



## The Hummy Rhythm of Play

By: Claire Bainer

*“If a child has been able in his play to give up his whole loving being to the world around him, he will be able, in the serious tasks of later life, to devote himself with confidence and power to the service of the world.”*

- Rudolf Steiner

We know that we are watching excellent teachers when we see them meeting the needs of the group and each individual child while maintaining a calm, dependable presence. Like the therapist sitting and listening to a client, the early care and education teacher is also listening, watching, thinking, and carefully composing her response—although, unlike a therapist, she is doing this amongst a large, active group of children. In the preschool world the response may take the form of action rather than words, as young children operate more in the body than the mind. When we can see an inner peace, and a knowingness that the children and teacher are in the flow of life unfolding around them, we know the teacher has achieved this high level of mastery. Seeing this demonstrated by a master teacher when I was a college student inspired me to strive to recreate this in my classroom when I was a new teacher on my own. It takes years of practice to achieve this highest level of teaching skill in the classroom and play yard setting, far beyond the 10,000 hours Malcom Gladwell suggests that it takes to achieve mastery. This reflects the complexity of the knowledge base, because in the preschool classroom mastery requires that each of many areas of knowledge are mastered and blended into a holistic, synthesized understanding of the children’s learning.

The children and their behavior reflect the sophistication and capacity of the teachers in the preschool setting. In a quality preschool program the children are the most important thing happening in the room. In a good school adults should first notice the children and then look to find the teacher, the opposite of programs where teachers are instructing and telling children what to do. Teachers facilitate and support and help the children learn to manage themselves quietly and independently. Conformity follows individualization. The next thing the teacher masters in her teaching is understanding how to match toys and equipment to the children’s understanding and stage of development; the toys and equipment in the rooms and yards all should be developmentally appropriate with the furniture, the climbing structures, the potties, the sinks and the play spaces all sized to fit the children. Successful play experiences offer built-in, incremental and achievable challenges created by teachers and by the children themselves.

Respect for the organic pacing of life is important to mastery too. Food, rest, stimulation and quiet appropriately balanced in support of the needs of growing children all affect the teacher’s ability to get to that special mastery in the classroom. Stimulation comes in many forms in a classroom; it may be bringing new opportunities, ideas, and things to explore or it may be through language as it scaffolds thought and enriches vocabulary words, listening skills

### Upcoming Events

**Thursday Feb 1**  
HEDCO House Meeting  
6p.m. - 8p.m.

**Thursday Feb 8**  
Parent Scholarship  
Committee  
6:15 p.m. - 7:45 p.m.

**Monday Feb 19**  
BlueSkies Closed for the  
Presidents’ Day Holiday.

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## Co-Directors Report Cont...

and the reciprocity of communication skills, building social skills and compassion and empathy as it goes. Incorporating nature, music, and art bring sensuality and beauty into the child's life; it also enriches, soothes, and delights. These nuances bring wonder and joy, building the growing being with a sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and harmony, and giving the idea that life is good and full of wonderful surprises. Once these qualities are in place the teacher is on the road to creating the flow of mastery in the classroom. At first you only get glimpses of it, a few moments of magic, then it subsides into action as usual (and occasionally chaos to untangle or play to reset), then it starts to last longer and longer and hold the children in such a special way.

As teachers and administrators we are always watching to see, to hear and to feel the qualities of homeostasis in the flow of mastery. As we are thoughtfully and consciously nurturing the development of the whole child these signs of homeostasis show us the child's development is integrating nicely. At that point children are trending toward stable equilibrium within themselves; their own interdependent elements of development are progressing and synchronizing, especially those maintained by physiological processes. This is what has created this harmonious outcome in the classroom.

The qualities we watch for in the children that indicate the presence of this harmony and classroom flow have somewhat odd identifiers, if you have been a teacher you recognize them and watch for and even listen for them first in one or two children and then throughout the group:

- Children "lost in their play," oblivious to all else. This reflects a complete sense of safety and trust in the world around them and in the self. This state allows disparate pieces of the world to align, facilitating creativity and growth.
- The "hummy rhythm of play" (Jim Greenman's apt phrase). These are the harmonious sounds of busy, happy children – children's voices are relaxed, communication is easy, it is neither too loud nor too quiet. Feeling the calm, pleasant, happy environment you could tell even with your eyes closed that the children in the space are constructively engaged and enjoying themselves.
- Songs emerge from the children as they play; engaged in painting or climbing they hum and sing about what they are doing. Children who are making up songs, singing and humming to themselves, show us that they are focused on their inner world, deep in the magical thinking of childhood.

These alluring and abstract descriptors are found in old texts about teaching, coming up again and again in descriptions of quality in early childhood education programs. They are the fanciful and dreamy markers of that inner place where all is well with the world. When several children find or land in this state of homeostasis the classroom settles, the harmony expands and the classroom begins to flow. It is a state we adults long for in our days full of distraction and demands and worry, and ironically it is those distractions that can make us forget that this is what makes life satisfying.

Teachers thinking about the rapid brain growth of the first five years of life think carefully about what those little brains are assimilating, and reflect on what value it is adding to the quality of life now and for the future. Lots of detail-oriented information is best saved for a more mature brain that can connect and expand details into bigger and new concepts and greater understanding. It is by learning who they are, how they feel and respond and manage their "being-ness" that they learn to be contributing members of society. When all is going well the magic of childhood shines brightly in the hummy rhythm of play and the teacher knows, as Rudolf Steiner knew in 1880, that "he will be able, in the serious tasks of later life, to devote himself with confidence and power to the service of the world."



