

A Moving Experience

By Sonja H. Sutherland

I awoke Tuesday morning excited to start the new school year with lots of fun ideas for teaching. Over the years, the children and I have developed many movement games. I bring to our movement classes my background in dance as well as my ongoing interest and training in the Feldenkrais Method® and in the martial art Aikido. Your children bring their enthusiasm, love for fun, and their honesty. Together we develop engaging games which focus on integrating physical, emotional and mental aspects of developmental learning. We play with the essence of embodied education— learning through moving, learning in action.

As the movement specialist at Aurora, my first day back to school this fall was Tuesday, September 11th-- a day that so many of us will never forget. Just before heading off to school, I turned on the news. Images of the world trade tower collapsing filled the screen. Feelings of sadness, helplessness, and disbelief swept over me. The world as I've known it had radically changed. Before beginning my classes that morning, I asked a few teachers how they were managing this crisis. They had all had a meeting in the morning to talk about how to work with the children through this time. They passed on this information to me, but I felt overwhelmed and in a daze. How could I hold this experience myself? As I was still lingering around wondering how to begin my school year, one teacher said: "Thank goodness for the children. It is so healing to work with them."

I took a deep breath and headed off to round up my first class for movement. The children blessed me with their enthusiasm, with their love, with their inquisitive minds, and their emotional presence. We played. We laughed. We explored how we could twist, turn, jump and whirl. I could feel their great sense of joy when they were twirling gleefully with one another. We played group games. Someone got angry and screamed; someone else's feelings got hurt and cried. With my own emotional state heightened on this historic day, I clearly identified with the children's dramatic responses when their game didn't go as they had planned or hoped. I could feel our motions and emotions flying through time and space. We took breaks and worked together to resolve the situations at hand. I felt a renewed sense of commitment to my conviction of how important it is to address our feelings and learn to manage them in healthy, constructive manners. To learn to deal with life not just by developing our minds, but also our hearts; not just our words, but our actions.

I am grateful to be part of the Aurora staff which honors experiential, integrative learning. And I am grateful to be working with your children, with whom I have the opportunity to practice "Learning in Action".