

Imaginal Education in Community Interplay Preschool Watsonville, CA

Mary Scherer Clutz

"He goes to a preschool you wouldn't believe!" exclaimed Mrs. Herrera at her son's pediatrician's office. Her 2.5 year-old son, Tony, had just pointed out a picture of Albert Einstein to the nurse and told her about him.

My husband and I were sitting in the atrium of the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco one evening and Gerri Martin, a preschool parent I had not seen for years, came up to us and said they were celebrating their daughter Christina's graduation the University of California in Berkeley. Gerri told us that Christina had majored in International Relations in college. She said it was because of the emphasis on multicultural education at Community Interplay Preschool that got her daughter interested in studying about the globe! We were amazed!! First of all that we were that old! Ha! Secondly that the Preschool had such an impact on her.

Community Interplay Preschool was founded in 1969 as a result of a study on the needs of the community of Watsonville, California. The study was done by group of people in the city of Watsonville who had been trained in community reformulation by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) in Chicago. Based on the study, it was determined that Watsonville did not have a preschool for middle to upper income families. There was a Head Start program and a cooperative nursery and that was all.

When Community Interplay Preschool started, it especially targeted professional families. This was done because of the belief that professional people often have the political power and savvy plus the resources to make permanent changes that can benefit the community. Part of the goal of Community Interplay Preschool was to educate the parents as well as the children. Looking back on it from the perspective of more than twenty years, this goal was successful.

The parents of the school helped to sponsor a Town Meeting for the entire city during the national 1976 bicentennial year. One parent became a principle of an elementary school and used some of the imaginal education tools in that job. Many used some of the knowledge they gained to benefit their work in many community organizations. As the school got established, children also came from low to lower-middle income families. Some children were part of families who were migrant workers in the valley.

The school won an award from the Bank of America for community service. We had "adopted" a rest home. Once a week we took our sack lunches to the rest home. Each child had a "pal" whom they sat with to eat lunch. The senior citizens in the home enjoyed it tremendously; and it was a meaningful experience for the children. Community Interplay School was honored by the Mayor of Watsonville who named a special day for the school on its 20th birthday!

Mary Jensen and I were the first two teachers. It was quite an experience because neither of us had taught early childhood before. But I believed so strongly in Imaginal Education and the idea that preschool children were open to learning that we went

ahead. We did every job. We had no other help. No secretary, no janitor, no other administrators or teachers. We learned a lot in the first few months!

By the next fall to school expanded to four teachers for thirty children, allowing each teacher to teach one part of the curriculum. We still did all the jobs, including moving furniture. The school had a beautiful Parish Hall to work in. It had floor-to-ceiling windows on one entire wall. The only problem with that every time there was a meeting in the evening for the church, we had to move all the furniture. We also set the room up for Sunday school each Friday. We were so excited with what we were doing, that it didn't seem like much of a burden. The worst part was cleaning the boy's bathroom!

Watsonville has 20,000 people, located on the Pacific Coast Central California. It produces most of its income from agriculture. There is a large Mexican American and Asian population who work in agriculture. Also, many of the "old" families are involved in produce. It is so sophisticated now that it is "computerized agriculture". Apples, lettuce, strawberries, broccoli, cauliflower, and cut flowers are some of the largest crops.

Serious thought was given to developing the curriculum to meet community needs. The basic curriculum of ICA's preschool in Chicago was used. A major change was to use a multicultural theme as a constant throughout the year. The reason for this was to honor the rich heritage of the cultures represented in our student population and to expose the families involved to a global dimension. In a rural area, such as Watsonville, people are often isolated from global awareness. To read the local paper one would seldom be aware of global events because many global happenings were not covered. To act as something of a balance to the rural mindset, the school emphasized the globe.

In most of the courses I have taken as a teacher that have dealt with multicultural education, and have not been taught by the ICA, the emphasis was on teaching just the cultures representing the children in the classroom. It was also of a very limited scope, mostly a superficial look at housing, food, and clothing. They didn't seem to really know why they were studying the country. When studying the entire globe, it is possible to include studies that represent the children in your classroom. When setting the entire world children have the opportunity to be exposed to wonderful gifts of many cultures.

