

Form and Freedom: Two Parts of a Whole

What does it mean to find a place where these two seeming opposites work together to free life force? Drawing on the wisdom of each of the extremes we just discussed, we can find some guiding questions:

- on the one hand, how can we let the children's desires and dreams inform us of their deeper needs?
- on the other, how can we let our own wisdom and the wisdom of those who have gone before both help us meet the child's needs and also lighten our load?

1) the wisdom of the children's desires and dreams:

What does it mean to allow the child's desires to determine the day? to answer this, for a start, we can look at ourselves and our own experience of life and ask "what would it mean for "I want" to guide our days? If we went through a day driven exclusively by our wants, what would happen? How many of us would prepare three meals? Driven solely by "I want" how many of us would get up in the middle of the night for the fourth time with a hungry, tired, or sick child? How many of us would eat well ourselves and engage in enough physical activity to stay healthy? Driven solely by "I want," in all honesty, how many of us would, at some point, walk out on a child who is behaving "less than his best"?

The vast majority of us adult humans would not fare very well, let alone do well by our children if "I want" was our deepest voice, or the voice that guided our behavior.

Based on both experience and belief, Enki Education rests on the premise that we all have a much deeper wisdom that lies beneath the voice of "I want." We do not believe that this is some heavy-handed, oppressive superego. Rather, this is the voice of connectedness: an expression of our connectedness to our own inherent vitality and to the world around us.

Given this outlook, what would it mean to raise a child to believe his own "I want" voice is an expression of his deepest self? Most of the people choosing to read this would find it rather frightening and overwhelming if "I want" was the only voice we could hear, yet all too often we do see this in the world around us. But in the years the child spends with us we have the opportunity to help set his internal compass – would we rather set it toward connecting with his deepest vitality and wisdom, or towards the feelings of desire and aversion that constantly ebb and flow in our, so very human, nature? Wouldn't it be better to bring the child an experience of a guiding force deeper than the voice of "I want"?

Then what of the child's internal drives? He is interested in so many things, and he is so clear about what he wants and needs. We believe that these desires express strong and natural forces like any other and the child's words and desires are certainly telling us something. Sometimes the words (or screams) tell us exactly what he needs; sometimes they don't; either way, we are still the adults who must decide. For example, most of us have had a time when the meal was late and our child begged for ice cream or candy. He is absolutely telling us something very important. He is hungry. And he is even giving us a sophisticated, biochemical read out: his blood sugar is low. But it is rare that we would see ice cream and candy as a good solution to the problem, and even if his blood sugar is so low that these are needed momentarily, we know it is only a momentary solution. Without thought, we will very quickly turn our attention to making sure he eats nourishing food sooner next time.

Another common example is when the over-stimulated child whines and cries that he is bored. Frequently parents respond by giving him more activity, more information, more tasks, and he winds up in tears or wound up and screaming – or all three! On the other hand, we all have seen and delighted in the young child who spends hours fully absorbed in a little mud, perceiving what the poet William Blake described as “the world in a grain of sand.”

Far more often than not, the voice complaining of boredom is not saying, “I need more,” but rather, “I need less because I can't settle down to connect with what is right in front of me.” We live in a world of great richness, so what does it mean to be bored? Basically, it means we have disconnected. That is certainly because we need something we are not getting. Maybe that something is “more,” but more often than not, that something is down time, rhythm, quiet – i.e. “less.”

So in the Enki approach, the child's expressed needs and wishes are very important, fully critical *pieces of information*, but it is up to the adult to listen to the deepest voice of wisdom and vitality underneath the child's words, and discern whether his words tell of precisely what he needs or point to something else, even the opposite of what he says. It is the adult's job to listen to what the child says, even demands, and then perceive the core need beneath that – this deep perception is far too much to ask of any child.

2) drawing on our own wisdom and the wisdom of those who have gone before:

In choosing to see the children's expressed desires as information about their deeper needs, but not as instructions, we open ourselves to the underlying truth of parenting and teaching: there really are no proofs. We cannot say, “Well, the child wanted it so it is his fault.” And we cannot say, “Well, I followed the prescribed method so it is not my fault if my child fell apart.” Once we accept this, we realize that we are standing without proofs or backing, and, ultimately, we are left with only our own wisdom – or the deepest wisdom we can access at the moment – to lean on.

In truth, even if we listened to the child's "I wants," or the experts "I promise," **we** are still the ones making this choice. If we are facing reality, there is no way around it: we have only our own wisdom to rely on.

This does not mean we cannot learn from others; we must. But it does mean that we recognize that each of us must choose who to trust, and, to the best of our ability, we make that decision guided by our inner wisdom.

Mother in Ohio:

The "baby" was heading for three and I couldn't seem to get my mother-in-law's voice out of my head. She was an educator, had raised three children, and I really wanted to feel she was a well-informed source of support – but I didn't. I had been listening to her views and proofs for almost four years now (since the pregnancy announcement), and with each passing year and each milestone, I felt worse and worse.

Early on, I set out to become the expert, someone entitled to my own opinions. I was at the library so often I think they considered calling the police - or erecting a monument to me! I read everything I could and watched so many podcasts and TED talks that I think I burned out my computer – certainly my brain! With each author's or speaker's all-knowing enthusiasm, I became sure that his or hers was the best way to raise my precious little guy. I would get it right!

Now my child was three and I certainly didn't want to miss any sensitive period for learning – and I had learned enough to know I should call these sensitive periods and not "critical moments!" But I was lost. I felt I should be offering him something, and I was just lost in a sea of other people's ideas, and, worse yet, their conflicting proofs.

So where *is* the proof that any approach will be the best?

No Guarantees but the Grave

Let's start right there, in the eye of the "decision making storm," with a simple and undeniable truth: we can offer no proof, and neither can anyone else. **There are no proofs possible.**

That is a hard truth, but also a freeing one, and, regardless it is an unavoidable truth; anyone who tells you otherwise is foolish or dishonest. No matter what sales pitch or statistics or brilliant innovative promise someone offers, only you, the parents and teachers living the moment to moment reality, can decide what you believe, what you think best to offer the child. Proof or no proof, the question of what to believe rests with you. Period.

Maybe what you have heard of Enki so far seems inspiring, or maybe questionable, but whatever approach you ultimately choose, that decision rests on you. So how can we best make it?

As already implied, the teacher – whether at home or in the classroom – stands as the fulcrum between the outer world and the child’s opportunities and experiences. As the fulcrum, she must decide. We see three major elements with which we all engage when making this important decision – and with which we *must* engage, whether consciously or not. These are unavoidable parts of life, much as we can’t help but engage with air and water and soil, whether we attend to their toxicity and sustainability, or not. These elements are:

- Harmonic Resonance
- Holding Strong-back/Soft-front
- Dancing the Dance