

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 81, Fall 2021



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This scene is from a puppet play based on the story "The Silent Maiden," a story from the new WECAN publication, *Truer Than True: A World of Fairy Tales for the Waldorf Kindergarten*. See the book review in this issue for further details.

For the WECAN Calendar of Events, please visit waldorfearlychildhood.org/events-calendar.php



WECAN

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ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA



Photo by Paulene Hanna, from *"The Healing Power of Shelter Play"*

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Both / And

The 2021 February WECAN conference, “Toward a Kinder, More Compassionate Society: Black Lives Matter,” put the urgent issues of our times right in our laps. Keynote presenter Laleña Garcia was invited to share with Waldorf educators how she works with questions of racism, discrimination, and gender issues in her progressive, non-Waldorf classroom of 3-6 year-olds. The summary of her presentations is the lead article for this issue of *Gateways*. It deserves this prominent place because of all the difficult and controversial questions her suggestions have brought forth.

Laleña began with stating that the issue of “implicit vs. explicit” always comes up with Waldorf educators. Implicit is taken to mean that Waldorf teachers use stories and image-filled pictures to respond to children’s questions indirectly, while Laleña has adopted language from Black Lives Matter which states things more directly in mainstream vocabulary. As she walked us through the thirteen principles of Black Lives Matter, they resonated with Waldorf education’s intention to create respectful, healthy social life that honors all members. But the question of “how” has stirred up many conversations and some tensions in our Waldorf communities.

This issue of *Gateways* has no single answer for us, no absolute “either / or” to affirm one side or the other. The intention of this issue is to open up a pathway to “**Both / And**.”

We are living in contentious times. There are polar-opposite opinions about almost everything we can think of. The tensions of our times would push us to affirm one viewpoint and criticize the other. But **Both / And** allows the possibility that there are many good answers depending upon individual circumstances, time and place, even though they are different.

We hear much about freedom, but what does that mean? My personal opinion is that we each have the freedom to arrive at our own conclusions by grappling courageously with the contradictions. Then we have the responsibility of deciding how we are going to act upon that conclusion to serve the

health and well-being of the children and families in our programs. These will take many different forms.

“Implicit vs. explicit” may not be the right question. After living for weeks with the content of this issue, my inner being is clamoring to say that we cannot ignore, avoid, rationalize, or try to dismiss the reality that children notice race very early in their development and absorb the implicit discriminatory messages that permeate our society. In addition to the summary of the February Conference emphasizing the impact on Black communities, the reality of the injustice and oppression imposed on indigenous peoples is presented to us starkly in the next two articles. “Our Journey” is shared by Otsistohkwí:yo, lead kindergarten teacher at the Everlasting Tree School in Canada. Prepare yourself for a very powerful article; it is not easy reading.

The Lakota Waldorf School on the Pine Ridge, ND reservation is also featured. Both articles tell of the tribes’ dedication and commitment to reasserting their native languages, traditions, ceremonies, and culture.

Diversity does not exist only in terms of race. Differing ethnicities, cultures, and languages compose another area of differences in our school communities. Sunbridge early childhood graduate Karen Imhof undertook the question of bilingualism as her final teacher training research project. Portions of her full research paper are shared in the article on Bilingualism. Children’s identities are connected to their language group. There are increasing numbers of bi- and multi-lingual children in our classrooms. This paper points out how essential it is to honor and support each child’s language situation to strengthen and protect sense of identity and security.

While we grapple with all of these huge questions, COVID remains our long-term visitor. Everyone’s sense of security and safety is rocked, healthy sensory stimulation has been hijacked by screens and restricted freedom of movement, and our chance to explore the outer world through our senses has been limited. Thank goodness, the children can at least still play. An

article on shelter as created through play is provided by Australian Waldorf educator and researcher Paulene Hanna. Children create their own shelter, safe space, and healing through their play. This article is uplifting and renews confidence that healthy instincts live within our children.

Another encouraging example of how we can utilize the out-of-doors to create and restore health is described in “A Strip of Fruitful Land Between Stream and Stone,” a report from a forest kindergarten in Germany. Just reading this article relaxed my breathing and reaffirmed confidence in the healing and encouraging power of being in nature—no matter where we find it.

“To screen or not to screen” in our school programs and homes has confronted us all. No matter what our decisions, screens and exposure to social media are everywhere. Our young children are subject to the influences of “likes” as well as our adolescents. A colleague from Canada shares how she is working with this influence in “Aspects of Social Media Influence in Early Childhood: One Teacher’s Exploration” and gives practical advice for teachers and parents.

We also pay tribute to two individuals very important to Waldorf education who crossed the threshold earlier this year. Freya Jaffke is probably best known to the English-speaking Waldorf world through translations of her books of singing games and circles and her well-known volume, *Making Soft Toys*. Colleagues from Germany, Austria, Australia, and the US pay tribute to her.

Henning Köhler, German author of *Working with Anxious, Nervous, and Depressed Children*, also made his transition to the spiritual world this spring. His compassionate view that there are no “difficult children” but rather children in distress has widened the picture of how to more warmly appreciate and companion the vulnerable, agitated children of our modern times. His important contributions are recalled in the memorial tribute to him.

In the “For the Classroom,” section, we are pleased to share a story from the newly published multi-cultural story collection, *Truer Than True* (also reviewed in this issue): the Native American

tale of “Gluskabi and the Wind Eagle.” This story, with a humorous edge, is a cautionary tale with no moralizing. A second story, “Gatopato,” is a modern tale from Argentina. It pictures the sensitive realm of facing and accepting difference in a sweet, artistic, affirming way. Enjoy. It is a treat to read and will be to share as well.

We have many verses of blessing. Songs or verses to end snack are less common. The “Thank You House” verse offers statements of gratitude in several languages. Here is another example of an opportunity to acknowledge and support diversity of language. If you have diverse language speakers in your community, you can add additional verses of your own, and be sure to share them back with *Gateways*.

This issue concludes with two book reviews. These two books could not be more timely.

Susan Perrow has compiled a collection of healing stories dedicated to addressing situations of grief and loss. *Stories to Light the Night* includes stories for all age groups which embrace loss through death, separation, and natural or human-caused tragedy, to name a few. Each story can provide inspiration for creating your own original story if you do not find one that fits your need.

For years Waldorf teacher and adult educator, Holly Koteen-Soulé, has been collecting multi-cultural stories. A selection from her large collection is now captured in *Truer Than True*. These stories represent different continents and cultures. Female heroes are well represented in this balanced collection. Each story has proved tried-and-true with classes of children. This book is likely to become a new favorite along with the two *Tell Me A Story* volumes.

Both *Stories to Light the Night* and *Truer Than True* are available through the WECAN bookstore.

These times call upon us to be vigilant, honest, flexible, courageous, and creative. It is time to sort out the essential from the inessential in pedagogical practice and human relationships. We are all striving to get to the same healthy, safe place where all peoples will be sheltered, welcomed, and honored. There are many ways to get there, not just either/or. May we all be blessed to find our own **Both / And.** ♦

Focus—Both / And: Recognizing Diversity and Affirming Roots

Toward a Kinder, More Compassionate Society: Black Lives Matter and Waldorf Early Childhood Education

— Notes on a Presentation by Laleña Garcia

“Toward a Kinder, More Compassionate Society—Black Lives Matter”—was the topic of the 2021 WECAN continental conference, held online from February 5-7, 2021. The keynote presenter was Laleña Garcia, early childhood educator of 20-plus years’ experience, who teaches at the Manhattan Country School, a progressive independent school in NYC. In her classroom, she brings the principles of Black Lives Matter to young children and offers workshops and presentations to encourage other professionals to do the same. She has adapted the thirteen principles of Black Lives Matter into simplified language that she uses with her class of children.

The topic of this conference was historic, as was the decision to bring Laleña as a colleague from outside of Waldorf education. This move confirmed WECAN’s commitment to establish wider contact with mainstream educational streams and to explore how other approaches are bringing consideration of racism, diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice to the children in their care.

The following is a summary of the main points in Laleña’s presentations over the three days of the conference.

* * *

The fundamental question before us is, “How can we move toward a kinder, more compassionate society?” What does a kinder, more compassionate society look like through the principles of Black Lives Matter? Laleña teaches little children about Black Lives Matter and enjoys sharing how she does this with other teachers.

Before proceeding into the actual content of these principles, she stated that conversation with Waldorf early childhood educators always brings up a discussion of “implicit vs. explicit.” Waldorf holds a deep and passionate respect for early childhood as a distinct phase of life, a time which deserves protection from premature awakening consciousness about matters of the world. She agrees that it is different from being a grownup. Little children are filled with delight, zest, and curiosity for life. She, herself, feels that she was allowed a magical childhood that has benefited her always. We see this joy and wonder in young children in our classrooms and want to protect this for them

for as long as possible, using imaginations as food for mind and soul. At the same time, our children live in a world that is shaped by systems and stories of race, gender, and class every day. These stories are harmful to all children. If we are committed to keeping children safe, then we have to explicitly interrupt the implicit messages these narratives impose on children.

These stories influence children from a very early age. By three months, babies notice race. By age two, children have already learned that some groups are considered to be better than others. Race and gender stereotypes are implanted very early on. We have to continually offer an alternative narrative.

Laleña referred to Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, who is teaching anti-racism. Between nine months and three years of age, children are learning all the racial attitudes. It is important that there is nothing special or superior in having white skin or inferior because of dark skin color. We adults have been taught these stories our whole lives, which we now have to unlearn.

We want children to be released from the burden of these thoughts so they do not have to unlearn them. To do this, we have much self-work to do to uncover what lives implicitly within ourselves.

She remembers when the ideas of racial values first awoke for her as a six-year-old. She had heard that some people were treated differently and badly because of the color of their skin. She thought that she would have to marry a white boy so her children would have lighter skin to avoid discrimination. She remembers that she had had no experience of racism, *per se*. But from somewhere she had internalized ideas about power and status and race.

We are here in this conference together to learn how to talk about race. As a country we are trained to not talk about race. We are not comfortable with this topic, avoid it, and don't get any better at it. We are at about age five in talking about race, but racial ideas have penetrated us much more deeply. Using Black Lives Matter as a framework is one way we can begin to talk about race. We do this by interrupting the implicit lessons society imposes by using explicit language. This is a way to move toward a kinder, more compassionate society.

When we look at the title of this conference, we already know about kindness. We teach this every day as a virtue. Kindness is a step toward compassion. Compassion is defined as having sympathetic consciousness of others' distress *together with a desire to alleviate it*. When we see someone in distress, we want to respond in a helping way. Children already have this inclination and need tools to deal with it.

To understand compassion in the larger society, we also need to talk about equity and fairness. Children can understand equity and fairness if we give them a good example. Three children of different heights are pictured standing on uneven ground while trying to look over a fence. The shortest child cannot see over no matter what. But if positions are shifted and the smallest child has something to stand on, everyone can see over the top. Their situations are not equal, but by some shifting and accommodating, everyone gets a chance. Children depend upon the grownups to make sure things are equitable. When things are fair, this is justice. Everyone gets what they need to have a fair chance to participate. To have no chance is oppression, which hurts those who have too little and those who get more than they need. Compassion is what results when kindness and equity are combined.

There is a misunderstanding that to speak about race is exposing children to racism. They know about racism already. There are systems and stories that expose children to this all the time.

If we do not talk about it, children internalize that the stories are true. Persistent stories say that white is more valuable than black, a story that is harmful to all human beings. Racism must be confronted so it can be exposed.

Racism can be defined as a system of power that values everything associated with white people over things associated with black people. We often think that racism is only individual people being unkind to others. This is one type of racism. But racism also has institutional forms.

A "system" is a set of rules and practices that people put in place to support the stories that they tell and want others to believe and to tell as well. Systems are made and put into place by people—not some universal order—to perpetuate certain ideas about themselves and others. Institutional systems protect the advantages of the institutions.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) provides another structure in order to propose a new, compassionate system. Compassion is the starting point and arises when kindness is connected to a fiercely held belief in the importance of equity. If we see someone else in distress, we are responsible to respond. We need to tell different stories and create systems that do not depend upon systems of white supremacy. The principles of BLM are visionary, and state what we do want, not just what to stop.

