



THE ECOLOGY OF HUMAN DISCERNMENT



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THE TWO TURNS OF DEVELOPMENT

From Living the Archetype to Watching It

Oliver Riddett | The Archetype Approach

A child first lives an archetypal power from the inside. Only later can they stand beside it, recognise it and decide whether it should lead.

Two children are building a harbour from blocks.

One places a bridge across the water. The other moves it a few centimetres.

"No," the first child says. "It does not go there."

The bridge is moved back.

The second child reaches for it again. A hand comes down over the structure.

"Stop. You are ruining it."

An adult kneels beside them.

"Your Planner is working very hard to keep the harbour the way you imagined it."

The child looks puzzled.

"I am not planning. It just has to go there."

In that sentence, the whole of early development is visible.

The child is not yet standing beside the Planner and observing it. They are living inside its world.



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The bridge does not merely feel better in one position. It belongs there. The plan is not one possibility among several. For that moment, it is reality itself.

Before a child can watch an archetypal power, they must first live it.

THE FIRST TURN: BECOMING THE POWER

The first turn of development is into experience.

The young child meets life directly through the body, feeling, relationship and action. They do not begin by observing their inner world from a distance. They begin by becoming it.

The Mover runs.

The Watcher withdraws and looks.

The Helper reaches in.

The Rebel says no.

The Joker breaks the tension.

The Friend seeks the circle.

The Imagineer changes the meaning of the room.

The Planner holds the sequence.

Energy fills the moment.

The Thinker asks why.

The Builder makes the idea solid.

The Explorer crosses the edge.

At first, these are not concepts available for calm inspection. They are ways the child enters reality.

When the Rebel rises, the child does not usually think, "A protective impulse towards freedom is active in me." The child says, "No."

When the Friend fears separation, the child does not say, "My need for belonging is becoming too strong." They follow, cling, agree or collapse.



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When the Joker protects against shame, the child does not analyse the defence. They laugh, distract, imitate or turn the moment into a game.

This identification is not a mistake to correct. It is the first form of knowing.

First we live the power. Later we learn to stand beside it.

THE ARCHETYPE AS A WHOLE WORLD

An active archetype does more than produce a behaviour. It organises attention.

The Planner notices what is out of place.

The Friend notices who is included.

The Rebel notices pressure, contradiction and unfairness.

The Helper notices need.

The Explorer notices the unopened gate.

The Watcher notices what others pass over.

This is why children can appear to inhabit different realities while standing in the same room.

One child sees a carefully ordered game. Another sees an invitation to invent. One sees a rule that protects fairness. Another sees a rule that prevents discovery. One sees a child who needs help. Another sees a person who should be allowed to try alone.

Each perception may contain truth, but no single archetypal view contains the whole.

The young child does not yet know this. The active power feels complete because it determines what becomes visible.

The child inside the Planner does not experience themselves as rigid. They experience the change as wrong.

The child inside the Rebel does not experience themselves as oppositional. They experience the demand as intrusive.

The child inside the Friend does not experience themselves as self-abandoning. They experience separation as a threat to belonging.

Understanding this changes the adult response.



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We no longer assume that repeating the rule more forcefully will give the child a wider view. Often the child needs to borrow a view that is not currently available from inside the active power.

WHY FUSION COMES FIRST

There is a temptation to treat self-observation as the more mature and therefore more desirable state.

But a child cannot reflect upon a life they have not yet been allowed to live.

The first turn gives substance to the self.

The child discovers the force of movement by moving, the reality of care by helping, the dignity of refusal by refusing, the pleasure of order by arranging and the mystery of imagination by entering another world.

These experiences lay down the roots from which reflection can later grow.

When adults hurry children into constant self-monitoring, the result may look mature while remaining inwardly thin.

A child can learn to say the approved words without understanding the power being named. They may apologise before feeling the effect, describe an emotion while still disconnected from it, or repeat that everyone gets a turn while privately experiencing the other child as an obstacle.

Language can arrive before integration.

The answer is not to withhold language. It is to keep language close to lived experience.

The child needs time to be energetic before learning how intensity affects others. They need to experience agency before they can yield freely. They need genuine belonging before they can risk disagreement. They need imaginative freedom before form can become meaningful rather than imposed.

Development does not move from wildness to control.

It moves from participation, through reflection, towards freer participation.