The global curriculum of the ICA studies the world as a global village. It understands our connectedness to everyone and everything on the planet earth and even the entire universe (or universes). It also emphasizes the unique gifts that each cultural expression brings to the globe. What each culture is different and we don't want to make people the same, we can learn from each other and appropriate some of these gifts for ourselves. In other words, we can learn from each other what is truly important.

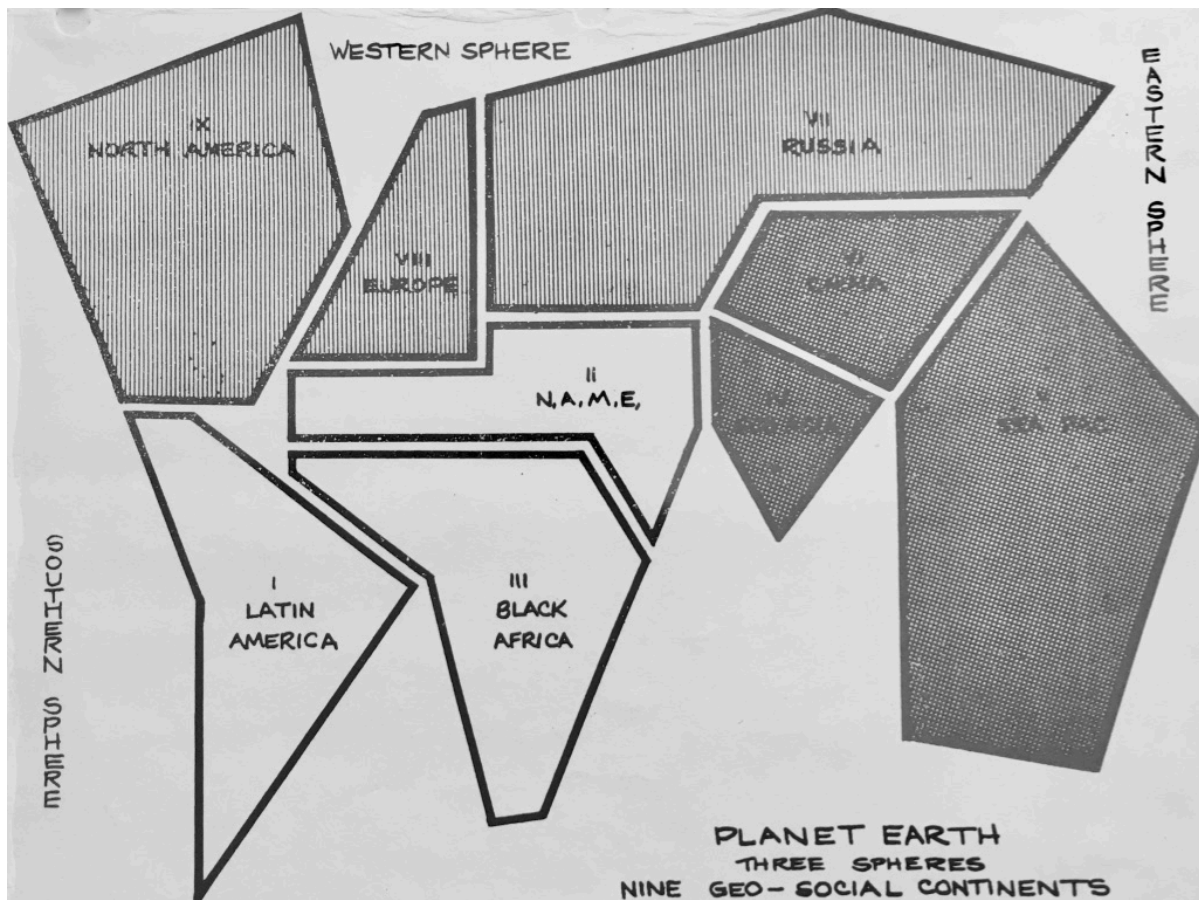
The unique gifts of the culture are often unconscious operating images like our own Western gift of rationality. We are born wanting to know how, when, why, and where. No one has to teach us to be curious. In other cultures that is not as important and not their first response to life. There are six distinct operating images in the globe. The Institute called them Urs.

