

Book Review

Baby Bare

by Stephanie Johnson

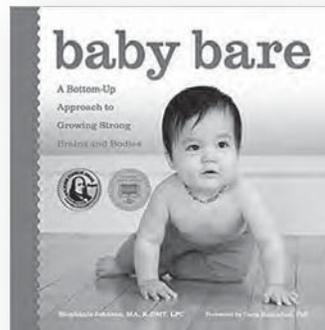
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Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

Baby Bare, a new book by movement therapist and counselor Stephanie Johnson, is a wonderful resource on development for Waldorf early childhood teachers and parents.

Stephanie is deeply steeped in understanding the importance for little children—especially from birth to eighteen months—to have freedom of movement to unfold their own developmental timetables. In this age when everything is hurry-up-fast-or-you-have-already-lost-the-race, hers is a voice of calm reassurance. She explains that the best start we can give babies for healthy brain development, smooth body coordination with efficient movement, success in future academic learning, and social and emotional stability comes from allowing them to go uninterrupted through the unfolding of the wise movement sequences embedded in their bodies at birth. In short, they need abundant floor time to learn the geography and coordination of their bodies.

Discovering hands and feet and bringing hands together at the midline is an essential first accomplishment. Rolling will then come along as the first locomotion and give more experience of spatial orientation and body geography. All this prepares the ground for “lizard crawling,” the often overlooked and underrated but critical integrating preparation for crawling on hands and knees. Crawling then will lead to stable sitting with strong torso strength, standing,



and finally walking. The longer a child takes—even “revels”—in each stage, the stronger will be the child’s healthy foundation for meeting life’s future tasks.

Ms. Johnson is well versed in neurology and brain development. She shares the picture of what she calls “growing from the bottom-up.” She describes the triune brain—the first and most basic level called the hind-brain, then the mid-brain, and finally the cortex. In the hierarchy of brain development, the hind-brain is the first director of basic life functions, reflex movements, and such. Everything this section oversees in development will become automatic so the child will not need to think about how to do these things at later ages. The hind-brain is active and matured when the baby is on the floor like “a lizard.” What the baby accomplishes in movement in the “tummy up” or “tummy down” position will become automatic for life. Stephanie emphasizes how critically important it is that the baby not be rushed through this phase. Torso strength, coordination of arms and legs in different patterns, eye-tracking, and eye-hand coordination are but a few of the important accomplishments solidified during this time. And everything else that will be accomplished in future brain development depends upon how strongly this foundation grows. The hind-brain is offered here as an example, but this principle holds true as development ascends to the mid-brain and finally to the cortex.

Baby Bare draws attention to aspects of our modern life that put our children’s healthy development at risk. Pushing a child to sit, crawl, or walk before she does it on her own will interfere with her body’s own wise plan. Restraint in car seats and other sitters, walkers, bouncers, and the like thwart the free, intentional movement that trains the body and builds the brain. Over-stimulation of the senses, screen

exposure, and prematurely awakening the child's intellect also rob the time and forces needed to create the essential healthy foundation that the rest of the brain—mid-brain and cortex—require to unfold their special gifts.

This book is completely compatible with the wisdom that Waldorf early childhood educators hold as our own foundation and that we so earnestly want the world to understand. *Baby Bare* is a resource and ally in its commitment to our children's healthy future. Primarily written as a guide and support for new parents, the book is very readable and accessible in concepts and language. It gives practical suggestions and examples—illustrated through gorgeous photos of amazing babies of many races and skin tones—and it encourages parents to be calm, sensible, and loving; and to follow their baby's lead, resisting the societal mania to push and rush ahead.

Baby Bare is well researched and provides a clear vocabulary for us to understand and

describe this picture of “movement building the brain” with parents. It is ideal for sharing in parent-child classes. It is also an important read for Waldorf early childhood teachers who work with preschool and kindergarten-age children. More and more children are coming to our classes with incomplete development, sensory issues, movement awkwardness, poor coordination, and social challenges. The foundation for each one of these domains lies in the movement achievements and brain development of the first eighteen months. Reading *Baby Bare* and coming to understand what could have happened and didn't will give us insight into the children in our care and how we might back-track with them to strengthen the foundation that did not get finished.

Thank you to Stephanie Johnson for this resource. Writing it was a noble deed on behalf of young children. For further information about this book, go to www.babybare.net. ♦