

FOREWORD

Since time began, the parent-child relationship has been a “dance” for control... sometimes called a “control drama,” an “influence drama,” or as Dorothy Briggs puts it, “sharing power.” You may see this as you read these pages: at times the parent gives the child power, and at other times, must take it away. This is democracy in discipline, says Briggs, and “comes a bit easier for those who like themselves.”

Rudolph Steiner, in *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, stated a belief (confirmed by present day Steiner leaders) that even newborns have an innate passion for imitation. This is the parents' advantage in this drama. Reading to a baby is an opportunity to use this passion to imitate by planting seeds for relating to books/ and the written word as a vital life skill.

Jean Paul, a German poet (1763-1825) stated that “The Human Being learns more for the whole of life during the first three years than he does during his three years at university.”* What he learns from the power sharing and imitation will impact every relationship in his life.

To survive on his own eventually, the child must learn to make good decisions. Emmi Pikler, the “mother” of *educaring*, shows how the child, as he is given information about what is about to happen, with no distractions, makes associations which will be the basis of later decision-making. With time, given simple and limited choices, he will choose more and more wisely. He thereby earns parents' trust, so they feel comfortable giving him more and more freedom over himself.

Reading or storytelling to a baby is a classic setting for this give and take of power. Following Baby's cues can keep the experience positive and make reading together a gateway to magical possibilities.

Even a very young baby influences his parents in at least three ways: his needs, his expressed likes/dislikes, and giving his parents pleasure. Notice that he is not conscious of doing this; in fact, parents permit it out of their love. They actually create the control out of their desire to have Baby always be happy, comfortable, and a reflection of good parenting.

According to Barry Long (in *Ridding Yourself of Unhappiness*), if carers can let go of focus on Baby's likes/dislikes and their own, their job will immediately become easier, as Baby will not expect to “like” his every moment. As a result, when “likes” finish (as they inevitably must), both Baby and carers will have less unhappiness. When dislikes occur, they will be “what is,” rather than something that must be changed.

You will see in this story how, by starting very early to use the child's intelligence in these ways, parents' tasks of daily care become easier. As the child is invited to participate in his care, *given time to react*, and taught how to help, his brain integrates what he sees his parents/carers do with what he can do. One day, he does it without coaching. Therein lie delightful surprises.

*Quoted by Rudolph Steiner in *The Child's Changing Consciousness*.