

# **Imitation, Interaction and Recognition Communication between Children and Adults in the Waldorf Kindergarten**

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**ABSTRACT.** In Steiner's educational lectures, there is a strong focus on the role of imitation during a child's first years of life (Steiner, 2003). According to Steiner, imitation provides important impulses for childhood development and later manifests itself throughout life as a source for independent thinking and sociability. However, imitation in Steiner's oeuvre is mainly presented through an emphasis on the responsibility of adults as role models and through explicating the processes children undergo when they imitate adults. There is little discussion of mutuality and interacting communication between children and adults. This article focuses on why interaction, recognition and mutuality should be given a more prominent position within Waldorf kindergarten pedagogy. By highlighting selected educational thinkers and research, a transition during the 20th century is illustrated, demonstrating a shift from a more individual-focused pedagogy to an orientation towards interaction and relations. Relevant and contemporary approaches to understanding interaction and communication between children and adults are presented. The idea is that these perspectives may inspire an expanded understanding of imitation and a reconsideration of what is at stake in the interaction between children and adults. The argument is that Steiner's statements regarding imitation will not lose their significance, but that an element of dialogue and response can be added and thus enrich the understanding of human and material encounters in the Waldorf kindergarten.

*Keywords:* imitation, interaction, communication, kindergarten, role of adults

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG.** Die Bedeutung der Nachahmung während der ersten Lebensjahre eines Kindes werden in Steiners pädagogischen Vorträgen immer wieder besonders betont (Steiner, 2003). Nach Steiner liefert die Nachahmung wichtige Impulse für die Entwicklung in den ersten sieben Jahren der Kindheit und manifestiert sich im Laufe des weiteren Lebens als Quelle für eigenständiges Denken und Gemeinschaftsfähigkeit. Allerdings wird die Nachahmung in Steiners Werk hauptsächlich dargestellt mit Bezug auf die Verantwortung von Erwachsenen als Vorbilder und durch die Beschreibung jener Prozesse, die in Kindern vorgehen, wenn sie Erwachsene nachahmen. Es gibt bei Steiner wenig Diskussion über mögliche Gegenseitigkeit und interagierende Kommunikation zwischen Kindern und Erwachsenen. Dieser Artikel konzentriert sich auf die Darstellung von Gründen, weshalb Interaktion, Anerkennung und Gegenseitigkeit eine zentralere Stellung in der Waldorfpädagogik im Kindergartenbereich gegeben werden sollten. Indem ausgewählte pädagogische Denker und entsprechende Forschungsergebnisse hervorgehoben werden, zeigt er, wie im 20. Jahrhundert ein allmählicher Übergang von einer am Individuum orientierten Pädagogik hin zu einer Orientierung an Interaktion und Beziehung stattgefunden hat. Relevante und zeitgemäße Ansätze zum Verständnis der Interaktion und Kommunikation zwischen Kindern und Erwachsenen werden vorgestellt. Die Idee ist, dass diese Perspektiven

zu einem erweiterten Verständnis der kindlichen Nachahmung beitragen und zu neuen Überlegungen darüber inspirieren können, worum es in der Interaktion zwischen Kindern und Erwachsenen geht. Steiners Aussagen über die Nachahmung sollten nicht an Bedeutung verlieren, sondern eher ein Element des Dialogs darstellen, das die unterschiedlichen Modi der Begegnung im Waldorfkindergarten fördert.

*Schlüsselwörter:* Nachahmung, Interaktion, Kommunikation, Kindergarten, Rolle der Erwachsenen

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Four major relational themes have framed Waldorf pedagogy in kindergartens. They are sensing, movement, imitation and play. All four take place in dynamic interactions between children, adults and their surroundings. Current research and the ideas of Waldorf pedagogy agree that emphasis should be placed precisely on fertile sensory experiences, movement, good encounters with people and the world, as well as active play during childhood (Nicol, 2010; Patzlaff & Sassmannshausen, 2007; Pillow, 2012; Sobo, 2014; Steiner, 2003; Wasserman & Zambo, 2013). Imitation is at the core of these four activities as it is based on sensing and movement and flows into play, creating an organic relationship between them. Rhythms also play a prominent role in Waldorf kindergartens, but this topic will only be included here in the form of rhythmic communication and interaction between children and adults.

Steiner's educational lectures have a strong focus on the role of imitation during a child's first years of life (Steiner, 2003). Children perceive and process human acts through imitation. According to Steiner, imitation is the most important impulse for development because it enables deeper forms of communication between children and adults at the same time that it nourishes and forms the developing organism of children (Steiner, 1997a, 2003). In Steiner's lectures, imitation is presented mainly through an emphasis on the responsibility of adults as role models and through the processes that children undergo when they imitate adults. There is little discussion of mutuality and interacting communication between children and adults. This article focuses on why interaction, recognition and mutuality should be given a more prominent position within the thinking at the heart of Waldorf kindergarten pedagogy.