The 13 principles of BLM follow:

- ❖ Empathy—Different people have different feelings. We want to care about and respect these differences.
- ❖ Diversity—We acknowledge and celebrate the many ways in which we are different from one another. Differences enrich our lives. We want everyone to feel safe in being who they are.
- ❖ Loving engagements—We want our communities to be places where everyone is seen, safe, and loved.
- ❖ Restorative justice—We focus on solving problems and not punishment. We take responsibility if we have solved a problem and find a way to heal any harm. Children always deserve a second chance.

- ❖ Black Women—All people are important and everyone has the right to be safe and have their feelings. Women are important.
- ❖ Transgender affirming—Everyone gets to listen to their own heart and mind to choose a word to describe who we are in terms of gender. Everyone has a right to feel loved, safe, and affirmed.
- ❖ Queer Affirming—Everyone has right to look into their heart and decide who they will love, irrespective of gender or gender expression.
- ❖ Black Villages—There are many ways to make a community. Everyone in the community has responsibility to take care of all the others in the community as well.
- ❖ Collective Value—Everyone is important and has the right to be safe and happy no matter what differences they have.
- ❖ Unapologetically Black—Everyone should feel proud of what/who they are and should be treated respectfully.
- ❖ Black Families—A family is a group of people who love and take care of each other. There are lots of different kinds of families and they all matter.
- ❖ Globalism—There is a global black family from all countries with different kinds of experiences. Black people live all over the world in villages, cities, and beyond.
- ❖ Intergenerational—It is important to have spaces where people of different ages can come together and learn from each other.

All of these principles are based on compassion. All of these together make a template for a more compassionate society.

Laleña elaborated upon some of these points in conversation with WECAN representatives Keelah Helwig and Juliana Pinto McKeen.

Laleña came into this work from a family heritage affirming that we each have responsibility to make the world a better place. When she began working with young children, she felt responsible to counter injustice. When she started working with BLM with children, they already seemed very familiar with these ideas. BLM provides a shared language that helps the children see themselves as members of the community. Every year the children demonstrate to her that they are ready for this work. Others say that kids don't understand, but she thinks that this sells young children short.

Not everyone has awakened to doing this work. To introduce BLM principles, she has written a book which breaks the principles down very simply: *What We Believe: A Black Lives Matter Principles Book*. In the US, we live with ideas of scarcity. People are afraid that if someone else has something, it may take something away or detract from what we have ourselves. We need to build connections so we can begin to have conversations. A leading question can be, "Do you really believe that skin color makes people more or less valuable?" Most people will say no.

Both parents and teachers have responsibility to teach about race. Families of color have to do this all the time. Now we all need to do it. To facilitate this, the teacher's special responsibility is to create a classroom community who can speak and understand each other through a shared language.

Everybody has a gender, not just women; everyone has a racial identity, not just black people. We have to learn to recognize and celebrate differences of all kinds. It is our ethical responsibility as educators to teach about differences. Otherwise, we perpetuate the implicit message that one culture or race is more important than another.

There is racism, discrimination, and oppression in the world. There is also goodness, beauty, and truth. These are not mutually exclusive. We affirm truth when we teach that no race is superior to another. This is a true. There is racism and also goodness and joy in the world. When people care about and for each other, there is beauty and goodness. When we counter the untrue stories, we are affirming goodness, beauty, and truth through that very deed.

For classrooms to welcome more diversity, we need to make classroom spaces representative of every kind of child and family whether they are there or not. Acknowledge differences in the environment. Make sure the class knows that there are children like this in the world.

If a child is the only child of color and they do not see themselves reflected, this is a big problem.

A new family needs to see itself reflected in the environment. When you are welcoming a new child, find out about their family. Ask the family what makes them feel welcome and provide that. Minority families have broad spectrum of experience. Do not assume that all are the same. Even if the child feels welcomed, if the parents do not, the family is not likely to stay. Be attentive to what the parents tell you. We are not

going to be perfect at this. If we cause harm, we have to work through it. Ask, make mistakes, learn from it, and move on.

It is important to work with our families, not just the children during school time. Weekly notes to families can let them know how we are thinking about and working with issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice.

Getting more people of color in our schools will not solve the racism problem. If we eliminate racism in our practice, then we will attract more diversity.

BlackLivesMatter.com has resources. There is a starter kit available to everyone.



So far the content had been about the “what and why” of speaking about racism. Laleña concluded by going on to the “how” we can speak.

To work intentionally and consciously with this difficult subject, it is helpful to begin community agreements. A list presented to the conference includes:

- **Humility** in approaching this work
- Willingness to **take risks**
- Building **community**
- **Stretching** beyond one’s usual comfort zone
- Accepting **accountability** for *impact*—being accountable is being responsible to repair
- **Restoring justice**
- Approaching issues with **Both / And** perspective (rather than either/or)
- **Speaking from your own ‘I’ experience**
- Expecting and accepting a **lack of closure**.

The systems and stories mentioned previously are often so invisible that we don’t think about them. Children internalize these stories all the time. We have to talk to them with alternative stories to counter the bad ones. We have to keep conversations ongoing all the time to practice replacing old and harmful narratives with new possibilities.

Here are some guidelines for speaking with children.

Be honest—If you don’t know something, say so.

“That’s a great question, I don’t know the answer. I’ll see if I can find about it, and then I’ll get back to you. Make sure you ask me again.”

We have to treat children with respect and honesty. Make sure that we say is true and not avoidant.

In talking to kids, **be interested**—It helps to discover the context out of which the child is asking. “Can you tell me more? What makes you think that?”

Be clear and objective in how we respond. For example, if an offending or indelicate remark is made about skin color, a possible response could be, “Oh, I see that you are noticing that skin colors are different.” Acknowledge the remark. If we cannot talk about it right then, say that we will talk about it later and come back to it. Ask the child to remind us. We have to be accountable.

Giving an objective response is a way to give an explicit response without prematurely awakening the child’s awareness. When a child asks a question, it signals that the child has noticed something and is aware enough to ask about it. We can talk about what children are seeing with their eyes. Respond to children’s observations. When children are noticing things about themselves and skin color, they are probably noticing skin color in general. We need to respond objectively and acknowledge: “Yes, that person’s skin is brown.” We respond in a matter-of-fact, objective way.

Stepping into the future with our Waldorf curriculum, changes must be authentic, not token adjustments. To protect the future children of color, different ethnicities, and racial backgrounds who will enter our classes, we must begin now and practice. Make sure diverse expressions and materials are available now. The things that we do to support people outside of the white majority are good for everyone. Festival celebrations should be accessible to all peoples. Make sure that all families, all children are welcome. Use inclusive pictures in our classroom *before* we have a non-traditional child and family. Intention is everything. We do things because they are right for everyone. We need to be able to explain why we do what we do.

We do not jump in with both feet before doing our own preparation and inner work. We need to get ideas and motivation straight and be able to explain why we do what we do. We need to keep striving and keep questioning. ♦

Our Journey

— Otsistohkwí:yo (Melissa Elliott)

It was May 28, 2021, and we were sitting in one of our school's small yurts as the rain poured outside, waiting for families to come for their one-on-one Closing Wampum ceremony, when one of my colleagues reported, "Oh my God, they have found 215 children's bodies at the Kamloops Residential School grounds in British Columbia." At first I didn't seem to hear her words—I was so focused on the task before us: ceremonially celebrating this strange year for our school's youngest children and releasing our responsibilities to their families for the summer months.

I held a basket of wampum strings in my hands, which is a string of ceremony beads that our people have used for centuries to symbolize agreements and record our Haudenosaunee history. At our school, Skaronhyase'kó:wa (The Everlasting Tree School), these wampum strings are made by the families to represent their child and their commitment to our school, ceremonially passed to us, their teachers, and held throughout the year as a reminder of our responsibilities to each child and family. The speech that we say when we hold and ultimately release their families' wampum was going through my head:

Tyohsera't nikarí:we's wa'ethiya'tanó:ronhste, wa'ethiya'tanenhstate, táhnon wa'ethirihónnyon ne sheyén:a nonkwawenna nok niyonkwarihó:tens tsi niyó:re yonkwatkwénnyon.

For one year we have loved, protected, and taught your child our language and ways as best as we were able.

That thought was broken by the discussion that ensued among the other early years teachers about this discovery and its darkest revelations. This truth that we have known for so long, but held in the shadows:

*When we speak of
Onkwehonwe (Indigenous
peoples) and education,
we must look at the dark
truth that education
has been used as a
tool of genocide in
our communities.
Traditionally, we did not
have "schools" in our
communities.*

GENOCIDE. It is finally coming out and being revealed to the world. A bittersweet, tragic, and gut-wrenching silence comes over the room. However, we could not linger in this. Instead, we pull out the trait we have all learned as we grew up through trauma and ongoing genocide: compartmentalization with a twist of humor.

We must put aside our grief today, don't think about it, put it in a box, don't even glance at our social media, so we can get through the day and fulfill our responsibilities to the children and families. This is how we survive the day, this is how we've survived many days.

Though this proves to be effective, and we have many laughs and smiles celebrating

the little spirits we have the honor of knowing in our Kanenhanonnhá (Protected Seeds) nursery program, it is broken up with flashes of a growing pain in the stomach: buried grief bubbling up and begging for release. Indigestion is a symptom of genocide and trauma that indigenous peoples experience the world over.

Ó:nen enyakwátkahwe ne ki onekórha táhnon akwé:kon yonkwatwéhonte tsi niwakénhas

Now we will release this wampum and all of our responsibilities during the summer time.

As I return to my home in Brantford, Ontario, I go to my room immediately, shut the door and open my Facebook app, reading the countless posts and commentary on this horrific discovery. It takes me down a rabbit hole that I can't avoid—watching videos of Residential School Survivors' stories, reading articles and reports. Alone in my room, I allow myself to feel some of this grief, though at this point it is coming up more as a mix of anger and numbness.

How do people not know this?! The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report was released in December 2015! This is NOT news. A dark realization floods me that most people didn't know or even worse, didn't believe us—not until they found the physical bodies would they believe our stories and history. And even still many don't.

When we speak of Onkwehonwe (Indigenous peoples) and education, we must look at the dark truth that education has been used as a tool of genocide in our communities. Traditionally, we did not have “schools” in our communities. There was no need for schools. Our peoples’ lives naturally flowed and allowed for everything children needed. Children were brought up not just with a mom and dad, but with a community of aunties, uncles, and grandparents/elders that all supported their growth. They were involved in all aspects of life and taught through life as well as based on the gifts they were given from Shonkwaya'tihson (the Creator). They were at the center of our life, valued, seen and supported holistically.

However, in the colonial, Eurocentric and Christian viewpoint, this was a backwards way. We needed their schools in order to be properly educated, in order to “kill the Indian in the child.” How did this “proper education” manifest in our communities? Through kidnapping our children, abusing them in every way imaginable, separating them from the land and ceremonies, hurting them if they spoke our language, isolating them from their families, making them ashamed of who they were, working them to the bone, and in many cases, killing them. Let us remember that the last residential school closed in 1996, a mere 25 years ago.

This education has morphed and changed over time (though its foundation has remained the same) to take us to today with the current educational model. We

When the founders of our school were introduced to Waldorf education over 15 years ago, they found a system of education that offered an alternative to the horror we have experienced with modern education and schooling.

are hardly represented in the curriculum; it is for the most part only offered in English (perhaps with a Native Second Language class here or there). The modern day educational curriculum for Onkwehonwe peoples does not connect us to our community or to the land, at best romanticizing our traditions, history, and culture, and at worst completely erasing them.

This was the way our communities were invaded and ripped apart from the inside: through “education.” In fact, you can see this reflected in our language. In Ohswe'ken (Six Nations of the Grand River

Territory), our word for school is yontaweyatáhkwa, or “the place they enter and don't return.” This is the grief and trauma that was passed down through the generations, the trauma that we are collectively carrying in our communities to this day. Therefore, to speak of schools or education in our Onkwehonwe communities, we must acknowledge this collective trauma and consciously work to heal it.

