

## Transformation

On my desk, I keep a small pewter polliwog. No bigger than the first joint of my thumb; I bought the polliwog in an art gallery in a mid-western city in the US at a time of significant personal and professional change. It is an important reminder of the power of transformation. A polliwog is often referred to as a tadpole and my pewter symbol captures the phase where the long tail of the tadpole is still in place but the legs have begun to form. It shows the point of metamorphosis from the totally aquatic stage to the land based frog that it will become. Awkward and strange, the polliwog is neither one form nor the other as it undergoes significant change, growing legs and absorbing its own tail as it changes its way of moving as well as its habitat.

Similarly, the chrysalis stage in the life cycle of the butterfly symbolizes for us the transformation that occurs in nature and in our lives. Captured in children's books such as Eric Carle's much-loved "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" and in the classroom as a way of understanding nature and science through the life-cycle of the butterfly, the caterpillar emerges as a butterfly following a dormant period in the chrysalis. This is another potent symbol of transformation. There are times when we may crave some time away, to retreat and be dormant for a while. Except for brief holidays, in our busy lives, we don't usually have the luxury of a dormant period.

Children who have heavily scheduled extracurricular activities rarely have time to retreat to an inner world and be dormant for a time. It is interesting to note that in a study of high achieving women, Barbara Kerr found that a period alone (through illness, geographic or social isolation) was a common experience in the formative stage for these women. Some religions place great importance upon the need for regular religious retreats and the re-emergence of meditation and mindfulness demonstrates the need to find stillness and focus in frenetic lives.

The chrysalis and the beauty of the emerging butterfly have their place, but for me it is the strangeness and awkwardness of the polliwog that best captures the transformation that takes place in childhood. There isn't always a smooth transformation from one form to the other. Physical growth, cognitive development, academic and personal skills emerge while other indicators of developmental delays remain.

As new habits form, there can also be a regression to old, unpalatable habits. Just when a parent thinks a child has made a big, developmental frog-like leap, there is evidence of a 'tail' that reminds us that the transformation is not yet complete. Development through childhood is characterized by enormous changes but the transformation is rarely smooth. The child experiencing this transformation often feels strange and awkward, different from those around them. Patience, perspective, guidance and support from parents can help to nurture polliwogs through their transformation.