My husband, Wendell Clutz, and I had the privilege of traveling with the ICA on a "Global Odyssey". Each of the six Urs were included in the Odyssey. It was a life-changing experience. We went many places that tourists don't usually go, including Calcutta, India. While there we had a chance to see and talk with Mother Teresa. We visited the House of the Dying and the orphanage she helps to run. Other countries we visited were Mexico, Japan, China Territories, Thailand, Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Greece, Italy, and England.

In each of the places we visited, we experienced new understandings. An especially meaningful happening for me was to see the Buddhist monks in Thailand in their bright saffron-colored robes walking through the streets once a day with their "monk's bowls". This was the only food the monks received, and yet it was the people *giving* the monks food that were saying "thank you" for the opportunity to give. This is certainly a 180-degree turn from the prevalent mindset in the United States. I also found a beautiful, sincere smile on the faces of most people in Thailand, even though many are extremely poor.

THE MULTI-CULTURAL EMPHASIS

As a result of my trip to the major cultural expressions in the globe combined with the ICA's curriculum, I find teaching multi-cultural units constantly vital and exciting. The classroom of Community Interplay Preschool included having an area decorated with items and pictures of the culture we were studying. We used the six understandings of the globe developed by the ICA.



Each year started with the study of the northern hemisphere of the globe, including USA, Europe and Russia. The cultural gifts of these people include rationality, technology, initiative, and exploration. The reason we started with this part of the globe is that is the part we are. As an educator I know that children learn best when they start with their own experiences. Then you can build from these experiences to study other cultures and other parts of the curriculum.

One of the fun things about the curriculum is that it is contentless. Because of this, each time the staff works together to build the curriculum, it is like a painter creating a painting. Within each category of the curriculum we were free to develop any kind of lesson. The teachers have fun building the curriculum content from the basic understandings. Even when our school expanded to the sixth grade, each unit would find the staff gathered together brainstorming ideas for specific content for the curriculum. We never used textbooks or "basal" readers. We used what was going on around the children and in the globe.

Because of this we could study countries that represented the heritage of the children and teachers that year and also the countries that were in the forefront of the news, where key happenings were affecting lives in the globe. One example was when we studied Saudi Arabia when there were hostages there. Preschoolers often see the news on the TV when the parents are watching. The parents were shocked that their preschoolers knew about the desert, dress, camels, flag, and many other things about Saudi Arabia. The children were excited that they could relate to the news.

When the children arrive at school, they are impacted by the décor. At the entrance there is something to tell them they are entering different space. When we studied space, they would walk through the planets and space. For India they walked through a temple. For the Middle East they walked through a wall of beads; and we put up a large tent and all sat under it. (It was a large silk parachute.) For East India we had a quiet place to sit with a beautiful real flower in a brass vase. There was also larger than life size poster of Gandhi.

One of our mothers was an artist; and she drew a beautiful picture of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. This same mother was so interested in the cultural studies that she developed ideas for masks representing each culture that the children made. She also demonstrated various necklaces that the children could make. We also had authentic foods from each culture.

At the end of each six weeks study, we had a big celebration. When the children were on the playground, some of the teachers would transfer the learning room into the cultural expressions that we were studying. For instance, for the Oriental culture, we lowered the tab the floor; when the children came, we had them take off their shoes. They wore Chinese hats, and we ate Chinese food. The teachers also wore Chinese clothes. Some years it was Japanese or other Oriental cultures.

We often had guest speakers who shared their cultural experiences with the children. One year some of our children did traditional Japanese dances for us with their kimonos on. There was an active Japanese Buddhist church in Watsonville. We often went on a field trip to see it. We also had a Japanese garden area in our city park.