As previously stated, our Onkwehonwe peoples traditionally never knew or needed schooling. However, we have come to a place in modern society where schooling is necessary and in fact needed. With this in mind, how do we provide schooling and education in our communities? Do we simply accept the modern educational model that was forced on us? Do we simply translate public school curriculum into our languages? Or do we transform schooling into something completely different? These were the questions burning in the founders of our school. They were on the hunt for an educational model that more reflected our beliefs and culture.

When the founders of our school were introduced to Waldorf education over 15 years ago, they found a system of education that offered an alternative to the horror we have experienced with modern education and schooling. They found a system of schooling that was healing, based on seeing the child as a gift from the

spiritual world with their own mind, spirit, journey, and purpose that we are to nurture. This, along with so many other aspects of Waldorf education, was in such alignment with our own traditional view of the child and child rearing that we felt the search for an indigenous pedagogy to education was over. In Waldorf, we found a modern educational model that we could transform and imbue with our language, culture, and ways of being to create something useful and healing to our community.

“Through Kanyen’kéha we will nourish the spirit of every child to guide and inspire them to realize their true potential as Rotinonhsyón:ni”

– Skaronhyase’kó:wa Mission Statement

Our school, Skaronhyase’kó:wa, was founded in 2010 with this intention. Instead of abusing, neglecting, and harming our children, we would love, protect, and honor them. Instead of condemning and punishing the use of our language, we would speak our languages, immersing and nourishing our children with our language. Instead of separating the children from their family and community, we would create partnerships with their families and connect the children to their community. Instead of shaming children for their culture, we would enliven our culture and create a space where our ceremonies and traditions are natural, living, and expressed daily.

Instead of separating children from the land, we would connect children to the land. Instead of forced child labor, we would allow children to play, create and build their imaginations. Instead of starving children, we would provide children with traditional, healthy, nourishing foods. We will consciously transform the toxic system of education into one that is healing and nourishing to our children and community.

This school started as a small initiative of parents who wanted a more holistic education for their children. It has since grown over the past 12 years as teachers have become trained in Waldorf education and begun experimenting with how to implement this model in our own way. A few Skaronhyase’kó:wa teachers with a traditional Haudenosaunee perspective and background, myself included, took Waldorf teacher training. We immersed ourselves through

many outlets into the Waldorf educational movement holding the question: how do we translate and transform Waldorf into our language and culture and bring it to our Onkwehón:we community?

The modern Onkwehón:we Waldorf teacher is an alchemist at heart. We do not simply implement the accepted Waldorf curriculum in our languages. We instead use Waldorf pedagogy to awaken questions within us through which we can examine our culture, language and traditions in a deeper way. For example, how do our people traditionally view child development? What traditional stories are appropriate at each age? How do we prepare our children to participate in ceremony? How do we bring traditional principles of Ka’nikonhrí:yo (a good mind), Ka’satsténshera (the great natural power), and Skén:nén (peace/tranquility) into the classroom? We then start looking for answers to these questions, discussing them with each other, with our elders, and our people—finding connections, differences, and new needs as we look to bring these elements to the classroom. We finally allow ourselves the creative freedom to transform our ceremonies and traditions within an educational setting. Through this process, we are re-ensouling our ceremonies and traditions as we bring them into daily living. Our culture then becomes living and relevant to the children in our program.

We are continuing to develop these methods of marrying Nonkwawén:na nok niyonkwarihó:tens (our traditions and ways) with a Waldorf educational framework, which is unique to our Kanyen’kéha (Mohawk) culture and community. However, this past year we were given the unique opportunity to further document our pedagogy and teach it to others. Through a grant received by the Douglas Cardinal Foundation of Indigenous Waldorf Education from the National Indian Brotherhood Trust Fund, we brought together three Haudenosaunee Mohawk Immersion schools who are inspired by and experimenting with Waldorf education. We took our knowledge and experience and began teaching each other these new methods and pedagogy.

Through this work we formed the Haudenosaunee and Waldorf Inspired Initiative (HAWI), a collective of Haudenosaunee schools, programs and initiatives that are doing this same work.

In June 2021, we held our first three-day Onkwehonwe Early Years Training Intensive. This was immediately following the discovery of the 215 children's bodies at the Kamloops Residential School. Throughout this training we could feel the power of this work and the growing movement that was forming. We received such an incredible response, that we hosted another training this past month. This session was opened to the public and we welcomed over 20 Indigenous early years educators from seven different programs.

There is no doubt that discovery of the over 5744 children at various Residential schools across Turtle Island has reawakened the collective pain and grief within our communities. It has made the hidden history that we have known and carried for generations public for the whole world to see. However, this discovery has also awakened a new impulse within our Onkwehonwe communities: to examine, reimagine, and transform education. As we do this work, we are not only honoring the memory of these children, we are consciously healing these collective ancestral wounds.

If you are an Onkwehonwe educator who is reading this article today, know you are not alone. This work can seem lonely as our peoples and communities are spread out all over Turtle Island. Connect with us through our Facebook page, share your work, and help us lift each other up.

If you are a non-indigenous ally to this cause, you can support this movement through continuing your education on this dark history, start genuine working relationships with Onkwehonwe school initiatives, participate in discussions through the work of the WECAN Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Access (IDEA) Committee, and donate to HAWI, Skaronhyase'kó:wa, or The Lakota Waldorf School. For more information on these initiatives contact HAWI on Facebook or at hawi.inspired@gmail.com or info@everlastingtree.org or info@lakotawaldorfschool.org.

Written in memory of and honoring the children who didn't make it home. We see you. We love you. Every Child Matters. ♦

- 3,213 documented deaths of children found by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (Canada Wide)
- 215 bodies found at Kamloops, British Columbia
- 104 bodies found at Brandon, Manitoba
- 38 bodies found at Regina, Saskatchewan
- 35 bodies found at Muskowekwan, Saskatchewan
- 751 bodies found at Cowessess First Nation, Saskatchewan
- 182 bodies found at Ktunaxa Nation, British Columbia
- 160 bodies found at Penelakut Island, British Columbia
- 227 bodies found at Mt. Pleasant, Minnesota, USA
- 189 bodies found at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA
- 161 bodies found at Fort Providence, Northwest Territories
- 21 bodies found at Grand Junction, Colorado, USA
- 39 bodies found at Dunbow, Alberta
- 74 bodies found at Battleford, Saskatchewan
- 50 bodies found at Rapid City, South Dakota, USA
- 103 bodies found at Haskell, Kansas, USA
- 182 bodies found at Cranbrook, British Columbia

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The Lakota Waldorf School

— Fallen Sorbel, Joyce Little Whiteman and Laurie Clark



The Lakota Waldorf School in Kyle, South Dakota is right in the heart of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. It is located in one of the most impoverished counties in the nation and is a tuition-free indigenous school serving the Lakota children from early childhood through eighth grade. The School is a Lakota language immersion program for all of the children that attend.

Laurie Clark has had the privilege to mentor the early childhood teachers weekly during this pandemic year via Zoom and has been involved with this school for many years. Fallen Sorbel is the lead teacher in the early childhood class and Joyce Little Whiteman is the Lakota Language teacher, serving kindergarten through eighth grade.

Fallen feels strongly that in today's society it is vital that traditions and cultural relevance be kept alive and acknowledged in education, most importantly to protect a person's spirit. The Lakota people have virtues that pertain to treating others with respect and valuing the world of nature. The teachers feel that Waldorf education can help build these values and virtues for the young children in their care, always staying aware of Lakota cultural identity and consciousness.

Fallen has the deep conviction that Lakota traditions and cultural relevance must be kept alive and should be part of education. In her early childhood classroom, she guides the children and enhances their cultural awareness respectfully, in an implicit way, through "doing" the cultural practices, without direct explanations.

The morning begins with the children gathering in a circle where the traditional practice of smudging

takes place, which "purifies each of us and brings in positivity." Traditionally, sweet grass or sage is burnt and "gets rid of negative energy from the outside world." A prayer of thanks is sung in Lakota: *Maka sitomni, oyeh wau ca, tunkasila wicozani ki, namahuwe wopila epelo pilamiyiyielo*; this is loosely translated to mean, "All around the earth, the creator gave us life. We thank the creator for our health." A "Good morning, dear earth" song is also brought during this time. The children all sit down to eat a warm organic breakfast together. The children have learned how to ask for what they need in the Lakota language. *Mni wacin*, "I want water," or *Wakpe wacin*, "I want tea."

Creative play time follows breakfast. While the children play, the teachers are busy with practical work such as beading or other crafts. Transitions into cleanup time are all sung in Lakota.



Elements of the language are incorporated in all activities in the classroom. During watercolor painting, Fallen says, “Who have we here?” She shows the red paint, *sa*, the blue, *to*. The children enthusiastically name the colors. Bread baking is accompanied by a lovely song that is sung in unison, creating an atmosphere of community. Making connections with others is a significant value that lives in the heart of the Lakota culture. The fundamental understanding of this kind of connection in Lakota language is *Mitakuye Oyasin*, which means “We are all connected, we are all relatives.”

The beginning of circle time is held by the fluent Lakota speaker, Joyce Little White Man, or as the children call her, *Unci*, which means “grandmother.” She brings songs and verses that are all brought to the children in Lakota. Joyce has translated many of the Waldorf circles into Lakota as well. For the older children in the school, Joyce has gone on field trips with them, gathering the local plants, showing which ones are edible, and finding the plants that are used in Lakota ceremonies.

The children have plenty of outside time, and enjoy nature walks within the abundance of nature in the prairie lands surrounding the school. Stories are told to the children before a hearty lunch is served. Oral storytelling in the Lakota culture carries the importance of life lessons, traditional beliefs, and customary ways, all put into imaginative language. Some mystical Lakota creatures may be incorporated in a story, like Iktomi, the trickster.

Festivals and celebrations are a big part of the Lakota Waldorf School. There is a lantern walk with singing of Lakota songs, and the walk ends up in a circle of prayer. Blessings to those in need are said. Prayers that bring kindness and gratitude are brought. The Advent or winter spiral is also celebrated with the sound of drums. The drum signifies the beat of the heart, and each child walks through the spiral enkindling their light, ready to make the whole of the path brighter for the next child to come through.

Celebrations are significant in the Lakota culture and give an opportunity to have community gatherings. Powwows are a traditional all-school celebration. The children, and all of those who can dance, will dance for the elders and for those who are sick who cannot dance. Every child is encouraged to participate.

Fallen brings these thoughts about guiding the children through the seasons. “In the spring, we welcome back the thunder beings because they have been gone for quite some time. We try and take a trip to a sacred site. We watch the earth bring forth food and medicinal plants. When it is time to harvest, an offering is made. This practice shows gratitude. We thank the plants for returning. We offer this world to the children; it is beautiful and good. We will show respect to mother earth and mature to be kind to this planet that has merely been lent to us.” ♦



Fallen Sorbel is the lead teacher in the early childhood class at Lakota Waldorf School. Her commitment to the children and her Lakota community is to rebuild the Lakota language and cultural identity.

Joyce Little Whiteman is the Lakota Language teacher at the Lakota Waldorf School, serving kindergarten through eighth grade. She is re-enlivening the cultural heritage by sharing the traditions of the Lakota people with the children and teaching them their native language.

Laurie Clark has been involved in Waldorf early childhood teaching for four decades and has recently stepped away from lead teaching at the Denver Waldorf School. She is a prominent teacher trainer, author, workshop and conference presenter, and mentor. She currently has a small “home group” of very young children, which she loves! She and Nancy Blanning have co-authored *Movement Journeys* and *Circle Adventures*, Vol. 1 and 2.

Bilingual, Bicultural Children in a Waldorf Early Childhood Classroom

— Karen Imhof

The number of bilingual children in our programs is growing. In his indications about language, Rudolf Steiner did not concern himself with bilingual children directly. Many anthroposophical writers and Waldorf educators have written about speech and language learning, but with the focus on monolingual children. Bilingualism was not a particularly well researched theme for mainstream educators and linguists either; for a long time, bilingualism has been considered a disorder rather than a desired state and an important part of a child's identity. Research has moved on to a more inclusive and less discriminating view of bilingualism, but this biased perception has informed how educational programs have been designed for decades. This view has shaped how bilingual children are viewed and treated in schools even today, where they are by no means a minority any more.