Sensing is a child's gateway to the community and to the world, but also to their own bodies. Waldorf pedagogy for the first years of life is based on the idea that a child will not find a safe developmental path until this gateway has been opened in a good way, when there is trust and a breathing balance in the communication between the outside world and the child's inner life (Steiner, 1996b). Movement is children's natural response to what they experience through their senses. Children use movement to explore themselves and their relations with people and things (Darian, 2012). Movement is communication and children speak and perceive the profound language of movement long before verbal words and thoughts are expressed (Johansson & White, 2011). Imitation unifies the activity of sensing and movement with sensitivity and participation in the social community (Steiner, 1996b, 2003). The ability to imitate makes it possible to actively experience another person's actions and behaviour. Also feelings and thoughts can be imitated, as expressed in the face, eyes and body language (Steiner, 2003; Wulf, 2011). Furthermore, imitation feeds play and thus provides a social foundation for children's freer, self-guided and exploratory activities when they are playing. Play takes place though deeply-concentrated solo activities and in dynamic and pulsating social constellations (Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013). Children's relations with people, nature and artefacts are explored and developed through play (Else, 2014; Jaffke, 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009). Play is also seen as important preparation for subsequent development of thinking and scientific understanding (Schwartz, 2008). In all these activities, imitation plays a crucial role. Through imitation, children internalise what goes on in their surroundings and express their interpretations and responses to these events. Imitation gives direction and energy to sensing, movements and play.

Each of the four relational themes can be seen more from the perspective of the individual child as creative abilities related to self-realisation and development. In addition, they can be viewed as social activities where relationships and interaction are in focus. When adults serve as good role models and create safe settings for play and interaction, this provides a foundation for children to learn and develop through

these four basic activities. However, the role of adults represents more than creating a good setting and being role models and the protectors of children. The quality of adults' presence, attitudes and their interactions with children are also important in terms of how imitation and play, sensing and movement can be good, nourishing experiences (Løndal & Greve, 2015). As a consequence of approaching each other through visual engagement, words and actions, children can feel that they have been seen, recognised and included (Gjems, 2009; Rochat & Passos-Ferreira, 2009; Skoglund & Åmot, 2012). By presenting a set of ideas regarding the significance of communication between children and adults, this article seeks to provide a foundation for the understanding of educators' concrete interaction and work with children. We argue that interaction, recognition and responses constitute a fifth relational core theme in Waldorf pedagogy which covers and vitalises the four themes mentioned.

## Imitation by children and adult role models

The pedagogical value of imitation was already known in antiquity, especially through Aristotle's term *mimesis*. It has since been considered a basic principle for development and learning (Wulf, 2011). Who can learn to ski, dance, speak their mother tongue or cook without imitating others? Most of Steiner's numerous books on education address the important role of imitation during childhood: imitation has consequently been a key theme related to the interaction between children and adults in Waldorf kindergartens. In brief, Steiner split the theme of imitation into two main approaches: one from the perspective of children, according to their abilities and needs, the other based on the responsibility imposed on adults in the presence of children. Steiner was concerned with children realising their natural zest for life and maintaining their developmental energy through imitation (Steiner, 1996d). According to Steiner, imitation is a main impulse for children's development: „Children imitate what they see because they necessarily develop according to how they are connected with their surroundings“ (Steiner, 1996b, p. 105). Here Steiner's thinking finds a parallel in Vygotsky's understanding of development, where the environment also plays an important role (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003; Veer & Valsiner, 1991). They both focus on how the environment around children is internalised and stimulates development. Steiner views young children as almost transparent in relation to their surroundings, as open sensory organs (Steiner, 1996a, 1996b), and claims that sensory impressions have a great impact on children's bodies and their development of will (Steiner, 1995, 1996b). According to Steiner, imitation nourishes children's organic development (Steiner, 1996b, 1996d, 2004b). This view implies that a child's opportunities for development and learning are strongly linked to the type of role models he or she encounters.