Another time we are invited to a home of a student, who was celebrating Japanese Girls Day and had her living room filled with beautiful Japanese dolls. Her mother shared some traditional food with the children. Parents enjoy sharing about their traditions.

THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Of course the curriculum is much more comprehensive than the multi-cultural studies. In the room children experience four distinct areas for the four areas of the curriculum.

Basic. In the Basic area they learn the tools or skills necessary for all humans such as colors, numbers, letters, shapes, beginning reading and writing, and can explore many manipulative materials using their marvelous imaginations. They also learn to write, communicate, and problem solve.

Relational. In the Relational area a social science program is provided, which enables the child to see the self in relationship to family, community, nations, the world, and the universe. The child is also led to see the self in relationship with the past, present, and the future.

Psychological. In the Psychological area children are provided experiences in art, music, literature, and physical education to enable them to express and accept his/her physical and emotional needs. Each child is encouraged to learn how to express his/her feelings.

Imaginal. In the Imaginal area each child is helped to see his/her life as it really is – with *limits* which I cannot change and therefore must accept, *possibilities* – talents, potential, future; and *decisional lifestyle* – what is needed to be an individual in my part of the world, the ability to decide how to live each moment.

In the ICA preschool these four categories run through the year's curriculum. Along the top of the curriculum are the categories political, economic, and cultural. Looking at the global grid, the northern hemisphere falls under political as their biggest concern; the southern hemisphere is under the economic; and the eastern hemisphere is under the cultural.

It is hoped that the children and adults involved in the school can be helped to balance the significance of the cultural with the seemingly pervading political and economic concerns of our society. If it should swing the other way, such as in the Middle Ages when the churches controlled society, then the political and economic parts of the curriculum would be emphasized. Or teaching this curriculum in India, there could be only one unit on the cultural since that is their gift, and three on the economic and political since that is where they need more awareness. This gift of being able to "bend" the curriculum to meet the felt needs of the people you are working with, is a fascinating and powerful tool.

I've heard people saying "you are brainwashing" people." What I don't understand is that all teaching is brainwashing. It depends on whether or not you are willing to be conscious about what you are doing and decide to be intentional and responsible. Education has often been used to brainwash people politically. Imaginal Education

provides the vehicle for people to be truly free and responsible by educating their lifestyle as well as their mind.

Another aspect of the curriculum, which is fascinating to me, is the way the curriculum interfaces the four framework areas with political, economic, and cultural. For instance, we begin each year with our western culture. The basic area fits in with our rationality. In the psychological area we need to cover all the rules and safety measures and the tasks that the children need to do in school. This also fits into our society's need for order. In the relational we learn why order, justice, and welfare are important in school, at home, and in the community. This political dimension is what is the major operating image of the Western Hemisphere. In the imaginal area, we affirm our self-esteem by talking about how important our ideas are, how explorers risked acting on their ideas, how Einstein's theory of relativity changed the world forever by helping us to understand we do not live in a fixed universe, but can decide each day how we will respond. The study of the whole universe helps children to see how they are related to all that is.

This same premise holds true in studying the other units. The economic unit fits in beautifully with the study of the countries of the southern hemisphere because this is their main concern with life. The study of food, clothing, shelter in the relational and the study of resource, production, tools, distribution, human resources and their preoccupation with time/space fit together. For the Middle East their interest in the myths and stories of their heritage helps us understand their preoccupation with fate. The Oriental cultures emphasize community and the family along with complementary dualism. In India the mystery of life is important and how every living thing is in unity. In the African culture the internal vitality and "dance to life" is embraced.

One of the goals of the curriculum is to enable each person to be a "Universe Person" at the end of the year's journey: a person who can embrace all the peoples of the world and honor their uniqueness and yet decide to learn from each. This is a much different concept than a "melting pot". It does not mean all the cultures melt into one expression. I have heard the words a "quilt" or "stew" used to explain "Universe Person". They are helpful to me because each square of a quilt and each vegetable in a stew retain their own identity, but together they make something that could not be made on their own.