Bilinguals are demographically well represented today. This is mirrored in my New York City classroom, where the majority of the children are at least bilingual, if not trilingual, and usually exhibit very different levels of language proficiency when they start school. My role as a Waldorf teacher working with very young children is to support them as they incarnate into their bodies, gain trust in the world and their abilities, and also freely develop to their fullest potential. Relating to the outside world through language is a significant factor in this process. Language affects how we can be with other people and deeply influences how we build our identity. In this sense a curriculum for bilingual children has to go beyond the mere topic of language learning.

How do bilingual children hear and learn two or more languages? If they grow up hearing and learning two languages at the same time or one after the other, how does their experience differ between these two modes?

The linguist Lily Wong Fillmore developed a model of second language learning in a social context that is useful for looking at the language learning of bilingual children in a Waldorf early childhood classroom. Rudolf Steiner's views on general language learning are added to broaden this social model and

show how a more comprehensive view can enrich our understanding of bilingual language learning.

What is often not fully acknowledged in the linguistic research on bilingual children is the importance of cultural factors for second language learning. Most bilingual children, independent of their language proficiency, are also bicultural, meaning that they have roots in more than one language and culture. This has an effect on the way bilingual children approach the process of secondary language learning in significant ways. The theme of cultural inclusivity is large on its own. This paper concentrates on those aspects of cultural inclusivity that directly concern learning language and finding identity in bilingual children aged two-and-a-half to six years old in a Waldorf early childhood setting.

Considering past research on bilingualism is complicated. Early research often held a biased (and often racially biased) view of bilingualism as an educational complication. The general attitude was held that bilingualism was a disorder that could be corrected through relentless instruction in a standard majority language, pushing out all traces of the invading language. The remedy was imposed despite the fact that the unwanted language was often the language spoken in the child's home, also carrying the child's family heritage and tradition.

Eventually another group of researchers started to look at the role that social factors played in second language learning and how they are instrumental to learning the second language. Researcher John Schumann developed a new model for language acquisition by arguing that second language learning is based on social factors as well, such as the integration into a community and personal feelings of assimilation. If this complex of experiences is positive, the future looks bright. Negative experiences of language learning and attitudes toward this process hinder possibilities for future healthy intellectual, social, and emotional development.

While he did not address bilingualism itself, Rudolf Steiner gave considerable attention to general language acquisition and language development. He

emphasized several aspects in Waldorf education that the mainstream view also acknowledges. First is the aspect of imitation. Waldorf education sees imitation as the driving force for all learning in the young child and definitely with language learning. Children learn to speak by imitating movement, the gestures that accompany speech sounds, and then the sounds themselves. Steiner writes, "While the human being is growing into the physical, earthly world, his inner nature is developing in such a way that this development proceeds in the first place out of gesture, out of differentiation of movement. In the inner nature of the organism speech develops out of movement in all its aspects, and thought develops out of speech. This deeply significant law underlies all human development. Everything which makes its appearance in sound, in speech, is the result of gesture, mediated through the inner nature of the human organism" (Steiner 1924, Lecture III).

Before babies communicate through spoken language, they communicate through body movements when spoken to. When the mother speaks, the baby moves. If she is still, the baby's body is also still. Motor movement, speech, and cognitive development are closely intertwined and support each other. As a consequence, thinking develops out of the structuring activity that speech has on the brain. Understanding the world through the senses, through thought, is developed out of speech. Movement precedes speech; speech precedes thought. First out of movement he learns to speak, to articulate. Only then does thinking come forth from speech. We must, therefore, look upon this sequence as being something of importance: gesture, speech, thought, or the process of thinking (Steiner 1924, Lecture III).

A consequence of this intense imitation process is that young children organize their bodies according to what comes to them through the senses and in ways that allow them to participate in the world. This particularly holds true when looking at the effect of language on children. Young children are so open and susceptible to outside impressions that they take in the verbal and

non-verbal expressions of adults wholly through their senses and are not consciously able to withdraw from them. This way speech and auditory experiences have a forming effect on the children's physical and soul organization. "And language coming from the child's environment, works upon the child's soul. Through

language we take in from our surroundings what we make our own in the realm of the soul. The entire soul atmosphere of our surroundings permeates us through the medium of language. And we know that the child is one great sense organ; we know that inner processes are inaugurated through these soul impressions" (Steiner 1988: 44).

This knowledge is not confined to Waldorf education. Ample evidence in scientific research has confirmed the effects of verbal and nonverbal communication on the organs, particularly on the brains of babies even before they can speak themselves. The implications of these findings for the language

development of children are that children need interactive communication (verbal and non-verbal) where they can both observe and imitate movements, gestures and expressions of others in order to develop non-verbal and verbal language themselves. They need an active speaker who speaks to them regardless of their intellectual understanding of the words or their own ability to speak. "Children need our sympathetic voice and word-sounds no less than the 'songs without words' from their surrounding. Just as an infant would languish without our soothing words and lullabies, and as a baby would suffer inwardly without our nursery rhymes and little games, a toddler would not thrive without our words and word-sounds that harmonize his tender experiences" (de Haes 2014:52). How language is presented and language development supported is of monumental importance. All language learning comes not only through sound but also through movement and gesture.

What is bilingualism? One definition describes it as the use of two or more languages in everyday life. A person is bilingual when she can function in each

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language according to given needs. How do emerging bilingual children perceive speech?

Steiner observes that speech starts when children gain uprightness and start walking. Hearing, on the other hand, happens much earlier. Infants even develop impressive auditory discriminatory capacities for languages in utero. Fetuses who were regularly read prose passages by their mothers prior to birth demonstrated a preference for these passages after birth in comparison to new passages. Dual language learners can benefit from these innate discriminatory capacities even before they are born. Newborn bilingual infants can differentiate between their native language and another language shortly after birth if these languages belong to a different rhythmical group (e.g. French and Russian) and by about four and a half months if they belong to the same rhythmical group (e.g. Spanish and Catalan). This ability to differentiate between languages early in life is an important foundation for building separate linguistic systems later.

While infants can differentiate sounds early in their life, the first sound production begins at about six months with babbling. At this point, babies are able to reproduce the sounds of all languages. But at about ten months, infants tune into the properties of their surrounding languages, reducing their spoken language sounds to those that are used in the relevant languages. This, in turn, changes their cognitive ability to perceive different sounds.

There are two categories of bilingual acquisition—simultaneous and successive.

Simultaneous bilingual children develop their two languages in parallel and achieve early language milestones on a similar schedule to monolingual children. This also holds true for children who learn a spoken language and sign language. Successive learners, who learn one language before the second language is introduced, already possess linguistic knowledge, know what language is, what it is used for, and in which setting it is used. This is of help to them when they start to learn a second language, particularly with skill transfer to academic reading and writing in the second language. However, when it comes to oral language use, the influence of one language on the other depends more on individual attributes such as personality, interaction style, environmental or cognitive factors. This is true when both languages are established properly.

It is a different picture when both languages are not established properly. When competence is lacking in both languages, the effect on the academic achievements of the child can be negative. Without adequately developed language, it is difficult for structured thinking to emerge. Children need language with which to think. Rudolf Steiner emphasized the importance of this sequence: gesture, speech, and then thought, or the process of thinking. This can be a guiding principle in supporting language learners in our classes.

One may see differences in how bilingual children structure their speech because of cross-linguistic influences. Substitution of a word-order rule from one language to another is common. This is a typical phenomenon of bilingual development that does not point to language confusion or difficulties in coping with different language input. But all in all, cross-linguistic influences are usually not rampant in bilingual children.

Another difference is “code switching,” when the speaker shifts to another language for a word or a sentence and then reverts back to the original language. Bilinguals switch languages for reasons other than simple confusion, one of them being that certain phrases, notions or concepts are better expressed in one language than the other.

There is another important aspect to understand when code switching is used as a communicative or social strategy. This can be the case when code switching is used to mark the identity of a group (such as the extensive use of code switching in English and Spanish, as found in the Puerto Rican communities in New York). This should be seen as an identity issue and not as a lack of proficiency.

Code switching is often criticized and has led to the misconception that bilinguals code switch out of laziness or carelessness about their language skills. The conception that code switching will lead to some form of language mix that is neither one language nor the other has led teachers to discourage code switching. Current research does not validate this concern. Bilingual researchers have found that code switching happens deliberately depending on the listener, the social environment, or the theme of conversation. Thus, code mixing can be viewed as a reflection of the child’s growing linguistic competence: in order to code mix, the child has to have access to the grammar in both languages in order to integrate

them in one sentence or conversation. Linguist Shana Poplack, who conducted pioneering work in the area of code switching, wrote, “Code switching is a verbal skill requiring a large degree of linguistic competence in more than one language rather than a defect arising from insufficient knowledge of one or the other. Rather than representing deviant behavior, it is actually a suggestive indicator of degree of bilingual competence” (Poplack cited in Grosjean 2010: 57). In addition, as stated above, as it can be a part of a child’s cultural identity and, therefore, a fundamental part of who they are. To refuse a child the possibility of using her languages for self-expression is to diminish the child as an individual.

Whatever strategy the family adopts—who speaks which language and when—what is important is to ensure that the child receives enough input from both languages and that she has a real need and opportunity to use both. Language learning should come from active human interaction, not passive input from TV, computer programs, or voice recordings. Both Waldorf and mainstream research affirm this need.

When bilingual children enter school with little knowledge of the language spoken there, they are often expected to acquire the majority language as best as they can without paying any attention to their first language. This approach presents numerous problems on many levels. If children do not understand or speak the dominant language, learning of skills and content is often slow and they fall behind. In addition, they often feel lonely and insecure, especially if they alone do not know the language spoken by most of their peers. This struggle is even harder when the teacher has no knowledge of the child’s language or culture, and there is nobody around to help them out. Research reveals the frustration of children who do not have sufficient second-language skills. They are not able to express their intelligence, their feelings and their ideas to their peers and teachers. They cannot do so in the language of the school, and they are often not allowed to do so in their home language.

Lily Wong Fillmore describes three social strategies that language learners adopt to enter into a second language setting. First they join a group and act as if they know what is going on, even if they don’t.

Second, they give the impression—with a few chosen words—that they can speak the language, even if they don’t. Third, they count on the help of their friends to actually learn words, sentences and expressions in the new language (Wong Fillmore 1991, p. 52). Children will often attach to a teacher or an older capable child and imitate unconsciously what they hear until they gain an understanding of the language.

Steiner speaks repeatedly about the openness of a young child’s senses and the influence of attachment figures in the imitation process of the young child. This holds true particularly for initial language acquisition. Rainer Patzlaff writes, “In order to develop in a healthy way, children need the ‘spark’ and impulse of being spoken to on a regular basis. It is not the number of words that matter, but certain qualities that ask a lot of today’s adults. We must not chatter to children while thinking of something entirely different, but make the effort to keep everything from our minds when we speak. All our powers of feeling and empathy must be involved when we surround the children with conscious awareness. Then, and only then, will our words be true, authentic expressions of our I.” (Patzlaff 2011, p. 30) Children need a truthful expression of our own I in order to build their I. Bilingual language learners who do not know the meaning of words yet are even more in need of our true interest and empathy.

It can be said that the language learner needs a language companion, a buddy, who speaks with the special needs of the learner in mind. The helpful language spoken tends to be “structurally simpler, more redundant and repetitive, and is characterized by greater structural regularity than what is found in ordinary usage” (Wong Fillmore 1991, p. 54).

How can we adapt our classroom language in order to fulfill this prerequisite for successful second language learning? In a Waldorf classroom we already have wonderful tools to practice rhythmical, repetitive language use with children. The Waldorf educator and researcher, Rainer Patzlaff, refers to Piaget’s observation about language learning: language learning in children is not a product of intellectual learning but a by-product of sensorimotor intelligence, the immediate synchronizing of sense perceptions and motor activity without the use of mental images or

rational insights. From utilizing sensory and motor skills, children move on to unconsciously absorb language structure, leading to conscious thinking and using language as a tool. In other words, children learn language through movement, gesture, sensing the environment, rhythm and repetition, and richly spoken language in stories, circles, and puppet plays.

