

# Parent-Child Classes for Infants and Toddlers: We need them!

— Liz Hagerman

What positive impact does having a parent-infant and parent-toddler program have on a school?

I have observed children of ages four through six peering in the windows of my classroom to catch a glimpse of the babies. They stare, then their gaze turns inward. Are they remembering themselves as babies? As toddlers? Perhaps seeing the youngest ones helps these children connect to the pre-verbal part of themselves. They are growing and moving into the world, but can take this little baby with them, inside themselves.

Often, in one of my classrooms, I have children from the nursery and kindergarten come to use the little toddler-sized bathroom (of course not when I am holding class). I think that in doing so they feel a sense of mastery—of how far they have come

The teachers of one of the mixed-age kindergartens at Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten & Nursery told me that it is helpful to have parent-infant classes in the school. When the children begin to tease a child with “Billy is a baby,” the teachers can respond, “Oh, there are no babies in our classroom—they are all in the baby class.” This seems to shift the children to a more contemplative mood ... “I used to be in that class—when I was a baby—I crawled around!”

Or the joy of having these little ones in the school, arriving with their mothers or fathers. Does seeing the babies remind them of the baby inside them? A memory echoing from deep within? One day a line of kindergarten children followed their teacher through the Acorn Hill lobby on their way out to the play yard. Some parents were bringing their babies in arms through the front door to my class. The kindergartener’s usual song of “Ho, ho, ho, the children in a row . . .” spontaneously changed to “We

*In every three-year-old  
there is a two-year-old,  
a one-year-old,  
and a baby  
waiting to be born.*

*D.W. Winnicott*

love babies! We love toddlers!” The baby parents certainly got a warm welcome that day.

Perhaps the babies and toddlers allow even the three-year-olds to help someone younger. A heartwarming example of the Waldorf early childhood pedagogy supporting empathy and the healthy social life happened last winter at the Washington Waldorf School.

Snow and ice caused a delayed opening for the school, but the “Moon Garden” parent-infant class started at eleven. When I arrived at school, I found an ice slick stretching from the gate to the yurt, our garden house classroom in the Children’s Garden play yard. I imagined mothers with small babies in arms—yikes! The Forest Kindergarten and the nursery class were bundled up and sliding around happily. I spoke briefly to the teachers to say I would go find some ice melt and come back to hack a path from the gate to the yurt.

When I returned with the facilities manager and some ice melt, I beheld children of ages three through six (and teacher), shovels in hand, hacking and cracking the ice with focus and gusto. “We’re making a path for the babies!” said one child to another. I took up a shovel and together we made a safe, welcoming, meandering path. At one point we saw that a nursery child had made a “path” about two inches wide. “Look! I’m making a path for the babies!” Her teacher smiled. “Let’s make one for the mothers and fathers, too,” and the path was joyfully widened. The sun shining, the ice and snow sparkling, the children so joyfully working to help others—this was a picture of what we want in our schools—a healthy social life. When we care for and show respect for the youngest in our midst, we all feel it in our hearts’ own core. ♦

**Liz Hagerman** is a faculty member at Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten & Nursery in Silver Spring, Maryland, where she teaches parent-infant and parent-toddler classes. She also teaches these classes at Washington Waldorf School in Bethesda. Liz is a board certified dance/movement therapist, a Waldorf Birth to Three specialist, and a Pikler Pedagogue candidate. The focus of her work is in supporting free, self initiated movement within a secure, warm, consistent relationship. In the summers she is a commercial fisherman in Cook Inlet Alaska with her husband and two sons.