

## The Class Three Child

The journey of the nine year old begins with a process of inner change, a transition from an unconscious perception of the world to a more conscious one. There is a very significant step in self-awareness, there is Me and there is You. Earlier the children were in a varying state of 'dreaminess' - very much in the age of imitation. They have woken up in a sense and see their surroundings more consciously. They experience themselves much more deeply than before, there is a personal inner life. They look into the world with newly observant eyes. Many things dawn on them. The child is unconscious of what is happening and should remain unconscious of the process. While this process is happening in the inner life of the child there are outer signs that give us indications that the process is taking place.

The outer manifestations may look like a crisis, a moment when an individual questions the very foundations of their life, is there meaning, purpose or value. These may not be the questions the nine year old asks. Instead they may ask searching questions such as 'Do you love me? Am I adopted? How do you know? The child may become more aware of their own and others mortality, more aware of death. This can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, separating can be lonely and an awareness begins that life can be tough, that we have to work, we don't get all we want, there are times we are not happy. A feeling of insecurity may develop, anxiety where there once was none may arise during this stage. The child may want to withdraw from siblings and even peers, wanting time alone.

The child may find he/she can no longer accept the world as they once saw it, there are questions and criticisms. The child begins to see what others can do and be critical of both others and themselves. 'Sue is better at maths than me, Dave can draw better than me'. The child may wonder why there are differences and is it fair? Criticisms can be directed at parents, teachers, these adults once held in such esteem can fall from pedestals in the eye of the child and doubt may creep in, maybe they're wrong, maybe they don't know? Where there is doubt, defiance may creep in as the child pushes boundaries to see what may happen.

This period in a child's life can be paradoxical – puzzling and contradictory.

Many teachers, in explaining the change that occurs at this age, have used a part of William Wordsworth's poem, *Ode – Intimations of Immortality from Recollection of Early Childhood*, as it describes it well. The first stanza begins:

*There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore; —  
Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
By night or day.  
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.*

Here Wordsworth touches on experiences in childhood that have left their mark on him and from these acute feeling memories he is able to give us an insight into the changing consciousness of the child. He describes what Steiner calls the nine year old crisis, the nine year old crossing or crossing the Rubicon. Wordsworth describes the sense of unity the young

child feels with the natural surroundings, the connectedness and the sense of the world being clothed in 'celestial light', a divine presence within nature. And he also describes for us the sense of separation and loss felt by the child when the child can no longer see or live in the divine glory of nature.

The poem continues to describe a feeling that there 'is something that is gone' and that we begin in an ideal world that slowly fades into a shadowy life but before the light fades as the child matures, he emphasises the greatness of the child experiencing the feeling. The poem concludes with a realisation that even though he has lost his awareness of the glory of nature he did have it once and can still remember it. The memory of nature's glory will sustain him, our experiences cannot be lost or taken away as they are held in our memory.

This stage of development has also been described as a taste of adolescence, emotions are high, feelings are sensitive, and the child can swing from wanting or even demanding greater independence to sobbing and wanting to be held like a baby.

What the child needs first and foremost from us, the adults in their lives is solid ground, they need our strong moral sense of humanity and they need to know that we are kind yet firm and know what it is to be in the world. The child will be watching us, not only when we are teaching or interacting with them but also in our everyday encounters, conversations and manner with each other.

When the child withdraws into themselves they really want the opposite from us. They want to experience again our love through a warm-hearted word. What they need from us now is a sense of security, the world is lonely, foreign to them and they need us in our wisdom to provide consistency and rhythm in routine and provide for them a sense of order in the world. We need to give them a clear sense of right and wrong and be fair in all our dealings. The child needs to have a confidence in our loving authority. The child needs adults to reflect what is morally right though **GOODNESS** – what we do with our hands, **BEAUTY** – what we feel with our hearts, **TRUTH** – what comes with our ability to think.

At the same time, we need to let go of them too. We need to give them room to expand their sense of self, give them room to experiment, have the opportunity to take on a bit more responsibility and 'prove themselves worthy' but this is done with a strong sense of the loving adult eye upon them, they are supported to succeed, and they have to trust that the adults have their best interests at heart. We need to look upon these experiences of doubt, loss and loneliness not as barriers but as temporary periods of resistance to be overcome and learned from. We don't want to protect the child from the experience rather we want to observe with great care and provide stability and a sense that we can be relied on.

For some parents this is a hard time as it is seen as a loss of early childhood, but please remember that the children are still very much in the heart of childhood and their questioning needs imaginative answers and not overly technical or intellectual ones as this may stagnate and dull the child's powers of thought. Imbue your child with meaningful images. How we the adults react at this stage is imperative. Think of it as a reaction rehearsal for puberty. Setting strong boundaries, expectations and relationships now is fundamental for continuing positive relationships in those later more difficult teenage years.

Let's look at our curriculum and how it repeatedly and beautifully meets these changes in the child's conscious. We need to build bridges that begin to unite the child to the world in a more conscious way. In each year we talk about a 'mood for the year' and this mood is generated from the stories told in a particular year. Class 1 has the mood of the fairy-tale, everything is possible, Class 2 has a mood of Celtic enchantment, magic happening at particular times, human stories with magical background. In Class 3 the predominant stories are those of the Hebrew people. The stories move from paradise and unity to a separation that means that people must find a way to be in the world. This theme is repeated over and over again. People find themselves strangers in a strange land and all must trust and be guided by an authority that has their best interests at heart. These stories have a great wisdom and when we look at them with the picture of the child just described they take on a whole new meaning.

While it may be difficult for some of us to accept stories that speak of one all knowing, all powerful God, for the child at this time in their lives this picture of one God provides a security and a clear sense of leadership, authority and control. The children experience in great sweeping narratives the problems and feelings they are encountering within themselves. There are not always happy endings as the child sees that there are not always happy endings in the world around them.

A recurring theme in the Class 3 curriculum is that of moving from the informal to the formal. Giving shape to the world, order to the world that can seem vast and unknowable at this time of change for a child, but it is the formal side of our world that the child will find the security that they need at this time. The need to feel that there is order and that they can grasp this order and understand and use it.

Our Maths main lessons move into the world of measurement and this is brought to the children from a historical perspective. In English, grammar becomes more formal as they learn about nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Formal musical notation is found with recorder and strings.

Our world is practical which involves active engagement with the world and a sense of what it means to look after yourself and others in the world. As the child moves more fully into themselves or their 'House' they also have an experience of building and looking at housing and shelter around the world. Through farming and gardening the children experience the farmer as the human representative who works in order to provide food from the earth.

As with all change there is a sense of loss but also a great sense of excitement for what is to come. The nine year old change brings its challenges, but it is also an exciting time in the child's development as they become aware of themselves as separate individuals.