According to Steiner children learn the grammar of a language by experiencing the rhythmical movement of the language. He speaks in detail about the effect that the rhythmical movement of arms and legs has on primary language formation. "When you see how in the process of sentence formation the legs are working upwards into speech, and how the content, the meaning of words enters into the process of sound production—that is, into the inner experience of the structure of the sentence—you have an impression of how the beat-like, rhythmical elements the moving legs works upon the more musical- thematic and inward element of the moving arms and hands...Through the movement of the legs, the child learns to form correct sentences. Speech has to be developed on the basis of the right kind of walking and of the free movement of the arms" (Steiner 1988, p. 32ff.). Rhythmic movement, singing games, dance, and eurythmy all support this integration of movement and speech.

Bilinguals have both two languages and two cultures. Recognition and affirmation of each is also critically important for identity development and experience of belonging. Family, community, and place provide "anchors," according to Ruth van Reken, to make the child feel safe and simultaneously "mirror" back a message of how she is seen by those around her (Van Reken et al. 2017, p. 108). In traditional monolingual and monocultural childhoods these anchors and mirrors are more or less steady. A consistent language, known community, and recognized cultural values give guidance in how to interact with one another. If this process of anchoring goes well and the feedback coming to the children from their mirrors is kind and accepting,

then children can develop their unique identity and find their belonging in a particular culture (Van Reken et al. 2017, p. 117).

When children move to a different place and culture, the anchors and mirrors become unstable. Even if the family remains a stable entity, the community and place have changed. In this case what is mirrored back to the children depends on how the new community supports them. If the community helps the child to understand how life works in the new place with language and culture, the child's identity can grow in exciting new ways. However, if the community mirrors back to the child that she is not understood and not helped in understanding this different cultural context, then identity building is much more difficult. The new place feels unsafe.

Living with two or more languages and cultures is increasingly common for children in our time. Yet it is poorly understood in our schools. We know that successful school programs for bilingual children not only promote bilingual language learning but also have a real understanding of the children and cultures involved. The practice of cultural inclusivity and anti-bias education in classrooms is, therefore, not a choice but a necessity if we want to successfully support bilingual and bicultural children in our schools. Parents and teachers must be aware of what children are going through when they are learning to live with two or more languages and cultures, and must ease their passage as they establish their identity as bicultural-bilingual individuals. Ultimately, the journey into bilingualism and biculturalism should be a joyful one. This is only possible if the children feel accepted and supported as individuals who are rooted in more than one culture and language. Language learning and cultural inclusivity go hand in hand.

In addition to creating a culturally inclusive classroom and a true environment of belonging for bilingual-bicultural children, the importance of supportive social relationships from teachers comes up in all studies. Lily Wong Fillmore's model of language learning and the extensive studies of Jim

Bilinguals have both two languages and two cultures.

Cummins have shown that the experience of bilingual children depends critically on the relationships they can form with educators and other people in their environment. Cummins writes, “The starting point for understanding why (bilingual) students choose to engage academically or, alternatively, withdraw from academic efforts is to acknowledge that the human relationship is at the heart of schooling. All of us know this from our own experiences. If we felt that a teacher believed in us and cared for us, then we put forth much more effort than if we felt that he or she did not like us or considered us not very capable” (Cummins 2000, p. 40).

Rudolf Steiner sees the role of adults and the influence of environmental factors as decisive not only for the language development of a child but for the overall organization of their bodies. Contrary to the more restricted linguistic models of language learning, he defines language learning as imitative activity that is connected to the child’s sensory and motor experiences. Speech and environmental configurations enter the child through the openness of their senses and influence the constitutional development of body and soul. Therefore, speaking to the child is a great responsibility. It requires a conscious speaker as a truthful model for imitation.

How can we develop into such conscious and truthful speakers? Rudolf Steiner speaks repeatedly about the need to create an inner relationship with the child as the basis for a genuine teacher-child connection (Steiner 1924, Lecture V). He demands that we study the children deeply, not only in a general anthroposophical approach, but in a very real way as they present themselves before and within us. Regarding bilingual-bicultural children, this means that we have to educate ourselves about the specific linguistic ways they use to articulate themselves, the influence of their two languages on each other, and the importance of retaining their bilingualism and biculturalism in the classroom and their home lives. ♦

Resources:

1. Cummins, Jim (2000): *Language, Power and Pedagogy. Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Tonawanda, New York: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
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The Healing Power of Shelter Play

— Paulene Hanna

Every human child's earthly journey has, at its beginning, the need for the shelter and warmth of a human embrace. Our earliest security is experienced in the arms of someone who willingly cares for us, not only with nutrition, but with a loving gesture. It is not surprising that further on in life whenever we are fearful, anxious or experiencing loneliness, we may long to return to this early form of shelter. We can find ourselves with a need for the arms of another.

For the child, only just on the road to independent self care, the need for shelter is very present. This need is expressed symbolically in drawing as well as in play: the building of a boundary is often an initial play gesture. When the child moves beyond their first home into the world of the unfamiliar, support for their gradual ability to feel at ease is needed. Free play requires trust, and is supported by adults who, with time and patience, respect their child's play as an important form of expression that can be most meaningful when the child feels "at home."

Often an initial feeling of insecurity is expressed through holding on to a known or newly friendly adult. Gradually the child may move towards setting up his or her own shelter or boundaries and then remain firmly within them. These physical structures tell us that a space has been made where the child feels secure. From this space the little one will look out and maybe, in time, invite another in. We can call this expression "foundational home building" or "enclosing play."

Over my career with freely playing children I have seen older, seemingly confident children return to an expression of "enclosure" when entering unknown territory. An example is a child who, in hiding behind or under a piece of furniture, is seeking security and shutting themselves off from the enormity of the situation. Similarly, a child who is seemingly destructive socially can be supported by being given a play enclosure to call their own—from this they can look out at, or meet others, with conditions that are under their own control.

Every healthy, meaningful journey will benefit from having a safe home at its beginning.



As adults living with the threat of the coronavirus, we too are feeling the need for a safe space to call our own. We feel the need for protection from all that is going on around us in the wider community. Many of us are rearranging and redefining our homes so that the feeling of “shelter” is, once again, experienced by the whole family. It is a time when we have an awakened empathy for the need to live in a safe space.

The Play Enclosure or Cubby House and the Growing Child



The task of building a healthy physical body goes side by side with the child's developing self confidence. This process can be meaningfully expressed through the child's “home play.” Building up and breaking down is a common play theme of the very young child, whose instability in movement is reflected in the impermanence of their play structures. The older child, with growing control over movement skills and object placement, can plan and build more stable structures. He or she builds with more intention and confidence, and in doing so communicates: “This is my territory”; “This is my home”; “I can take care of myself.”

There is a feeling of satisfaction that comes with the building of a structurally sound “playhouse.” The play structure sits happily alongside all the expanding achievements of the child's growing body.

Almost magically, home play is enhanced and enlivened by the child's developing gift of imagination.



Home Makers

Some children will be enthusiastic builders and some will move into shelters made by others. Those who arrange the space inside the shelter we can call “home makers.” Making beds, storing food, cooking, and defining entrances and exits falls to those who “live” in the home. Through the personalization of space inside the “cubby,” the child makes the home uniquely their own and expresses their idea of being “at home.”

From an archetypal perspective, each child is at the start of a long journey, travelled by many who have gone before. Every life is experienced uniquely, but at the same time the foundational journey towards socialization and independence has been shared throughout history and across cultures. There has always been the need for shelter, to find food, to meet others and to find common ground. Children, too, begin their playful journey by satisfying the need to have a defined and safe home base.

Children often show a preference for either indoor or outdoor play, and the shelter or house theme can be expressed in either setting. Children the world over build circles of security around themselves in many ways, simple and complex. They may merely cover themselves over or hide as a way of feeling “safer,” or their building may involve chairs, tables, sticks and cloths. I once had a neighbor who in his eighties could still describe in detail, and with a twinkle in his eye, his childhood “dugout.”

The playing children are joining in the human being's universal journey towards self-understanding and independence, which has at its beginning



belonging in a safe territory. With a home space to leave from and return to, we can work on our communication and involvement skills as a member of a gradually widening social community.

All who are privileged to be with freely playing children can look at how experiences are digested and confidence enhanced by their entering daily into rich imaginative play. In all forms of play there are starting points, stepping stones, and sequences. All these stages can be revisited and enhanced by lots of self-propelled, playful practice.

Supporting Cubby House Play at Home

1. Children need a space to build and rearrange some simple furniture.
2. They need time to get into the play and to become satisfied with what they achieve (1 hour or a bit more).
3. They need some simple furniture and props that are theirs to move around.
4. Decorating items can be collected by the child and adjusted to their growing needs and ability to care for them.

5. Suggested props:

- small or light chairs and stools
- a table that can be played under or added onto
- a big sturdy basket in which to sit—store
- wooden or strong cardboard boxes can also be inspiring
- plain colored flat sheets and smaller cloths
- some special long building sticks—perhaps found on a walk and sanded
- some lengthy ties to hold the shelter together

Packing Away

It is important not to have too much, so that the materials can be kept in order. Children have taught me that they love to begin in a fresh space. If a space is cared for and ordered in a way that is accessible, it will attract players. Tidying and restoring order is important and children may need some adult enthusiasm to help with this. ♦



Paulene Hanna lives in Australia and entered Waldorf early childhood teaching in 1988. She has a passionate interest in children's play and uses photography as a nonintrusive way to observe children in this activity. She has recently retired from classroom teaching and is both a researcher and a writer, committed to awakening awareness of the importance of self-directed play in children's lives. She is also a former editor of the Australian early childhood journal, *Star Weavings*.

A Strip of Fruitful Land Between Stream and Stone: A Waldorf Forest Kindergarten's Ways and Future Potential

— Myrthe Jentgens

Reprinted from the IASWECE Newsletter, October 2020.

A few years ago, an agricultural apprentice of my husband opened my eyes to a phenomenon that I had not been fully aware of until then. He had seen my husband setting up a cultivator in the field and our four-year-old son standing next to it. The latter literally sucked the process into himself. Every movement was stored, every detail was “absorbed,” so to speak. Our apprentice suddenly realized that a normal apprenticeship would simply not be enough to reach the level of my husband, who also grew up on and next to his father’s tractor, in agricultural matters. Perhaps, as he said at the time, it would even be impossible, in some respects.

How intensively a child learns! The intensity of a child’s perceptions creates a completely different sense of time! “Every” spring as a child, one pulled up the turnips, although one did so perhaps twice at most. One “always” went on vacation or celebrated Christmas in this way and no other. Moments appear as small eternities and are stored in a pantry that accompanies the child and from which it can draw for the rest of its life.

The intensity of these learning processes is probably due to the fact that the children do not only learn with their heads, which can always remain at a distance, but with their twelve senses, which enter into a deep connection with everything that surrounds them. Although sensory activity prepares the cognitive element because it plays a major role in brain development, it also forms the cradle of what is ultimately much more important and what could be called the sense of aesthetics and moral sensitivity. In three ways, the Waldorf Forest Kindergarten, as I have come to know it as a mother and as a helper, seems to me to make an important contribution to a foundational development of the senses and thus to the most important future questions of our time.

The Climate Question

The Waldorf Forest Kindergarten carries a responsibility to provide children with a resilient

toolkit for the realities of the 21st century. A materially reduced, near-natural environment is part of this preparation. What is missing is a building whose construction and heating use up the forces of the earth. Materials from nature and some kitchen utensils for the sandpit are completely sufficient to keep the children busy for a whole morning. In fact, there are no signs of lack of play or inspiration in this respect. On the contrary. If the educators move away from the home base with too much perseverance, climbing, building, rolling and running, some children even complain about not having had enough time “to play” in the familiar place.

In my opinion, the work areas of the future will not be mainly “in the office” as they have been for the last 30 years. In the foreseeable future, it will be much less about managing, marketing or redistributing products, but rather about whether and how we humans can still take care of ourselves, our earth and our fellow human beings in a physical-material sense. An educational practice close to nature and the body therefore seems to me to be urgently needed in order to be able to meet the future requirements to some extent. The children of the Waldorf Forest Kindergarten get used to a life in the open air, to which they relate, which they appreciate and admire, and from which they also learn to distance themselves. They get used to a daily routine in working clothes, with earth under their fingernails and heavy clumps of mud on their boots. They find a relaxed but attentive way of dealing with wind and weather and with questions about the appropriate equipment. They get to know a wide variety of animals and insects without being afraid of them and they learn which plants are edible and which are not. They learn to endure, and to be intimately happy about a beautiful sunny day in autumn, winter or spring. They learn to perceive their own body and its needs more precisely when the question arises at regular intervals: How many layers do you have on and what material are they made of? Are the feet warm, are they wet, are the hands warm, is the scarf enough?



