

“When a snowflake leaves the sky,  
It turns and turns to say ‘good-bye.  
‘Good-bye, Dear Cloud, so cool and grey,’  
Then lightly travels on its way.  
When a snowflake meets a tree,  
It says ‘Good day, good day to thee.  
Thou art so bare and lonely here,  
I’ll call my friends, and settle near.”

January has brought us beautiful snow and deep creativity into the children’s imaginative play. Everyone was happy to return to school after our winter break. At Will Rogers for our forest days, we have not had to travel too far away for our forest expeditions. As many of you have seen at pick-up time, the children have stamped “Snow Mountain,” a giant snow pile created as a result of plowing the parking lot, with their creativity and playful spirits. What joy this big snow pile has brought to the children during play on Tuesdays! They have been using shovels and hands to build forts and tunnels, building houses and birds nests to live in, creating construction sites, sliding like penguins and otters, and practicing teamwork, sharing, compassion for one another, and plenty of healthy movement all the while.

The children are working to share the few small shovels I bring along for fort building, and practice sharing the work of building something special, like a tunnel, with another enthusiastic friend. Sometimes, a project feels dear to one child, but, a friend sees what the child is doing and wants to help so badly! With a bit of encouragement toward the child to explain her project, and how the friend can help, soon, both, and sometimes more, collaborate, and end up working together and sharing ideas to make a fort or tunnel that is extra-neat--- one with a living room, pass-through tunnel, bread oven, slide... The children also work to share space in a birds nest, and learn how to make a nest bigger if a friend comes along and wants to join, making the bird family grow!

In the deep snow, the children work hard to walk from here to there. When they venture beyond Snow Mountain, it can feel like a real adventure when the snow is knee deep! If a child falls down in the snow and is struggling to get up, friends are usually willing to lend a helpful hand. When a friend wants to join play on the bench that overlooks the “valley,” the field down a steep hill, with a view of Scarface in the distance, the children are guided to remember to welcome that friend in, for, the view of the Valley is for everyone, after all, and the friend who wants to join has a sad look on her face. The children agree to include the friend, and, soon, they are all playing together- I walk by to remark on how much fun they are now having, and everyone is included!

Opportunities for movement on Snow Mountain and in the surrounding deep snow are abundant. The children are climbing up steep, slick, snowy slopes, sometimes using both hands and

feet to reach their destination. They slide on their bottoms down the hill. They work together to perch on top of a pointed tip of a hill on a small sled, before the fast descent down the icy hill, working to keep their feet up so as not to lose speed, but stay upright so their heads stay out of the snow. They run and trudge through deep snow. They crawl through deep snow. They tire and fall backwards into deep snow, then roll and work to right themselves again-- sometimes they fall purposely into the deep, soft snow, because it is fun to do it! They climb the young pines at the corner of the field, within view of Snow Mountain, and climb and balance on the huge pine trunk that is lying at the edge of the field, seemingly waiting there all these years for children to make it their playground. The children work with their arms to use the shovel to dig holes in the sometimes powdery, sometimes icy, sometimes heavy snow. They must coordinate their movement with the shovel well, to keep their friends safe, and to ensure the shovel lands where they hope it will in the snow.

What about this movement? Why mention it? Well, it is important work for the children, this movement. Snow Mountain, such a simple pile of snow, is offering the children stimulation and strengthening of their sense of self-movement, or proprioception, and their balance, or vestibular sense.

Through the freedom they find during play on Snow Mountain, the children work with the shovels and scoop snow, reach for a hand to give a friend a tug up a snowy slope, crawl, pretending to be cats, climb hand-over-hand, and perceive where to place a toe on a small foothold of the climbing tree. These movements are helping the children to strengthen their sense of self-movement, or proprioception. Body movement works to strengthen and synchronise connections in the brain. The children are preparing their bodies and minds, and the connection between them, for academic readiness, and living meaningfully in the moment as they do this work.

Sliding down the hill, tumbling, spinning, working to stay upright while walking on ice, or moving through deep snow, sitting balanced on a branch after having climbed the tree, tracking a bird with one's eyes across the sky, or a squirrel as it hops from branch to branch in the tree- these movements are strengthening the vestibular sense, or the sense of balance. More important work for a strong body and strong mind!

These types of movements do not only happen out on Snow Mountain, or out in the forest. The children are always moving during their play, no matter where they are. In our classroom they crawl on all-fours as jaguars, move like spiders, hop like frogs, lumber like turtles. They build slides and "whoosh" down them. They climb up on the small table or cabinet they can use as jumping platforms, and have a moment in flight before they land on the mattress, rebounding for another leap. They push and pull heavy wood, sort corks, chestnuts, and keys, and work with flowing fabrics, much more yielding than the heavy stump to move and manipulate.

During Circle time, we integrate many therapeutic, rhythmic, and strengthening movements to go along with song, rhyme, and story. While we crawl, stomp, chop wood with our arms (cross the midline), jump, spin, and map different parts of the body, the children are working on nurturing their sense of self-movement and balance. Movement combined with speaking the stories, rhymes, and songs helps to strengthen and develop the child's memory, as well.

This is just the beginning of how movement in play affects the growing child. How does movement and gesture affect empathy, how we connect to one another, how another perceives us? Next month's newsletter will look into empathy, and will touch upon movement and empathy, and more.

If you would like more information on how free movement for children can help to develop and nurture the senses, please read the article found at the link below.

<http://www.sandpointwaldorf.org/sws-blog/2017/5/10/the-role-of-movement-in-learning>

Upcoming Events:

- Tuesday, January 30, 6:00- Parent Evening- We will discuss Discipline. Please, join us!
- Volunteer to help create the Winter Carnival Float or costumes for parade attendees- date still TBA- I will let you know when we have a date organized.
- Winter Carnival Parade- February 10- Time TBA

Thank you!

Miss Cassie