## Staff out in February

The following staff will be out this month:

- \* Liisa out 2/9 - 2/26
- \* Spencer out 2/20 - 2/23



## Retirement Celebration for Liisa Hale

Friday, March 23rd, 6p.m. - 8p.m.  
Lake Merritt Sailboat House

*Join us as we celebrate Liisa's 27 years of leadership at BlueSkies and wish her well as she embarks on her next adventures! Invitation to follow.*

*We will also have an opportunity for current BlueSkies children and families to gather and say goodbye to Liisa on March 30th from 3:30 - 6:00p.m. at BlueSkies.*

## BlueSkies-isms

*Parents often hear their children using phrases that they suspect they learned at BlueSkies. Each month's "BlueSkies-ism" will include a phrase the teachers use all the time at BlueSkies, and some context to help you use the phrase at home too.*

*"That's fancy!"*

We use this to describe something with a lot going on; people can be fancy, as can ideas, clothes, artwork, and even a complicated block building be fancy. Children can feel quite proud of themselves for being able to do something "fancy" and being acknowledged for a difficult or complicated task.



# Snapshot in the Playroom: Team Teaching

*By: Claire Bainer*

A child in an apron is working at the art table, dipping home-made stamps in saucers of paint then printing on a paper on the tray in front of him. Teacher Arleen notices Jimmy watching the art table and asks if he wants to put on an apron and try the stamps too. Jimmy looks at her, with a look Arleen interprets as “tell me more.” Arleen says “This is a stamp.” She hands Jimmy the paper cup with bubble wrap taped to the bottom of it. “You can dip it into the paint in those plates and see what kind of a mark it makes on the paper. It looks different depending on how much paint you put on it and how you touch the paper with it.” Jimmy looks at the stamp he is now holding, and then turns a worried look to his hands. Arleen follows his gaze and says “Oh I see, Judy was using this stamp in the blue paint and now a little paint got on your hands. We can wash the paint off your hands when you’re all done. Here is a nice clean paper for you.” Arleen puts the fresh paper on Jimmy’s tray, takes the stamp back and puts it in the saucer. Jimmy wiggles into the free apron, turns to Arleen for help with fastening it, and sits at the table.

Nearby, Emma says “Dump it all out!” as she dumps water out of the container into the toy sink. She continues talking in the stream of her consciousness, “I’m a parent.” Anne, also scooping water, says “I’m a parent too!” Hanna at the kitchen table responds “Who wants this cupcake?” Anne and Emma say “ME!” as they continue pouring water. Emma calls to teacher Ruth “They need more water in the sink.” Ruth says “OK, we can do that.” As she pours, Emma reaches for the pitcher to help. “You know what, I’m going to do it so it doesn’t spill,” says Ruth as she moves the pitcher out of Emma’s reach.

Children continue working on their stamp prints. Arleen tells Jimmy “Remember try to keep the paint on the paper. It’s ok if it gets on your hands, but try to keep your hand dry; things can get so messy with painty hands.” She cleans his hands off with a towel. She asks if he wants to paint more or if he is all done. He says “I’m all done.” Arleen begins coaching him through the procedure to hang up a painting. She says “You can get the clips just like you usually do. Oh shucks, there aren’t enough clips! Is it ok if I just put your picture up here on the flat rack to dry?” Jimmy (like a good two-and-a-half-year-old) says “No!” Arleen responds “You really want to hang it up? Ok. Let’s try to do it with one clip.” Jimmy smiles “It works!” Arleen agrees, “It works!” Jimmy holds up his hands and Arleen sees there’s still paint on them. Arleen says “We can do a proper hand-washing at the sink, but I can try to get some more off for right now with the towel.” Jimmy is satisfied. He pulls off his apron and pushes in his chair. Arleen asks Jimmy if he can help Corrine put on her apron and moves off toward the sink. Jimmy helps Corrine and follows Arleen to the sink. Ruth moves closer to the door in the play house area a few more feet away from the busy girls. Ruth can see Corrine take Jimmy’s place at the art table. Ruth says “I’ll get your paper for your tray, Corrine; what color are you going to try to stamp first?”

The Playroom classroom is a good place to see team teaching. I pause to watch two teachers working near each other; they are both busy and focused on the children they are helping with their different activities in different areas of the room, but as they work they are listening to each other, knowing they may need to step in if the other teacher needs to fully attend to one child for a few minutes. Team teaching begins with awareness, and they are paying attention to each other as they share a sense of responsibility for the experience of the whole group, the individual children, and the co-teachers. Arleen did not need to ask Ruth to help because both teachers know they are responsible for what happens in the classroom. Arleen was near the art area because the children needed her there. Ruth knew she needed to be close to water play. She also knew that once the children engaged and knew she was nearby to help she could step back and put some of her attention elsewhere. When Arleen moved away to help at the bathroom sink Ruth just slipped over to help in both areas knowing Arleen would be back as soon as she could. The children’s needs are met, the teachers can relax knowing they are supported in doing what they need to do, and the room is running smoothly because everyone’s needs are being met.