Photo by Lori Lynn Hoffer

Have you already been creamed? Where is your sun hat? These matters are actually not stressful matters in this kindergarten, as I have already experienced in other kindergartens. They are not questions that turn being outside into a “survival”-like state of emergency, but rather an unexciting, necessary routine. Those who live outside have to take certain precautions, then they can move around freely and pursue their projects.

The increasing awareness of one’s own warmth balance, and of the differences between cold and warm days, clothes, and environments, also offer the child a valuable learning field in the area of its own sense of warmth, and the daily care for the children’s warmth balance can enrich and strengthen the relationship between the children and the educators, as Emmi Pikler has described in an exemplary way with regard to the immense value of mindful body care of the infant.

The “event character” of our contemporary experience of nature is known to be associated with extreme, climate-damaging conditions. If no snow falls, we need snowmaking machines. If you want to

go skiing in summer, you go to the indoor ski hall, including an après-ski stand and mountain panorama. Nature is expected to deliver sensation, adventure, beauty, and a heightened awareness of life. In the Waldorf Forest Kindergarten, children experience that nature can also be a daily environment, a home. Its joyful characteristics are not to be found in big actions, but in the little things that can be discovered by the children themselves, in fruit or flower formations, in ice crystals or other seasonal processes, in special weather conditions or skies, in surprises from the animal world.

Last but not least, nature in the Waldorf Forest Kindergarten is a world that is shaped by people. The kindergarten teachers work on nature by tending the beds and bushes, planting trees, making wood, baking bread, swinging the rake, harvesting and boiling down berries, feeding chickens, etc. The area around the construction trailer, with its clay oven, tool shed, composting toilet and nearby chicken coop, seems almost like a kind of village in a nutshell, surrounded by trees and, at the back, bordered by a high, round

wall of branches and twigs, where birds and other small animals live.

On the walks in the open countryside, the children get a feeling for how to create islands of home in the middle of an overwhelming environment. Picnic areas have to be found and prepared, huts and fairy houses can be built and made cozy, materials can be collected, sorted and put together into something new and redesigned. In short, one could say that this is a Waldorf village kindergarten that combines Waldorf education with the idea of the forest kindergarten and the village idea of the European Middle Ages. Again and again it seems to be about feeling how much openness, freedom, and wilderness is good for the children on the one hand, how much covering and framing they need on the other hand, and how they can learn to produce it themselves. The educators perform a continuous movement between expansion and concentration, circumference and center. The calmer and more comprehensive the movement between these two poles, the deeper the feelings of happiness, trust and creative power that the child, and the adults, can feel.

The memory of these feelings, in the midst of the wonderful, but also threatening, natural surrounding, will, I am convinced, benefit the children in an existential way in times of increasing weather extremes and physical emergencies.

The Health Question

The concept of a Waldorf kindergarten can also respond to the crisis of our physical health in an appropriate way. Don't pediatricians everywhere complain about the lack of fresh air, daylight and exercise? And are we sufficiently aware of what we are depriving children of when we increasingly deprive them of air, light and movement?

Fresh air and daylight form the basis for creativity, relationship-building, and imagination. Physical development and organ formation, which are of central importance in the first seven years of every human life, are stimulated in the most positive way by fresh air and daylight. We know this, but we continue to make our children spend their playtime and lives within four walls. The amount of time we are exposed to today's flickering and originally blue LED light and, even worse, the light of computer screens, is



Photo by Lori Lynn Hoffer

extremely harmful to our health. On the other hand, it is becoming more and more known how health-promoting it is to grow up outdoors, for example also with regard to children's eyesight (see Renz-Polster 2013, p. 24).

Movement forms the basis for all later learning and comprehension. A well-balanced, well-developed sense of movement goes hand in hand with a healthy sense of balance, which in turn is the basis for other senses. Children move outside, in nature, much more than in their home environment. My daughters' Waldorf kindergarten group stops every day at certain climbing trees and "mountains." The fresh air gives them energy, the expanse invites the children to run and jump without disturbing anyone, all kinds of obstacles challenge them to jump, tree trunks invite them to balance, and the uneven ground requires constant balancing and movement.

In this context, walking itself, walking on two legs, seems to me to be infinitely important. Pediatricians increasingly point out how important walking is for healthy growth of the legs and even the organs. The development of the body, as well as the spiritual grounding of the child, is fundamentally promoted by walking. In our Waldorf kindergarten, the children walk one kilometer daily from the collection point to the construction trailer and back. In addition to this, there are some more walks on Tuesday and Thursday.

Walking is also a development aid in a broader sense. The child learns patience, how to estimate and walk along a path. All becoming needs exactly this form of patience, needs tenacity and rhythm,

needs the trusting devotion to the moment and at the same time the experienced foresight. Today we want to be everywhere, literally “in flight,” we want to have everything here and now, to be everything, and to disregard the earthly realm and its limits as if by magic. Walking is the countermovement to this all-encompassing impatience of our zeitgeist and teaches children: Good things take time! The path is an important part of the goal.

The Spiritual Question

The Waldorf kindergarten can develop facilities for more than its own subsistence in a natural-material sense. The small “village” between woods and meadows is also a picture for the world of the middle, human domain. Between great wilderness and a small seasonal table, between the breadth of nature and the narrow construction trailer, a human spiritual life unfolds, so to speak. To me, the perceptions seem to find deeper resonance in the hearts of the children, perhaps because the pressures of noise, social stress, bad air and artificial light are eliminated. The many songs about processes and events in nature are given a concreteness that can offer an elemental joy to the children, and the adults. To their wide-open senses, berries they have picked themselves seem somehow redder, their freshly baked bread smells more fragrant, the springtime meadow seems somehow more enchanting. And against the background of the gray-brown winter world, the colors of the costumes for a nativity play, for example, which are pulled over fat baggy pants and snow suits with the most serious devotion, shine strangely intensively.

The culture of the puppet shows under the open sky also has a completely different appeal. How huge and wide is the real sky and the tall oaks and the distant edge of the forest compared to such a little mini-world evoked through cloths and dolls on the lap or on a piece of earth. And yet, time and again, we succeed in making this world appear as large and enchanting as the great outdoors. Even in stormy weather conditions, the children sit in the closing circle like little red-nosed gnomes and look spellbound at what is happening in the middle. In the closed room, the walls of the house take over part of the demarcation. If educators and children manage to draw their sensory activity together in such a way and direct it towards such a small process, I believe they work on the development of a resistant and at the same time wonderfully delicate inner life.

Of course, one cannot claim that the educational task within a forest kindergarten becomes easier. Where the four walls of a house do not hold and protect the children, it seems more than ever the task of the educators to hold the children. This is done above all by building bonds. The living relationship, along with the rituals and rhythms, forms an important part of the sheath within which a child can move with confidence and trust. Lower costs and the limited space of the construction wagon make it possible to limit the number of children in the group, which facilitates active relationship work. And the basic freedom of movement, the consciously sought-after places of retreat, and the intensive workload of the children create a good basis for making even difficult educational demands more bearable and workable.

Just as lovingly cultivated space between wilderness and urban civilization seems to be becoming increasingly rare in our world today, I believe that we can also observe a growing impoverishment in the area of human soul life between will and intellect. “If only we too could discover a pure, contained human place, a strip of fruitful land of our own, between stream and stone!” wrote Rainer Maria Rilke. To me this seems to be the world of the heart, between banal physicality and abstract spirituality, which in times of dehumanization must be preserved, or rather, constantly sought anew and brought to life. The Waldorf Forest Kindergarten village of my daughters represents for me, in this sense, a “strip of fruitful land.” And especially against the background of the climatological prognoses, I think almost daily that many, many more children should be prepared in this way for a life “between stream and stone.” ♦

Resources:

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Myrthe Jentgens studied history, education and literature in Amsterdam and Berlin. She lives as a freelance author and singer on the organic farm of her husband and is a mother of three children. The Forest Kindergarten is located in the North of Germany, by the Elbe river.

Aspects of Social Media Influence in Early Childhood: One Teacher's Exploration

— Karen Fjestad

A little girl enters my room the same way each day. She smooths down her dress, glancing down at it and then up to me to gauge my reaction. I say, "Good morning, sweetheart." She tries another time. She looks down, again, smoothing out her dress, then a look to me with more expectation, thinking that I may not have noticed. I say, "The babies are still sleeping. Perhaps you might go check on them." Not to be distracted, she says directly, "I have a new dress." "You do," I say without inflection and continue with my teacher's work, folding laundry. I am making a conscious effort not to feed that need that lives already so deeply in her for a compliment, a "like."

In my conversations with parents over the last twelve years in my classroom, there has been a strong increase in concern over social media's influence on the mental health of teens and young adults. Our children will most likely join the world of social media at some point. In our early childhood classrooms, we allow space for the development of empathy, feeling a connection with another, and self-confidence. With these skills, our children can be better prepared for this ever-changing world online.

Many of our schools have dress expectations that restrict the television and movie character images on the children's clothing. In my experience, when a child surrounds themselves with images of TV princesses and superheroes, it limits their creativity in play and gives them a feeling that the more I have, the more self-worth I feel. Images are everywhere: clothes, backpacks, rain boots, bedsheets, it goes on and on. It is better to learn at a young age that who you are is more important than what you have. Feeding this desire for attention for external things pushes that learning back.

Often, I can recognize the children who receive a lot of compliments at home because they are so hungry for recognition in class. "Watch me, Miss Karen!" is shouted over and over. A child may feel that doing

something challenging or interesting is not worth doing if there is no one there to say, "Good job." I react to a child calling out for me to watch them by watching, then a nod in their direction and continuing with my work. I may also simply describe what they are doing: "You are jumping." It is soon tiresome for the child to call for this type of recognition and not receive it. It doesn't take long before they stop looking for someone else's approval. They still will challenge themselves, but it becomes more for internal satisfaction than for recognition.

If a child grows up doing things for someone else's approval they often stop taking risks in different areas of their life. They don't want to risk not getting that recognition that they have become accustomed to. Instead of doing something new, it is better to do what's tried and true. Mom always loves drawings of rainbows, so better stick with those. Academically, a child may be fearful to reveal their shortcomings and not want to see their mistakes. They may blame other people or situations for any disappointments to divert unwanted scrutiny from themselves.

Young adults who have grown up needing that hit of a compliment may have a hard time when out in the working world, where they aren't going to get this reassurance in the same way. Their self-confidence may plummet if they are not getting constant positive feedback.

One day during free play time, a very shy and quiet child in my class piped up with a surprisingly deep, thunderous voice and shouted, "I want to be the scariest one!" In our Waldorf early childhood classrooms, young children meet each other socially in the richness of free play time. This time gives space for trying on different characters, which is such a valuable experience at a young age. Trying on different identities at four years old is healthier than waiting until those teenage years when, through the memory of social media, a temporary identity can be revisited forever.

Our free play time also gives space for the development of empathy and the practice of sharing feelings and describing experiences. When a child is hurt or a block castle has been knocked over, perhaps accidentally or on purpose, the children are brought together often facing each other so that they can experience one another's facial expressions and body language.

If the children cannot verbalize their feelings or describe what has happened, the grownup can describe what has happened. "Oh, dear. Joey was hit in the head with a block. That probably hurt. I don't think that Jane meant for that to happen. I am sorry that you are so sad, Joey." The adult is modeling the saying of "I am sorry," which we want the child to feel sincerely and not just say in words. "Jane, please get an icepack and we'll put it on Joey's head." When Jane returns with the icepack, the grown-up may place the child's hand onto the icepack on Joey's head. The child who has caused the distress is the one doing the healing or helping deed.