THE ADULT AS THE BORROWED WATCHER

The second turn does not begin alone.



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Before the child can observe an inner power, an adult observes it with them.

The adult becomes the borrowed Watcher: close enough to remain in relationship, but spacious enough not to be swallowed by the moment.

This does not mean naming an archetype every time a child struggles. The purpose is not to turn childhood into a running commentary.

It means helping the child distinguish the event, the feeling, the power, the effect and the choice.

"You had a clear plan."

"It changed when he moved the bridge."

"Something in you wanted to protect it."

"You put your hand over the blocks."

"He also has an idea."

"Let us see whether the harbour can hold both."

The adult does not ask the child to abandon the Planner. They make another reality visible beside it.

Repeated experiences of this kind create an inner space.

At first, the space exists between adult and child.

Later, it begins to exist within the child.

THE SECOND TURN: SOMETHING IN ME

The second turn begins when the child can experience a power without being completely identical with it.

"I am angry" begins to widen into "anger is here."

"I have to help" becomes "my Helper wants to help, but I am tired."

"You cannot tell me what to do" becomes "my Rebel is getting strong because I feel pushed."

"Everyone must play my game" becomes "my Imagineer has a big idea, and the others have ideas too."



This is not simply better vocabulary.

It is a change in the architecture of awareness.

The child has begun to decentre. They can step back just far enough to see that an inner power is real without being the whole of reality.

Then they can step in again with greater freedom.

The second turn is therefore not an escape from the archetype. It is a new relationship with it.

The child can ask: What is this power protecting? What does it notice? What has it missed? Does it need to lead now? Which other power belongs in the moment?

The Watcher becomes more than one temperament among twelve.

It becomes an internal human capacity: the ability to remain present while experience becomes available for reflection.

The aim is not to leave the archetypes behind, but to become spacious enough to hold more than one.

THIS IS NOT SELF-SURVEILLANCE

There is an important difference between self-awareness and self-surveillance.

Self-awareness creates relationship with experience.

Self-surveillance creates an internal authority that watches for error.

A child who has been repeatedly shamed may appear highly reflective. They scan their own face, voice and body for signs that an adult may disapprove. They apologise quickly, explain themselves anxiously and try to predict the correct response.

But this is not the inner Watcher in its healthy form.

It is borrowed judgement turned inward.

The healthy Watcher is curious, truthful and capable of revision. It does not stand above the child with a clipboard. It stands beside experience and asks what is happening.

This distinction matters when we teach emotional language.



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"Use your words" can become another demand to perform regulation for the adult.

"Tell me what you notice" opens a different door.

The purpose is not to make the child look calm. It is to help them remain in relationship with reality while feeling remains alive.

Reflection should not exile vitality.

It should give vitality somewhere wiser to go.

MORE THAN ONE POWER CAN SPEAK

The second turn makes inner plurality possible.

The child discovers that several truths may be present at once.

"I want to stay with my friend, and I want to choose for myself."

"I want to make everyone laugh, and I know he felt embarrassed."

"I want the tower to be perfect, and I want her to help build it."

"I want to explore, and I need to finish what I started."

This is where balance becomes more than an adult intervention.

At first, the adult brings the balancing opposite from outside. Stillness is offered to movement. Care is offered to rebellion. Order is offered to imagination. Construction is offered to exploration.

Later, the child begins to call upon the balancing power within.

The Rebel can ask the Friend how truth might remain connected.

The Friend can ask the Rebel whether harmony has become self-abandonment.

The Imagineer can invite the Planner to shape the vision.

The Planner can invite the Imagineer to loosen the form.

The Mover can listen for the Watcher.

The Watcher can allow the Mover to enter.

Wholeness is not the silence of every inner voice.

It is the growing capacity to hear several voices and choose which one should lead.



THE TWO TURNS ACROSS EARLY CHILDHOOD

The movement from living to watching develops gradually and unevenly.

In the earliest years, archetypal life is largely embodied. The child moves, clings, watches, builds, resists and explores before they can explain these patterns.

As language and symbolic play deepen, children begin to recognise repeated qualities in themselves and others. They can hear, "Your Mover needs room," or "Your Watcher wants to look first," without the words becoming fixed identities.

Between four and six, many children can begin to revisit an event with a trusted adult. They may recognise what they wanted, what happened and what another child experienced. The reflective gap is still shared and often disappears under stress.