Steiner spoke repeatedly of the responsibilities and tasks of adults being worthy examples for children (Steiner, 1996b, 2003). He was concerned with both what adults do and who the adult is. This applied to everything from language, facial expressions, thoughts and feelings, to movement and actions (Steiner, 1996c, 2003, 2004b). According to Steiner, this demands an ongoing process of self-development on the part of kindergarten educators in order to be able to encounter young children in a good and authentic way (Steiner, 2003, 2004b). When children imitate adults in a Waldorf kindergarten, emphasis is placed on the type of role model that adults are for children, the type of activities and attitudes children encounter with adults (Steiner, 2003). This is why the education and increase in the awareness of adults' ways of being and forms of expression are part of the training of kindergarten educators (Howard, 2006; Reistad, 2015). How do I talk to the children? How do I stand and move? What about my gaze, my facial expressions and ways of moving? Steiner's emphasis on the adult's responsibility as a role model for children has led to a culture in Waldorf kindergartens worldwide, where adults seek to be good role models and where they are active in performing tasks that give children rich opportunities for imitation (Nicol, 2010). Many of these activities are based on practicalities in the kindergarten, related to food, housework and simple crafts. In many ways, the two approaches to imitation – the child's openness and longing to imitate his or her surroundings and the adult's attentive and responsible presence – go together. It is possible to say that they constitute a shared ecology, where the child's needs and talents can be met and stimulated by adults who consciously shape an environment that invites versatile and nourishing imitation.

## Deep trust and a starting-point for freedom

Steiner elaborated on his understanding of children's imitation by making reference to children's deep trust in the world. He claimed that when children imitate adults, the impulse resembles a „religious ritual“ (Steiner, 1996a, s. 45). Based on his anthroposophy, Steiner argued that children's unconscious expectations that they will encounter a good world and good adults whom they can imitate is based on prenatal experiences. He maintained that the immediacy and intimacy between children and spiritual beings before birth continue to characterise how children expect to be encountered by adults during their first years of life (Steiner, 1996d). According to Steiner, children's deep trust in the world affords moral ties between adults and children. Through their actions and behaviours, adults greatly influence what children perceive as right and wrong (Steiner, 1996c). Plato and Aristotle linked imitation to moral development, so here Steiner aligns with a long pedagogical tradition (Lord, 1982; Scolnicov, 1988). Aristotle, in particular, maintained that goodness is learned through role models (Kristjánsson, 2007). For Steiner, children's receptiveness to morality requires an ethical responsibility from adults (Steiner, 1997b, 2003). Through their behaviours and ways of being, adults can become participants in children's moral development and provide important impulses to what children perceive as right or wrong.

Moreover, Steiner puts imitation in a lifelong developmental perspective. In addition to its importance in terms of morality, he claimed that the abilities in the child that allow imitation are the same that will later be used for independent thinking (2004a). In its own way, imitation already entails a form of bodily and situated thinking. Children experience and understand the world by mimicking and participating in activities. At present, Steiner's arguments have been followed up by research on bodily and situated cognition (Lankoski & Järvelä, 2013; Robbins & Aydede, 2009; Wilson, 2002). Thinking is no longer linked only to what happens in one's head. This research focuses on how performing meaningful acts is a way of thinking. In addition to viewing imitation as being a gateway to independent thought, Steiner maintains that children who have trustingly imitated good adult behaviours are better prepared, socially and democratically, when they grow up (Steiner, 1997a). Steiner even attributes the ability to achieve greater freedom as an adult to good experiences with imitation during childhood (Steiner, 1996d, 1997a). For Steiner, the apparently external character of imitation is a genuine and active link between children and adults, where a foundation is laid for later thinking, socialisation and individual freedom. Such perspectives can lead to deep respect for what may be at stake when children meet and imitate adult role models.

## Continuing to build on a valuable tradition

Attention to the opportunities afforded by imitation can turn the most elementary relations, i.e. children and adults being together, into pedagogical opportunities and challenges. In Steiner's writings, imitation is presented as a profound existential phenomenon, where children associate with the world, where they develop their bodies and will and lay the foundation for greater independence and sociability later in life. Being oriented towards imitation is, without a doubt, one of the most important and most valuable principles in Waldorf kindergarten pedagogy. However, as shown in the examples above, Steiner does not focus much on interaction and response. One exception is his emphasis on adults using natural language when talking to children and not adopting artificial child-like ways of speaking: „We really do a great wrong when we change our normal way of speaking to 'suit' a child, for children always want to imitate us as we really are, not as we pretend to be“ (Steiner, 2003, p. 112). This quote should not be understood to mean that adults must not approach and respond to children's forms of communication, but instead invites adults to be adults in the best possible sense when they communicate with children. Otherwise, Steiner scarcely looked at the interaction that may take place when a child imitates an adult. He did not say much about how adults can or should respond to children's queries or activities. Overall, the example on which Steiner focused was adults' behaviour in front of children and not the rhythmic communication where words and actions pulsate back and forth between children and adults.