During this time there are likely many other little eyes focused what is happening. This is a rich experience that can lead toward developing empathy and the skills for finding words to tell what has happened. Both the children directly involved in the situation and the ones observing can witness this. After the child is feeling better, or the castle rebuilt, whatever the healing deed is has been done, the children return to play. Even in one day, there are many times that children are given this opportunity to participate in or observe this interaction. A child witnesses the cycle of: I made a mistake, I can help fix it, and then life goes on. Empathy needs to be felt to be developed. It can't be taught directly or lectured about.

*If a child grows
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A deeper understanding of the other is achieved through this foundational development of social skills in young children. A true friend is someone who cares for you and upon whom you can rely. That is the counter-picture we are offering to meet the superficial influence of "friends," "followers," and "likes" in the social media realm.

Children and young adults who are hungry for compliments are primed and vulnerable to the dark side of the social media realm. Teens' time on screens and particularly time on social media has increased significantly. At

this same time, anxiety within this age group has also increased. Parents' concern for their children's mental health is steadily growing.

If we keep in mind the social media realm that our children will almost certainly enter into, we can arm our children for what lies ahead. By strengthening their sense of self and their ability to connect with the other at a young age, we hope that they can remember that who they are comes from within and is not the persona they put on their screen. ♦

Karen Fjestad teaches the 3-to-4-year-old Sunflower program at the Calgary Waldorf School. She has a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Alberta and Waldorf Early Childhood training from the West Coast Institute. Karen found her way to Waldorf education through her two curious and thoughtful boys who spent their schooling in Waldorf education and both now study engineering at the University of Calgary. Karen enjoys sharing her love of Waldorf education through parent work and giving tours of the early childhood program.

Transitions

Freya Jaffke—In Memoriam



Freya Jaffke, master Waldorf kindergarten teacher and teacher trainer from Germany, crossed the threshold into the spiritual world on June 1, 2021 at the age of 84. The author of many beloved books, she also lectured and offered workshops for educators and parents worldwide.

In the US, she was active primarily on the East Coast, offering courses and workshops in Spring Valley and at the Rudolf Steiner Institute. She was one of the European Waldorf “greats” who came to the first International Waldorf Early Childhood Conference held at High Mowing in Wilton, NH, in 1986. There she offered a workshop to initiate teachers into her beloved wood carving and offered the puppet play of “Pimpernel” to the whole conference alongside puppet performances by Margret Myerkort and Bronja

Zahlingen. She devoted thirty years to kindergarten teaching at the Freie Georgenschule in Reutlingen and was also a co-founder and teacher of the Waldorf Kindergarten Training Seminar in Stuttgart.

After founding the training seminar in the early 1970s, Freya realized that there was a dearth of teaching resource materials, including songs and circle games. She began to write and composed sixteen small books, through which she is likely best known in America. Her publications include *Work and Play in Early Childhood*, *Toymaking with Children*, *On the Play of the Child*, *Celebrating Festivals with Children*, *Magic Wool*, and *Let’s Dance and Sing*.

The following remiscence from Austrian colleague Brigitte Goldmann paints a picture of how influential Freya Jaffke was in contributing to the “Both / And”

form of the artistic kindergarten filled with practical work that we see in our schools today.

Brigitte shares:

To remember Freya Jaffke, I have to go back into the 70s when I started to work with Bronja Zahlingen in her kindergarten in Vienna. Bronja was a teacher living with art, bringing beautiful things into the surrounding of the children. She made wonderful puppets, dolls, wrote stories and plays and told us young teachers about the hierarchies in the spiritual world. When my colleagues and I wanted to go to Hannover to the international conference, Bronja warned us not to take the workshop of Freya Jaffke, which, of course, we then did. There we met a different world, because Freya knew how to understand and bring into the kindergarten practical work that Steiner had often just mentioned through short indications.

Bronja and Freya were two pioneers in a time where it was not clear how Waldorf kindergarten was to be lived and structured, how the rhythm of the day, the week and the year with the festivals should look. Freya told us to create a working atmosphere in the room through which the children could feel our will and then take it into their play. She made clear how to move in the room because the children are mainly imitating our movements and how our attention is directed toward the work we are doing in front of them. Freya was unique in the way she interpreted Steiner for us, pointing out the need for study and self-education.

Coming home, we strongly felt the task to unite these artistic and practical polarities. We made puppets but also started cooking in the kindergarten and working with wood. Freya had taught us to “bring daily life into the kindergarten.”

We learned poems, songs and fairytale-plays written by Bronja, and made puppets from silk for Bronja’s stories; but at the same time we learned from Freya to think about what and how to work and be with the children. Ironing is a holy deed if you know how to do it. We took up both impulses and still think that this is what the children need. “Learn to distinguish the essential from the non-essential and concentrate only on the necessary things.”

As a teacher trainer, some students found her quite strict, but others liked the clear words about the task of a teacher working with little children. These words still stay with me and I try to tell others about them as often as possible.

* * *

Susan Perrow, workshop presenter and author of books on therapeutic storytelling, shares these memories from Freya’s time in Australia:

I first met Freya in 1993 when she was the keynote presenter at the Vital Years Conference in Lennox Head on the far north coast of NSW. As one of the coordinators responsible for many practical preparations, I was struck by a request from Freya to purchase 50 wood carving knives for one of her workshops. This immediately aroused my curiosity, and I was not disappointed in this experience with her.

Freya was a great advocate for teachers to have a woodworking bench in or nearby their kindergarten room and to know how to carve wood safely and productively. Over several workshop sessions she taught us how to use the knives to create little wooden spoons and other items for creative play.

This spoke deeply to me and a woodwork bench was added to my room within a few months of her visit. I later mentored teachers in East Africa to do the same. I still have my woodwork tools in a small leather bag. After each of my grandchildren was born, I carved a little spoon for their first porridge or mashed vegetables.

The woodwork bench was not just for the teachers. Freya had stools for children to stand on to do their own woodwork of rasping wood and sanding. Sometimes a large log was clamped to the bench for the busy little workers to shape and form.

A few years after this 1993 conference I visited Freya’s kindergarten in Germany and watched one of her teachers busy at the workbench in the middle of the room with woodchips falling to the floor all around her. Children were using the woodchips in their creative play as well as the different carved implements and toys. Such a wonderful example of active imitation! This woodworking impulse stands alongside Freya’s well-known wonderful craft and doll work from her little books. These have also been well-used resources for me as a teacher, parent, and a grandparent.

A lasting memory comes from when I took her for a walk at Cape Byron. We parked up near the lighthouse. Gale force winds were blowing and rain was lashing all around. I thought she would want to stay in the car, but no chance—she pulled her raincoat on tightly and headed into the rain and wind. She was quite a small person in physical size but lived with such tremendous will forces!

* * *

From Rebecca Ruof, nursery teacher at Berkshire Waldorf School in Great Barrington, MA, who was a student in Freya Jaffke's kindergarten in Germany (the photos accompanying this article are courtesy of Rebecca):

Most of my memories of Freya Jaffke are feeling memories. I remember her most clearly from when she would come to our house to use our phone to call her brother. At the time my dad had a job that included free long-distance phone service. Freya lived in a little apartment down the street from us and she would come and sit at the desk in our living room to make her call. My sister and I were always very excited to know she was coming and tried to be quiet and stay in our room.

I was five when I was in her kindergarten and she truly created an environment and a mood that was not focused on her. "Dreamy memories" of that time are all that I recall. Freya kept herself out of the picture.

* * *

Gratitude from Nancy Blanning:

Freya was my guide and self-embraced mentor in all of my teaching. Meeting her gave me encouragement that I actually could become a Waldorf/Steiner kindergarten teacher with love of practical, simple work as my main gift to the children.

I had entered the classroom as an "emergency hire" with no training at all. A workshop with Freya Jaffke in Spring Valley in the late 1980s was my first taste of professional training. It changed my life in teaching and living. I still refer to the extensive handwritten notes I took then as my first precious Waldorf resource. I was fortunate to be able to visit her kindergarten in Germany for one morning a few years later. I learned more in four hours of just watching (and not understanding a word of German) than in my years in the

kindergarten. Just watching Freya's movements and gestures with few words was a powerful experience of how focused intention into our actions and deeds give the children accessible models for healthy imitation.

Attending the International Early Childhood conference at High Mowing was another gift. Brigitte Goldmann, in her reminiscences of Freya earlier in this tribute, described the tension in the 70s between the polarities of Bronja Zahlingen's artistic impulse in early childhood and Freya's practical work and engagement of the will. Knowing nothing about this but just following my interests and pedagogical needs, the two workshops I took at this conference were silk marionette making with Bronja and woodcarving with Freya. Little did I know that I was getting the best of both worlds. How fortunate I was to experience both of these magnificent teachers and take both of their impulses into my teaching.

I wrote to Freya last year to express my gratitude for all I have learned from her. She replied with a short letter and photos of the beautiful silk marionette plays she and her retired colleagues created each year until the last year of her life. Her artistry radiated forth along with her practicality.

I mention her regularly in teacher training courses and workshops. And I will continue to keep passing her name along to new teachers so we can sustain appreciation for our heritage from these very special teachers. ♦



Companioning Our Children: A Tribute and Thanks to Henning Köhler as Guide

— Nancy Blanning

This tribute is adapted from an article published in Lilipoh, Fall 2021.

The world of Waldorf education recently marked the passing into the spiritual world of “the warm philosopher of childhood,” Henning Köhler. He was born in Germany in 1951 and first encountered the ideas of Rudolf Steiner during a one-year curative education internship at Haus Sonne (Saarland) while in his early twenties. He ultimately became a clinical therapeutic educator and counselor.

A tribute to Köhler from the German Anthroposophical newsletter described that he did not speak of weaknesses and problems, but rather of “new talent profiles” in children. “We want to help children bring out the strengths and beauties of their nature, even under adverse conditions, and integrate their weaknesses in such a way that they do not become an obstacle to their lives.”

He is best known to Waldorf education through his two books in English translation: *Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children* and *Difficult Children: There Is No Such Thing*.

These works have helped to open up a compassionate and non-judgmental path to understanding and working with challenging behaviors in children.

Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children (fondly referred to as the Pink Book), is a key to understanding the impact of the foundational senses on physical, social and moral development of the child. This book further reveals the profound impact that the quality of our observing attention has upon the child. Köhler also advises how to work with the child’s angel.

In his second book, *Difficult Children: There Is No Such Thing*, Köhler asks us to recognize that understanding another human being is a creative, artistic process and, further, to consider the idea of parenting and education as an initiatory experience. He introduces and describes in detail the four central concepts of this process: protecting, accompanying, comforting, and healing. He awakens anew the awe we feel in the presence of children who are bringing

us fresh messages from the spiritual world and are trusting us to help them solve the riddles of this earthly life.

When thinking upon these works, a word that immediately comes to mind is “companion.” The picture of accompanying the child into earthly life helps us to understand the intentions of Rudolf Steiner in forming Waldorf education and of Karl König in implementing Steiner’s insights regarding education for special needs through the Camphill communities.

This understanding affirms that each child, each human being, has come into physical life with the intention to experience, grow, and learn, both for the sake of individual development and to serve societal growth toward goodness, beauty, and truth. In our times, we see many children who have accepted coming into our world even if it means facing challenges and difficulties. The world is not conducive to healthy development, but these children want and need to be here now to help us liberate the earth and ourselves from rigid, cold, materialistic concepts and attitudes that dominate our thinking. They have come to us, choosing us to be their loving companions who will accompany them on this life’s journey.

Each child comes to tell us something important. It has been said that everything a child does, all behavior, is communication. Actions, moods, celebrations, and frustrations are also their means of speech. Our children come to us, trusting that we will accept and understand what they are wishing to tell us about their experience in being on this earth. This communication can come to us as uneasy signs of distress, often described as “challenging behavior.” If we are baffled and frustrated in these difficult times, our response may be to become firm, authoritarian, even harsh. Usually everyone ends up unhappy and isolated from each other.

Köhler offers a different path. Instead of seeing “misbehavior,” Köhler urges us to receive the child as a mystery-of-transformation struggling to unfold. All of us—adults as well as children—are in a process of becoming. A beautiful butterfly lies hidden within each of us. But the caterpillar in the crusty, drab brown

chrysalis has to turn into green “goop” before it can emerge as the glorious butterfly. It has to struggle out of its tight imprisonment by bursting the chrysalis open. This process cannot be forced or hurried but must be allowed to proceed according to its own pace and inherent wisdom. These seeming prohibitions can make us feel powerless, that we can do nothing.