The songs and rituals developed ICA preschool are among its richest gifts. Of all the things that were taught with Imaginal Education, I think that the songs and rituals carry the most lasting effect. It is amazing to see changes in people after they have internalized them. To me, the change in the teachers was the most dramatic. There is no way you can start the morning singing:

"Life is good, and we can shout
With the sun and the moon and stars"

without feeling good afterward. There are other songs that deal with life's limits. One of these is:

"I am always running into doors that shut,
But I can live no matter what.
I'm alive and here I am,
I decide as the only one who can."

One December we had gone on a field trip to cut down a Christmas tree and then set it up in the classroom. The children had made their own beautiful dough ornaments. We were hanging them on the tree when the tree fell over. Some of the ornaments were ruined. One of the teachers started singing, "I'm always running into doors that shut ...". The situation was still painful; but it was amazing how singing that song helped us to appropriate to situation and somehow made us feel better!

Sometimes when teaching very young children, I wonder if they are able to internalize what we are teaching. I found out later with our own two daughters that Imaginal Education does work beautifully to build a person's self-esteem empowers them with critical thinking skills, a global perspective, social skills, and academic skills - to name a few of the gifts! But when I was first starting to teach preschool, I was somewhat skeptical because the children couldn't express to you what they were learning.

A preschool mother helped me to see some of this was working. She told me that when her son was being wheeled out of the recovery room following an operation, and was still semi conscious, he was singing some of the Imaginal Education songs. To me that meant that he was able to use the wisdom in the songs at an unconscious level to help him with his situation.

Another example was a little boy who didn't like himself very much. At the first of the school year he came in and smashed his image of himself in the playhouse mirror. Toward the end of the school year, he came in and threw his arms out and said, "Here I am." We really celebrated that event! One of the presuppositions of Imaginal Education is that people operate out of images and images can be changed. He certainly demonstrated that!

The most authentic tests of whether a curriculum works or does not work is my own life. I can truthfully say that my own life is transformed the more I teach Imaginal Education. It had been so easy for me in the past to fall into the "victim image" role where I thought life wasn't fair or that things were someone else's responsibility. Hearing the songs and rituals daily helps me tremendously as well as planning and teaching the comprehensive curriculum.

There are many other aspects of Imaginal Education that I have not touched on because I would need to write the entire book, instead of a chapter, to cover all of them. The methods such as the art form method of questioning, the charting method, and the workshop method are all used at Community Interplay Preschool and in my classroom. They are wonderful methods for helping children to raise their consciousness and enable them to be decision-makers.

After 25 years of teaching Imaginal Education, I still get just as excited when I introduce the curriculum or songs and rituals to students, teachers or parents. For the past five years I have been teaching in a public school. My class was invited to share some Imaginal Education in front of the School Board. The members were impressed with the enthusiasm of my classes as they sang and answered questions about the songs and rituals. Over 80% of our school are on a school lunch program. We have many low-income and one parent families. The parents that came were so proud. The Superintendent (National Superintendent of the Year 1992) presented each child in my

room with a rainbow colored ribbon that said, "You are special". The superintendent understands the importance of self-esteem. She has visited my classroom several times.

The multicultural program, which Barbara Cook, the other Pre-to-First grade teacher, and I do, was awarded a \$500 mini grant for the 1991-92 school year. With this money we bought cloth material so that each child could wear some clothes, which are an expression of the culture we are studying for that unit's celebration. We also made a video of all the celebrations. We presented the video to each of the children to keep and gave copies to our school library and the District Office.

Our school principal is also a strong supporter of Imaginal Education. She has received several major awards, such as Principal of the Year. She has nominated me for several awards. She also helps steer information to me, such as visitors from other countries. She encourages me to share methods with other teachers. She came to each of our cultural celebrations. For our space celebration she showed the children actual life-sized moving pictures of the astronauts in the Space Shuttle.

My husband, Wendell Clutz, has been a partner and colleague in all of my work. He was instrumental in helping to start Community Interplay Preschool. He also used Imaginal Education to train adults in study methods and team building.