Imitation primarily means that children take in and respond to acts or gestures by other people, but it does not imply that there must be a direct communication. Imitation can take place both in secret and at a

distance. The intensity in relations that arises when people talk to each other, do something together and take turns responding to each other is another matter entirely. The importance of mutuality in communication is a pedagogical topic that has become increasingly relevant since Steiner lived. The 20th century has seen a gradual transition from more individual-focused pedagogy to an orientation towards interaction and relations (Skoglund & Åmot, 2013). From 2000–2012, for example, most Scandinavian doctoral theses written about children up to age three focus on interaction (Bjørnstad & Samuelsson, 2012). In the following, different approaches to interaction and communication between children and adults will be presented. The idea is that these perspectives may inspire an expanded understanding of imitation and what is at stake in the interaction between children and adults. Steiner's statements regarding imitation will thus not lose their value, but an element of dialogue and response can be added to and enrich the understanding of human and material encounters in the kindergarten.

### **Interaction, recognition and response**

Contemporaneous with Steiner, George Herbert Mead conceived how responsive and recognising communication has a deep impact on the formation of a person's self (Biesta 2012; Mead, 1992). Mead considers reciprocal communication the very driving force of the development of self and consciousness. Mead's theory of mutual communicative development shares basic assumptions with Steiner's view of how the I-sense is active during communication (Steiner, 1996c). German humanist education (*Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*) have similarly focused on the human encounter and its spectre of educational possibilities and qualities (Koskela & Siljander, 2014; Wulf, 2003). In particular, Otto von Bollnow developed rich ideas on several dimensions of human encounters. He discussed how dialogues, impulses and calls from others can awaken deep existential motives in children (Bollnow, 1959). Shortly after, John Bowlby presented his theory about the importance of secure attachment in early childhood (Bowlby, 1988; Marrone, 2014). Mary Ainsworth conducted further research on Bowlby's attachment psychology and found that young children appeared to react differently to stress, depending on how secure they were in their relationship with their mother. This is how she developed a theory of different attachment types and showed that children's basic relationship with their mother, or nearest caregiver, was a critical factor in terms of how they behaved in difficult social situations (Ainsworth, Blehar, Wall, & Waters, 2014). Knowledge of children's attachment types can be valuable for an educator who must interpret rebuffing, aggressive, anxious or safe behaviour among children. Donald Winnicott further explored the consequences of how adults pick up on and respond to children's experiences. He studied what happens when adults mirror children in a confirming and recognising manner and pointed at how memories and experiences are lost to the child if they are not received and reflected back from an adult:

The sense of self comes on the basis of an unintegrated state which, however, by definition, is not observed and remembered by the individual, and which is lost unless observed and mirrored back by someone who is trusted and who justifies the trust and meets the dependence. (Winnicott, 2009, p. 82)

Adults' responses anchor the child to the world and provide impulses that allow children to integrate their experiences well. According to Winnicott, children do not become themselves until their communication has been confirmed by an adult.

Today, close, mutual, responding and safe relations are considered a basic constituent of children's development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Steinberg, Vandell, & Bornstein, 2011). Researchers point out how imitation, itself, is not enough. Instead, imitation is regarded as providing a starting-point for mutuality and interaction in relations between children and adults:

Imitation provides a basic sense of social connectedness and mutual acknowledgment of existing with others that are 'like me'. However, it does not allow for the co-construction of meanings with others. For human sociality to develop, imitation and mirroring processes need to be supplemented by an open system of reciprocation. (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira, 2009, p. 191)

Imitation is thus seen as a beginning, as a „seed that can only grow in the context of reciprocal exchanges with more advanced and cultured others“ (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira, 2009, p. 209). While clearly recognising imitation as a necessary quality of relations between children and adults, the authors contend that full human sociality will first develop through mutual interaction.

In addition to viewing children's imitation as a starting-point for interaction, research also points out the importance of imitation taking place mutually between children and adults. What happens when adults imitate children? Over, Carpenter, Spears & Gattis (2013) found that children in kindergartens imitate adults more frequently when beforehand, the adults have imitated the children. Imitation thus creates mutual trust and allows deeper forms of interaction. Mutual relations in childhood have also turned out to be of great importance in later schooling, higher education and life as an adult (Riley, 2011). These more recent theories share the idea that imitation needs to be expanded with a greater focus on interaction, on what happens when people address each other, recognise each other and give feedback (Over & Carpenter, 2013; Zayas & Hazan, 2015). The value of two-way communication in kindergarten is thus generally highlighted, compared with when adults unilaterally address children or primarily serve as role models (Gjems, 2009; Singer, Nederend, Penninx, Tajik, & Boom, 2014). In other relevant research traditions, communication is perceived as a form of musicality or mutual 'dance' (Bråten, 2006, 2009; S. Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009a; Stern, 2000). Jon Roar Bjørkvold has, for example, detailed the educational implications of musical qualities within communication between children and adults (1992). All of this can be summarised into stating that something very important takes place between people when they participate in active communication and interaction. Four of the aforementioned theories will be presented in further detail in the following.

