

Playground dances

Dakini Maris Warrior

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Autumn 2012 – my daughter Alana Maya begins class 1 at Penpont Primary. Shortly after the parents are asked if they have skills they would like to offer at school. Upon my response that I could offer dances from various traditions I get a phone call asking if I'm free on Friday to lead some dances for a group of girls. I say yes. There are 8 girls, aged between 7 – 9 years, and this is their chosen activity for Friday 'golden time' (last 45 minutes on Friday afternoon if they have finished all their work and behaved well).

We begin with some rhythm play and a name game. There is a lot of excitement and high energy. They get going immediately, talkative and enthusiastic. The first dance is “Wishita”. We only have time for one other dance and our time is up.

I then hear that I am expected to come to school every Friday for 6 weeks. The following week I go to pick up Alana Maya from school and I see a group of girls dancing Wishita on the playground, teaching it to others. Couple of weeks go by and the girls ask me – can we dance Wishita at our Christmas Concert. “If you wish”, I respond. The head teacher puts their names down and we continue our weekly sessions, having lots of fun. One day I tell them the story of Shiva, Parvati and Ganesha. When I say that Shiva goes on top of a mountain to meditate, the girls immediately sit in a lotus position, hold their hands out and chant OM. The following week they storm into the room and say: “Tell us a story, tell us the Ganesha story again.”

“You know it already. Can you now tell it to me?”

“Ok”, they reply and with a few prompts they do.

One day I take some small white stones from Findhorn beach with me. Each one has a word written on it – courage, joy, happiness, strength... There is a big blue cloth on the floor – the ocean. The stones are hiding underneath. I tell the girls a story about Yemaya, the Ocean Goddess. Each one of us throws an offering to the Goddess into the ocean and as the offerings are washed away, we put our hand into the water and find a special gift from Yemaya... Then we dance in her honour. “Can I really take it home?” asks Holly, holding her stone gently. “I will put it to my special treasure place.” “I will carry it with me everywhere I go”, exclaims Jasmine.

Our last time before Christmas. So, I suggest we do some of the favourites as it is our last time together.

“What?” the girls say. “You have to come back, otherwise i'm gonna pretend that i'm ill every Friday and not go to school...”

“Well, the teachers have others things planned for you. But if you really want it, talk to your teachers and we'll see what we can do.”

So, the favourites - Wishita is still number 1, then comes Shiva's Drum, Gopala, We circle around, Yemaya... I think they recall every dance we've done even though we only have time for a few.

After the christmas concert, all elated, the girls tell me that from new year a number of other girls want to join our group and we will have the use of the main hall every Friday.

So now, in March, I still walk around to school every Friday with my guitar or other instruments, to get my heart warmed and joy flowing, to listen and share stories, to dance and sing, ending the week in love and sweetness.

Please do get in touch if you are working with dances in groups of young children (I also do music sessions in local nurseries) – lets share ideas and practices. With love and blessings, Maris

PS: Wishita is still heard on the playground and not a Friday goes past without that dance.