Towards six and seven, some children begin to hold two inner positions at once. They can want something strongly and still notice the wanting. They can anticipate an effect, call upon another power or return to repair with less adult structure.

These are not rigid milestones.

A tired seven-year-old may become completely fused with the Rebel. A secure three-year-old may briefly say, "My Joker came out because I was nervous." Development moves with relationship, context, temperament and the intensity of the moment.

The scale is not whether the child can always reflect.

It is whether reflection is becoming increasingly available and whether the child can return to it through relationship.

LANGUAGE THAT OPENS THE GAP

Instead of "You are controlling," we might say: "Your Planner has a strong picture. Can you notice what the other builders are trying to add?"

Instead of "Stop attention-seeking," we might say: "Your Friend is looking for connection. How could you ask for it without pulling everyone away from what they are doing?"

Instead of "Calm down," we might say: "Energy is moving very fast. Let us help your Watcher find one thing that is happening right now."

Instead of "Do not be silly," we might say: "The Joker is here. Is this a moment for play, or does somebody need seriousness and repair?"



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Instead of "You know better," we might say: "Part of you knew, and another part took over. Let us look at the moment when that happened."

The language should remain light.

Archetypes are doors into reflection, not new labels to place upon the child.

We are not saying, "You are a Planner."

We are saying, "Planning is one power available within you."

WHEN THE ADULT HAS NOT MADE THE TURN

A child cannot reliably borrow reflective space from an adult who is completely fused with their own activated power.

The adult inside the Planner may experience noise as disorder that must be stopped immediately.

The adult inside the Helper may rescue before discovering what the child can do.

The adult inside the Rebel may turn every boundary into a contest of principle.

The adult inside the Friend may avoid necessary conflict to preserve the appearance of harmony.

The adult inside the Thinker may explain when the child first needs warmth.

In these moments, the adult is not lending a Watcher. They are asking the child to live inside the adult archetype.

This is why adult development belongs at the centre of educational reform.

The practitioner needs the same inner movement they are trying to support in the child.

"My need for order is active."

"My fear of being disrespected has entered the room."

"My Helper wants to solve this too quickly."

"My Joker is trying to escape the discomfort."

When the adult can name the power without becoming ashamed of it, choice returns.

The adult becomes more able to hold authority without mistaking activation for truth.



FROM CONTROL TO INNER AUTHORITY

Behaviour systems often try to produce the appearance of the second turn from outside.

The child is expected to stop, explain, regulate, apologise and choose the approved action.

But inner authority cannot be installed through external control alone.

It grows through repeated participation in truthful relationship.

The child experiences an adult who can stop harm without humiliation, name a power without condemning it, preserve belonging while requiring repair and revise an interpretation when new truth appears.

Gradually, the child internalises not simply the adult command, but the adult way of looking.

This is borrowed discernment becoming personal discernment.

The goal is not a child who never becomes overtaken by anger, fear, excitement or belonging.

The goal is a person who can return.

They can return to the body, to the facts, to the other person, to conscience and to choice.

They can let an archetypal power speak without allowing it to become unquestionable authority.

They can act, reflect, revise and act again.

This recursive movement is the living shape of discernment.

STANDING BESIDE THE POWER

Return to the harbour.

The bridge has moved again.

The child reaches out, then pauses.

"I still think it goes here," they say.

The adult nods. "You have not lost your plan."



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The child looks at the other builder.

"But we could make another bridge over there."

Nothing in the child has been broken.

The Planner still sees structure. The child still cares where the bridge belongs. The original power remains alive.

But it is no longer alone.

The Friend has noticed the other child. The Imagineer has found another possibility. The Builder can now make space for both.

This is the second turn.

Not self-control in the narrow sense.

Not obedience to an adult interpretation.

A widening of consciousness in which the child can stand beside an inner power, understand what it offers and decide how it belongs within the whole.

The child first lives the archetype.

Then, through relationship, they learn to watch it.

And from that watching, a more truthful freedom begins.

The second turn does not happen in isolation. It needs an ecology that can hold the child while awareness grows.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver Riddett is the founder of the Archetype Approach, a developmental and relational model of childhood built around twelve universal archetypes. Developed through practice at Children of Towan in Porthtowan, Cornwall, the approach helps parents and practitioners look beneath behaviour and respond through balance rather than correction.

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