## **The sacred room of communication**

The American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, George Herbert Mead, was interested in understanding human development (Mead, 1992, p. 198). A key theme in his writings was how communication and interaction provide impulses for development of the self. Mead's ideas have become increasingly relevant to current pedagogical thinkers who, like him, are interested in the social and relational aspects of pedagogy (Biesta 2012; Martin, 2010; Oelkers, 2008). Contemporaneously, Martin Buber also wrote on human communication and its deep significance in human life (Buber, 2013). Both of these thinkers saw interaction and mutual relations as the hub of the world, where both development and life's most important events occur.

Mead suggests that the human self undergoes a development from the role-playing of young children to the social, rules-driven games of youngsters, up to the adult self, freely interacting with society as a whole. According to Mead, it is the ability to act and communicate with others that enriches and develops the self. Mead asserted that after approximately the age of two, children's role-playing becomes more advanced as they put themselves in the place of other known figures. The child now creates dialogues where the mother, father, doctor etc. play their parts, and the child thereby makes his or her first immature experiences of taking on the roles of the others. Mead found that a critical point in development arrives when a young person is able to participate in games with set rules and several participants. In order to do this, the game's and thus the community's rules must be internalised within each of the participants. Subsequently, according to Mead, when adults can hold a similar representation of all of society, they have achieved full maturation of the self. An accomplished participant in play, games and society will thus acquire and internalise other people's attitudes and roles in constantly new ways. In addition to taking in attitudes and roles of others, the same participant will need to be an active and expressive contributor in the act of communication. Both the ability to acquire attitudes and roles from others and the capacity to express oneself are necessary in order to achieve such mutually developing relations. In this way, Mead contended that the source of the development of the self lies in communication whereby participants mutually recognise and respond to each other.

Mead understood the self as having two sides: 'I' and 'me' (Biesta, 1998; Mead, 1992). 'Me' corresponds to the internalised community; the 'me' that carries social conventions, laws, rules and accepted behaviours. In contrast, Mead asserts that 'I' represents spontaneous reactions towards 'me'. 'I' means opportunities

for innovation, unpredicted responses and breaks with the established. An interaction where both aspects of the self are mutually present thus provides an open space in communication where something new can enter the world. Such a process means that each party takes in the other's expressions and responds to them in a mirroring way. Concurrently, each participant also possibly brings something new and unique to the dialogue. Both will then recognise something of themselves in the response of the other, and at the same time, express their uniqueness. For Mead, it is important that both see an image of themselves in each other; that both experience their uniqueness mirrored in the other. A spark of development is kindled when a person sees him or herself reflected in an accepting way by others. According to Mead, this is the essence of a communication that develops the self. A simple form of love is given to those who can experience themselves in recognising responses of other people.

Mead's thoughts about the development of the self imply that educators in kindergartens are more than role models. According to Mead, the adult's responses are of critical importance to children (Ytterhus, 2001). Such a simple linguistic gesture as repeating children's statements with a warm tone in one's voice and a recognising gaze gives, in this view, something invaluable back to children. Consequently, children can feel that they have been seen or heard and that the adult embraces their statements and reflects them back in a recognising manner (Skoglund & Åmot, 2012). Consider how different a dismissive 'hush' or an impatient linguistic correction would be, compared to a recognising response. Mead's understanding of what can happen during dialogues between adults and children is thus an important supplement to the understanding of imitation in Waldorf pedagogy.

### **The I-sense and communication as sensitivity**

While Steiner said little about the dialogical communication between adults and children in kindergartens, in his pedagogical lectures he pointed out a phenomenon that illuminates face-to-face communication more generally. This applies to his understanding of what happens when two people talk to each other and simultaneously almost unconsciously sense each other's 'I' (Steiner, 1996c). Here, Steiner relates to Max Scheler's phenomenology and the idea that a person can have immediate sympathetic awareness of another person without having to respond via the formation of ideas (Kelly, 2011; Rang, 2002). According to Steiner, the I-sense becomes active in such a way that participants in verbal communication are taking turns sleeping and waking up in each other, without noticing. This is how he explained it, during a lecture for teachers:

As sympathy develops, you go to sleep in the other person; as antipathy develops, you wake up, and so forth. In the vibrations of meeting another person, there is a rapid alternation between waking and sleeping. We have to thank the organ of the I-sense that this can occur. This organ of I-sensing is so formed that it explores the I of another person, not wakefully but in its sleeping will, and then quickly delivers the results of this sleepy exploration to cognition. (Steiner, 1996c, p. 140)

