp
- does the arm move freely from the shoulder
- food arrives at destination - mouth
- food is found on clothing, hair, face, etc...

**Eating:** Assessment Concepts: sequencing, proprioception, tactile awareness, self-regulation, oral processing, gesture towards food

- breathing is rhythmic/arrhythmic
- child chews with mouth open
- child eats without chewing
- child takes excessively large bites
- child spits food out in conversation
- child is uncomfortable with temperature, texture, or smell of food

On rice days I have introduced the use of chopsticks as utensils, along with spoons. The older children especially enjoy this challenge. The younger children look at it as a skill to be mastered, just as in tying one's shoes.

We recognize that sitting at the Snack Table with the children is a time of joy and social caring. Many wonderful conversations ensue that give us a glimpse into the child's soul life. We are blessed and honored to have the opportunity to share with the children in this special way. Therefore, I wish to suggest that, if the opportunity arises we can take this aspect of our

being together with children to observe them in some of the aforementioned ways. Hopefully, this may provide insight towards an additional way we may respectfully and joyfully observe the children in our care. As Audrey E. McAllen's states in, The Extra Lesson, (p.6) : "These factors require us to look closely at the physical body in its structural organisation, that is, skeleton, muscles and nerves, at the same time when the soul and spirit of the individuality are entering into the closest connection of their development -namely from birth to the change of teeth"...