The Two Worlds of the Child
— Daniel Udo de Haes

The following is an excerpt from the book The Creative Word: The Young Child’s Experience of Language and Stories. Formerly available as The Young Child from Floris Books, it has recently been revised and republished by WECAN. In this chapter, Daniel Udo de Haes touches on the child’s experience of the spiritual archetypes that Susan Weber refers to in her article.

Clearly, it will be meaningful to immerse ourselves in young children’s experiences of their surroundings only if we try to awaken a vivid inner awareness that we, too, once bore within us the foundations of our soul-life from the spirit-land from whence we came.

In the child’s environment, we discover two distinct realms. The first is the natural world, which in the home is present through pets, houseplants, or the elements of earth, water, and so on; the second is the human realm, full of man-made things, which forms quite a considerable part of the world that surrounds us.

It is gratifying that many parents feel how important it is for children to be allowed to find an intimate relationship with the things around them. As far as nature is concerned, consider, for instance, the substance with which children have such a special connection—water.

The ability of the child to live in two worlds, which we described in the last chapter, has a close affinity to the life and nature of an amphibian, which both lives in water, its world of origin, and on dry land. This amphibious aspect of soul-life appears—more clearly in the toddler than in the child of kindergarten age—in all that the little one observes and experiences; but water is particularly important. What the little child can experience both in and with water is nearly limitless, and it is wholesome for children to play freely with water. With this attitude, we see the harm of scolding such as “Look now, what a mess you have made!”—which nullifies the joy and also the deeper effect of the play and makes children feel that they have done something “bad.” Many parents now even consider such games as pottering about in the garden with water or with the mud of a rain-puddle to be a blessing for these little ones. Others will now and then give children a bowl of water so that even indoors they can play with this wet element to their heart’s content.

As a second example, we may take the wonderful substance that combines the fluid properties of water and the hardness of earth—pure, white sand. We can rejoice in the adult who makes a small sandpit in the garden or even in the living room, where children can enjoy the forming and pouring of this wonderful substance.

In contrast to the sense for the substances of nature, a relationship with man-made objects helps children feel that their own journey from heaven to earth has already been accomplished by the whole of humanity and is still taking place. Where nature offers beacons which show the way, man-made things are signposts left by those that have gone before—and these also speak deeply to the child’s soul. They can be the simplest things, large or small—for instance, little pieces of cloth of various colors (where not only the colors but also an enveloping quality may be experienced), or a bowl and spoon, or a bucket and spade, or a small jug or cup, and so on. With the bucket or cup, the importance lies in the image of taking-up and letting-go, receiving and giving away again of the precious substance contained in these man-made objects. This experience addresses moral qualities and aids in their unfolding.

In this larger human context we may return to two earlier examples, which have a twofold message to impart. The sphere or ball made by a human being, whether it be as ornament, plaything, or for some other purpose, not only speaks to toddlers’ unbroken connection with the heavens, but can facilitate a
Scenes from the Child’s Garden
～ Stephanie Hoelscher

The Child’s Garden of Orchard Valley Waldorf School in Vermont is home to two early childhood programs on its own farmhouse campus, providing a small, intimate community for young children. The Apple Blossom Nursery group consists of children ages two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half, while a mixed-age preschool group serves three-and-a-half to five-year-olds.

Sounding Notes

Morning in the play yard at the Child’s Garden is hardly quiet. There is the squeaking of swings as the four-year-olds practice pumping their legs and propelling their bodies high into the damp, grey autumnal sky. From the sandbox there is the scraping sound of metal on metal as real tools dig into the earth—perhaps colliding with an inanimate mineral object—and carry a load into waiting buckets. There is the cry of a distressed child in the arms of his teacher. It is Monday. Mama is on the wrong side of the gate. One wonders, what is the passage of five days in the experience of a young child? And then there is, of course, the sound of children at play laughing and quarreling as they learn to be by themselves and with each other at school.

A teacher’s voice floats and somehow penetrates through these layers of sound. She sings, “Come little children; come along and follow . . .” A few children come running; others slowly pick up their heads and look about. Others continue in their work of play. The teacher’s voice is not loud, but she sings in the mood of the fifth with an open tone that steadily embraces all the children. In a matter of minutes all fifteen children are standing at the gate holding hands and ready to leave for their morning walk.

Children have a sense of being in their element wherever singing and playing, speaking and moving are in unison. To take note of the quality of sound on any given morning in the classrooms and play yard of the Child’s Garden is to appreciate how the “speech-body” of the children is nourished not only upon the love and understanding care, but also on the quality of the surroundings in which they grow up.

Daniel Udo de Haes worked for many years as a teacher in an anthroposophic institute for children with special needs in Zeist, Holland. He died in 1986.