According to Steiner, communication as talking and listening thus consists of an unconscious sensing of each other's 'I' in alternating states of sleep and wake. Taking Steiner's view on sleep into account, may provide a better understanding of what this means. For Steiner, sleep is a state of activity: a sleeping person has experiences only weakly reflected in the dreams or the restfulness experienced next morning. From an anthroposophical perspective, sleep affords unconscious spiritual experiences and entails a form of deeper processing of the impressions and actions of the day (Steiner, 1996b). Steiner thus sees sleep as an everyday mystery where the day's experiences are deepened and organised (Mathisen, 2015, pp. 46, 53). What does it mean to link communication to rhythmically repetitive sleeping and awakening? Following Steiner's thinking, sleep entails an opportunity to feel and experience the other person which transcends waking consciousness. The devoted nature of sleep creates a community in the dialogue that resounds deeply, and which Steiner maintains provides a real encounter with the other person's 'I'. The sleeping into the other not only means a deepened experience of the other, but also implies an enriched awakening into oneself. Thus, according to Steiner, in dialogical communication each participant can acquire a deep experience of the other person's uniqueness and individuality, and they both have the opportunity to grow in this experience.

## Communicative musicality

According to psychologist Colwyn Trevarthen, musicality, movement and rhythm are basic prerequisites of human communication. Together with Stephen Malloch, he developed the notion of *communicative musicality* and its corresponding field of research. Researchers in this field share the view that musicality is a psychobiological capacity that underlies all human communication (Dissanayake, 2009). Malloch and Trevarthen maintain that: „We define musicality as expression of our human desire for cultural learning, our innate skill for moving, remembering and planning in sympathy with others that make appreciation and production of an endless variety of dramatic temporal narratives possible“ (2009b, p. 4). In this context, musicality thus does not primarily apply to abilities and skills related to music, but is considered an innate ability and need to actively communicate. According to these authors, children participate actively in musical and rhythmic interaction with their caregivers from birth, and imitation is a key activity on the part of the child. Imitation is then understood both as an acquisition of skills and as an activity that seeks to achieve mutual interaction and communication where emotions are shared:

More significant than the conclusive demonstrations that imitation is possible within minutes of birth is clear evidence that the infant is motivated not just to acquire a skill for themselves, but to exchange an action that has been given meaning by the other's presentation, and to participate in emotions of shared action and response. (Trevarthen, 2011, p. 177)

Here, Trevarthen arrives at a similar conclusion to Rochat & Passos-Ferreira (2009). Imitation does play a prominent role in children's development-oriented activities, but it is understood to a greater extent as leading into further activities of mutuality and communication.

In his research on infant development, Daniel Stern investigated the wordless, musical and movement-based forms of interaction that, in his understanding of intersubjectivity, constitute an important part of children's early communication. According to Stern (2000), humans are able to combine different sensory perceptions into a perceptual unity from birth. He labels this unity „amodal perception“ and maintains that caregivers and infants share mutual experiences and feelings by matching intensity, temporal patterns and shapes (Stern, 2000, p. 51). This kind of perception shares similarities with the many dimensions of music experience. Trevarthen expresses it this way:

Music of course is a sound image of human body movement in expressive form. It's interesting that the voice has the agility to reproduce any gesture of the hands, and that the hands can imitate the voice. By the combination of prosody with rhythm and articulation – speech and song can gesture like the hands, or like the expressions of the face. (Trondalen & Stensæth, 2012, p. 215)

This type of musicality resembles what Stephen Malloch (2000) found after listening to Trevarthen's recordings of a mother interacting with her young child. Malloch used different musical transcription techniques to elicit musical elements in this material. Using a musically oriented analysis, he showed how mother and child followed each other in melodic patterns, and even pitch, through their conversations. They were rhythmically engaged in musical turn-taking. This adds a musical dimension to the developing patterns of dialogical communication described by Mead (1992). It also expands on Bowlby's (1988) theories about a secure base where protection and stability are the main focus, as it emphasises more active and playful kinds of interaction. Their findings further approach Steiner's view of the I-sense, where there is a rhythmic interaction between the communicative partners. Marwick & Murray (2009) later showed how communicative interaction between a depressed caregiver and a child was less rich musically, and that this loss of musicality had implications for the developing child. The conclusion is that musical qualities within interaction contribute to salutogenetic and emotionally-rich modes of communication.

Trevarthen (2002, 2013) regards dialogues between children and caregivers as a form of musical storytelling where both parts contribute in mutual sympathy. In this sense, imitation can be seen as a beginning, as a gateway to mutual forms of response and interaction: „Infant human beings imitate other humans, not just to act like them, but to enter into a communicative and cooperative relationship with them“ (Trevarthen, 2011, p. 124). The importance and significance of sympathetic and recognising adult responses to the initiatives of the young child is thus highlighted by Trevarthen. Building on Malloch and



Trevarthen's work, Thorjussen (2015) conducted a video study of the musical elements of the verbal and non-verbal communication that took place in the cloakroom of a Waldorf early childhood group, with children aged 1–3. Like Malloch & Trevarthen's studies of infants, Thorjussen's research emphasised the role of adults and their ability to be good listeners as crucial to the quality of the interaction between children and caregivers. He proposed that what is formed between adults and children is not only an intersubjective relationship but also an intermusical interaction, based on an aesthetic awareness on the part of the adult. Theories of intersubjectivity and communicative musicality can thus provide a deepened understanding of educators' communication and interaction with children. The lesson for pedagogical practice is that such musical engagement from the adult is based on and depends on a sympathetic and aesthetic awareness.

## Resonance as a quality of relation

Another aspect of human interaction is taken up by the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa. For many years, he was primarily concerned with the problems caused by life and work moving at an increasingly faster pace. Rosa has written critically on the tyranny of speed and the „intense stress and unease in everyday life“ (Rosa & Scheuerman, 2009, p. 36) that come with the acceleration of time (Rosa, 2010, 2013). In his latest book, Rosa asked what is necessary in order to live a good life in today's accelerated society (2016). His answer is clear: a good life depends less on resources and status than on good relationships with people and nature. Rosa uses the term *resonance* to describe the quality of such good relationships. The concept of resonance is taken from acoustics where the resonating capacity of specific materials and shapes gives musical instruments their timbre and quality of sound. The acoustics of a room and the sensitive vibrations transmitted by the eardrum are, likewise, resonance phenomena. To resonate means to set oneself in swinging movement by responding to something happening in the world. Similar to the way musical instruments reinforce their sound through resonance, Rosa maintains that people can experience a resonance in themselves when they experience the world. He asserts that this is happiness. According to Rosa, resonance relationships are „dynamic interactional events between subject and world, a relation that is fluid and momentous, is process-like. [...] Conceptually, resonance relations do presuppose a rhythmic swinging towards each other“ (2013, p. 55). Here Rosa uses language similar to Steiner's description of the I-sense.

Education may be the area in which the term resonance is most relevant. Rosa views school as a resonance space where very much depends on whether resounding relationships arise between teachers, pupils and subjects. In kindergartens, the idea of resonance relationships can be linked to every type of activity and interaction. Do children experience resonance during story time, when they take part in circle games, make food, get dressed in the cloakroom or when they play outside? Is there mutual resonance in conversations and activities where children and adults are together? Metaphorically, Rosa wants educators to get the 'world to sing' to children (p. 414). Children's eyes will then be 'resonance windows', where the educator can see signs of whether they resound or not (Rosa & Endres, 2016, s. 29).

For Rosa, *Bildung* is not primarily a matter of the acquisition of knowledge or development of individual skills. *Bildung* is about creating resounding relationships with the world. A good upbringing should therefore be characterised by engaging encounters and mutual emotions, and also by the vulnerability and trust that are implicit in such relationships. This is what Rosa writes about the pedagogical interaction between children and adults:

Transformative world relationships are being formed. This means to be engaged in resonant relationships. Concretely, it signals to be open to experience something new or different, to get touched, taken or moved by it, thus allowing oneself to be altered. And this is always accompanied by a certain vulnerability. Schools can and should form a shelter for such relationships to take place. (Rosa & Endres, 2016, p. 18)<sup>1</sup>

The term resonance thus builds on trust and requires openness towards the new and unknown. Showing vulnerability is considered a prerequisite for trust in relationships between people, and Rosa maintains that it is not until relationships of trust are in place that the world will begin to resound. From a pedagogical

1. Translated from German by A.M.

perspective, resonance relationships are characterised by tactfulness. Encounters between people and experiences during play and work can create resonance, but only when the individual is willing or able to resound. Rosa points out that resonance is not an echo. It means that the person has been individually moved or touched, and this may just as well mean resounding with joy, as being upset or reacting with distance (Rosa & Endres, 2016). Resonance is thus not a unilaterally sympathetic phenomenon, but creates space for both empathy and rejection.

In a kindergarten where educators focus on resonance relationships, all participants are invited to experience equal and mutual respect. This makes the kindergarten an arena for responsible adults and competent children. Rosa's view of resonance can thus inspire kindergarten educators to look at children's sensing, movement, imitation and play as possibly resounding relationships between the children and the world. The role of educators is to participate in such relationships, to facilitate them, but also to step back when children, during play or other activities, resonate on their own and resound with the world.

### **Discussion: Interaction in Waldorf kindergarten pedagogy**

While Steiner's presentation of imitation did not focus much on dialogue and interaction between children and adults, he made important contributions to the understanding of what is at stake when children imitate. For kindergarten educators, respect and humility towards young children's openness and trust in imitation can be a source of inspiration, and stimulate a greater focus on their own ways of being and interacting. Interest in children's eagerness to imitate, in their often joyous longing to participate, can tell adults something about the greatness of childhood, but also something about adults' responsibilities towards children. Steiner's dual perspectives in the presentation of the different aspects of imitation – imitation as expressing the child's needs and talents, and imitation as a pedagogical task for adults – can be brought into kindergarten pedagogy as areas for in-depth study, with a focus on dialogue and interaction. The theoretical and empirical research presented in this article concludes that children need interacting, responsive adults in order to develop properly. The focus here is on children's need to encounter a recognising response from adults and their need to be lovingly reflected by adults they trust. Adults can be responsive in numerous ways: it can be reflected in how they talk, the ways they smile, how they move their bodies and how sensitive and affirming they are when touching children.

Mead's understanding of interaction as a foundation for the development of the self, Steiner's I-sense and Rosa's resonance relationships do not primarily build on presented empirical materials. Instead, they refer to recognisable situations in life, to experiences many will acknowledge from their own upbringing and encounters with people. Contrary to these approaches, communicative musicality has been developed in close relation to empirical research. In different ways, the theoretical contributions of Mead, Steiner and Rosa examine deeper motives at work, often unconsciously, in communication and interaction. Mead's focus was on the dual ability of the self to contain the world and to respond individually to situations in life. Development can happen only when participants are active in processes of interaction. Mead's understanding of communication is based on a principle similar to inhalation and exhalation. This is akin to Steiner's description of a rhythmic exchange in the activities of the I-sense. In both cases, internalisation and self-expression complete each other in mutual communicative exchange. The core of Mead's understanding lies in the transformative power of reciprocal mirroring. Mead writes that it is not until two conversational partners experience themselves mirrored in the other that a development of the self is taking place. Inspired by Mead, a kindergarten educator may learn to be aware of how he or she mirrors children's activity or speech. Does the educator provide sufficient time and presence in order to respond in such a way that the child experiences a mirroring of some of his or her activity and being? Steiner's view that adults should talk and act naturally and authentically with children may supplement Mead's ideas here. A response where adults are themselves, use their natural tone of voice and their pedagogical tactfulness should provide the best foundation for good interaction and mirroring.

Like Mead's ideas about the development of the self in dialogical communication, Steiner's understanding of the I-sense's activity during conversation may point to the importance of nurturing linguistic and active

interaction between adults and children in the kindergarten. The immediacy of the experience of the other, which Steiner attributes to the I-sense, says something about what goes on in interaction on a deeply intuitive level. Talking and responding to children can thus be seen as one of the most important educational tasks.

Stern, Malloch and Trevarthen's research appears to be based on rhythmic ways of communication similar to that which Steiner described with his I-sense. Instead of focusing on deeper sensitivity in the form of alternating conditions of sleep and wakefulness, these researchers have described the musical, dancing and also narrative interaction that takes place between young children and their caregivers. An aesthetic and artistic element is highlighted by looking at interaction as musicality. Not only does communication take the form of musical and rhythmic movement, these researchers also place emphasis on the adult needing to develop an aesthetic awareness in encounters and interaction with children. This is parallel to the importance Steiner gives to the responsibility of adults being worthy of children's imitation, to be good role models. Based on Malloch and Trevarthen's research, a renewed emphasis should be made regarding how adults can train and develop their aesthetic attention and broaden their abilities to interact musically with children, as well as expanding their repertoires of emotional responses.

Hartmut Rosa's more sociological approach to relationship building and interaction points to how adults can strive at creating 'resounding' relationships with children and the world. Through the lens of the term 'resonance', kindergarten pedagogy can focus on the qualities of children's responses and on the activities children display in their encounter with adults and the phenomena of the world. Can adults help awaken something in the child that resounds or resonates? Are adults prepared to interpret children's resonance or lack of such? Resounding encounters require relationships characterised by openness, trust and vulnerability: something must be at stake. For a kindergarten educator who is concerned with being a worthy role model for imitating children, attention to children's ways of resonance may provide valuable insights.

To sum up, this article has illuminated relevant perspectives on interaction and communication between adults and children in contemporary kindergarten settings. In different ways, the presented researchers and thinkers maintain that children need interacting and responsive adults in order to develop well and safely. The emphasis has been on children's need to encounter a recognising response from adults and their need to be lovingly mirrored by adults they trust. Children's need to express themselves and their desire to participate are also part of this process. By focusing on mutual interaction, children are more clearly recognised as active subjects. In this way, an equity between children and adults can be concretely expressed. Seeds of human development, spurs towards inner growth and glimpses of the mystery of the other can be found in conversations and interaction. Simply doing something together or talking with each other can become educational, everyday mysteries.

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