But bearing witness, accompanying, comforting through silent caring, and patient waiting are also forms of doing that carry unacknowledged power. Köhler states that what matters is that we allow time for the mystery to unfold. “We must stand at the child’s side with a waiting attitude, simply be there, patient” (Köhler, *Difficult Children: There is No Such Thing*).

In his therapeutic educator role, parents came to Köhler for advice on how to change their child’s difficult behaviors. He gave lectures and advice in a surprising way. He counseled the parents upon how to change themselves. We can try to change a child according to our will. But the only change we can truly control is how we respond ourselves. We can work to change our perception of what we see and hear and how we respond. And how do we do that? “We must stand at the child’s side with a waiting attitude, simply be there, patient.” While he gave practical advice about how to meet hard situations, he directed parents, other caregivers, and teachers to work in spiritual contemplation and conversation with the child’s angel. Out of this effort can arise the inspirations that are the “gifts of the night.”

Countless children and families were blessed by Köhler’s warm, compassionate holding. His books give practical and subtle insight into children’s sensory development and how incomplete and unreliable sensing makes their behavior difficult to respond to. He locates the cause of challenging behavior in incomplete development and inefficient sensory functioning, as the responsibility of the child.

In the long term, Köhler counseled to open the heart to feel and hear, to be still. Practice patience. Companion. Accompany. Köhler encouraged parents and teachers to accept the mystery-of-the-other as the starting place. Then the door to understanding—perhaps only with the heart and maybe not with the head—can begin to open because the other feels accepted and companioned rather than judged.

Köhler affirmed that growth and development is a series of births. Sometimes this is tranquil and quietly happening without our conscious awareness. Sometimes the labor of this process is intense. The contractions are hard and painful. The transition stage of labor is usually the hardest to endure. The advice is “Keep breathing. It will pass.” Within each challenging moment a new being—thus far hidden or in disguise—is coming, a being who can be welcomed and celebrated as a miracle.

Henning Köhler was truly the “warm philosopher of childhood.” May his words continue to companion us all. ♦

Inspiration from the Work of Henning Köhler

— Laurie Clark

In Chapter Three of his book, *Difficult Children: There Is No Such Thing*, Henning Köhler opens the way for the teacher to understand the child by way of the heart. He implores the teacher to allow the phenomena to speak without judgements, conclusions, or diagnoses that can get in the way of truly knowing the child. In a sense, the teacher is asked to come as a witness, to bring an inner listening that hears the wellspring of intentionality that the child is bringing into life. Köhler offers an artistic rendering in a selfless offering

through the poems that he writes for the child he is trying establish a connection with.

Taking this advice to heart, I began writing poems for the children in my class. One of the six-year-old boys in my class came from a Russian orphanage and was adopted when he was two years old by a family that welcomed him with open arms. His experience at the orphanage was traumatic during these first tender years of life. I will call him John as I don’t want to use his given name here.

John often made loud, unexpected sounds and uncontrolled movements in the classroom. He often had a look of scorn on his face and appeared to be fighting a battle within himself, struggling to find some grounding. What appeared to the onlooker as misbehavior was the honorable struggle that he valiantly took on in this incarnation.

John could not bear to be the one chosen in a game, to be in the center of a circle or any circumstance where he felt exposed. One day, at story time, we were dramatizing the story of the Donkey, which we had heard told several times. The story is about a king and queen who wish for a child, but are given a donkey to raise. The king insists that he will grow up and wear the kingly crown. The donkey loves music and learns to play the lute. One day, he sees his donkey form in a well and leaves his father's kingdom and enters another kingdom where there is a beautiful princess. The donkey ends up marrying the princess and shows her his true form: when his donkey skin comes off at night, he is a handsome prince. The princess is the only person in the kingdom who knows this. When the king finds out, he takes the donkey skin while the prince is asleep and has it burned to ashes. The prince becomes anxious when he cannot find his donkey skin in the morning, but the King meets him at the door and begs him to stay and show himself as he truly is. The prince stays and inherits two kingdoms and "lives in all magnificence."

When I asked who wanted to be the donkey in the story, this boy shyly raised his hand, much to everyone's surprise. He played the part of the donkey with courage. It was hard not to come to tears while I witnessed this experience and realized the profound significance this part had for him. His intense desire to portray the donkey and the transformation into the prince showed that this was the story of himself.

Inspired by Henning Köhler's poems that he synthesized into an artistic picture of the child he was working with, I wrote a poem about this experience with John. A deep, unspoken communion occurred in my relationship with him; a kind of inside-out understanding of the soul condition of this child was reflected in me. I began to feel what it must have been like to have his birth mother abandon him and his struggle to understand his life. I knew why the story of the Donkey was his story. ♦

She gave me away

I opened my mouth for her milk

But she left and I swallowed the wound instead

That pierced through my body

It still runs through my blood like a fire

And I have to fight to still the pain

I become a hunter at sunset

Searching for my life

Have you seen it?

The wild animals that live inside me

Hold parts of me hostage

They seek me out

And I am the hunter and the hunted

At night, I lay my skin beside my bed

And am lifted up to the king

Meet me there at the gate

For this is where the wedding takes place

You must be my forgiving guest

Always be my forgiving guest

There, each night

To inherit the kingdom of my life

Meet me there

This is the conversation we never had

This is the only conversation we must always live

For the Classroom

Gluskabi and the Wind Eagle

— Retold by Holly Koteen-Soulé

Gluskabi (or Glooscap) is a benevolent hero of the Wabenaki tribes of the Northeastern United States. Sometimes he plays the role of a transformer, changing monsters into harmless animals and adapting the landscape to be more favorable to the people. In this story he gets himself in and out of trouble in his attempt to understand the forces of nature. The children can readily relate to the story's juxtaposition of innocence and cleverness, and to Gluskabi's needing to find his own way, rather than taking the advice of his elder. This wonderful story was popularized by the Wabenaki storyteller and author, Joseph Bruchac.

Grandmother of the Earth lived in a small lodge near a big lake, surrounded by mountains and trees, with her grandson Gluskabi. One morning, just as the sun was rising, Gluskabi went down to the lake. He pushed his canoe into the clear water and started to paddle out. He wanted to catch a fresh salmon for his grandmother.

He stopped the canoe and put out his fishing line. Suddenly, a great wind blew up and tipped his canoe over! Splash! Into the lake he went! Gluskabi climbed back into his canoe and started to fish again. The wind blew even harder. This time it blew his canoe back to the shore! With the wind howling all around him, Gluskabi went into the lodge.

Grandmother was by the fire, heating water for breakfast. She looked at Gluskabi's frown and asked him, "What is the matter, Gluskabi?"

"I am mad at the wind," said Gluskabi. "What makes the wind blow so hard, Grandmother?"

Grandmother Earth was very wise. She told him, "Far, far away, on the top of the highest mountain, lives the Wind Eagle, Wuchowsen. When he flaps his mighty wings, he makes the wind blow."

Where does the great eagle live?" asked Gluskabi.

"I will tell you, my grandson, for I know you will keep asking until I do. But I warn you, do not disturb the great eagle Wuchowsen. No good will come of it." Grandmother shook her head at Gluskabi, but went

on, "If you stand with the wind in your face, and walk and walk, always with the wind blowing in your face, you will come to Wuchowsen. It is a long journey and you must climb many steep mountains."

Gluskabi thanked his grandmother, walked outside, put his face to the wind and walked. He walked through the forest and across the valley. He walked up and down one mountain after another. The wind blew harder and harder, making it nearly impossible to walk. It blew off his cloak, but he kept on walking. It nearly blew him off the mountain, but he kept on walking.

On a peak ahead, he could see a great bird flapping his wings. He had found Wuchowsen, the Wind Eagle! Wuchowsen flapped his mighty wings so fast that it made the air roar. Gluskabi shouted at him, "Hello, Grandfather!"

Wuchowsen did not hear him.

"HELLO, GRANDFATHER!" shouted Gluskabi.

This time the Wind Eagle heard him, and he stopped flapping his wings. "Who calls me Grandfather?" he called out.

Gluskabi said to Wuchowsen, "It is I, Grandfather, I have walked a long way to thank you for making such good wind."

This pleased the Wind Eagle, so that he opened his wings and flapped them even harder. Gluskabi had to hold on to a tree or he would have been blown away!

"GRANDFATHER!" shouted Gluskabi. Again, the Wind Eagle stopped flapping. "Grandfather, you do such a good job making wind, but you would make even greater wind if you blew from that peak way over there."

The Wind Eagle looked at the far away peak and said, "It is too far to go. Even my mighty wings would be tired if I tried to fly there."

"I will help you," said Gluskabi. "Wait here."

Then Gluskabi gathered long sturdy branches and bound them together with strips of leather to make a carrying pack. He brought it to the Wind Eagle and



said, "Grandfather, lie down on this, and I will carry you to the far peak." Then he wrapped Wuchowsen onto the carrying pack with strong braids of leather. He carried the Wind Eagle on his back until he saw a strong tree growing out from a cliff. He hung Wuchowsen from the tree, upside down! Wuchowsen could not flap his wings; he could not move at all!

"Now I can go fishing!" said Gluskabi, and he journeyed home to his lake, leaving Wuchowsen hanging there! He walked up and down the mountains, and there was no wind. He walked across the valley,

and there was no wind. He walked through the forest, and still there was no wind. When he reached the lake, he pushed his canoe out in the water. The lake was still and clear. He paddled far out into the lake and put his fishing line in the water and waited. As he waited, it began to get hotter and hotter. He was very thirsty. The water became so dirty and thick with foam that he could hardly paddle.

He was not happy fishing in the lake, for it was too hot! He returned to shore and went into the lodge. He told his grandmother, "The air is so hot that I can

hardly breathe. The lake is becoming dirty and the fish are suffering. I do not know what is wrong!"

Grandmother Earth knew what Gluskabi had done. She answered, "Because you tied up the Wind Eagle, Wuchowsen, we have no more wind. We need the wind to move the air and keep us cool. It brings the rain clouds so we have water to drink, and our plants can grow. Without wind, our life on earth will not be good."

Gluskabi hung his head. He was so sorry for what he had done. He must hurry back to the mountain and set Wuchowsen free!

Gluskabi ran all the way to the high cliff where he had left the Wind Eagle. There he was, hanging upside down. How could Gluskabi set things right without the Wind Eagle being angry?

Gluskabi called to him, "Uncle, can I help you?"

Wuchowsen was so relieved to hear someone who could help him. "Yes, I was tricked by a boy who tied me to this carry pack. He left me here hanging upside down, and I could not help myself. Thank you, Nephew, I gladly accept your help."

"I will pull you up away from the cliff, Uncle." Gluskabi pulled and pulled until the Wind Eagle was safe on the ground, then he cut the leather straps and set the Eagle free.

Wuchowsen thanked his nephew, opened his great wings and flapped one tremendous flap!

Gluskabi said to Wuchowsen, ever so quietly, "Uncle, perhaps the wind can blow some of the time, and be still some of the time."

Wuchowsen looked at Gluskabi for a long time, nodded his head and said, "Grandson, I understand."

So it came to be that from that day on, the wind blows on earth some of the time, and then it rests. ♦

Source:

This story is excerpted from the new WECAN collection *Truer Than True: A World of Fairy Tales for the Waldorf Kindergarten*, selected and edited by Holly Koteen-Soulé. Many versions of this story appear in print and online. Joseph Bruchac's version, which inspired Holly's adaptation, is in *Keepers of the Earth: Native American Stories* (Fulcrum Publishing 1997).

Gatopato and Princess Molinda

— Maria Elena Walsh, translated and adapted by Manuela di Mattei

This story, by Argentine author Maria Elena Walsh, was translated by Sunbridge Early Childhood student Manuela di Mattei to share a story reflecting diversity and multi-culturalism. Some Spanish words are maintained in the translation to preserve its cultural origin. Gatopato presents a sweet picture of rejection and then celebrated affirmation of differences with warmth, sensitivity, and a bit of humor.

Once, in the forest of Gulubú, a Gatopato appeared.

How was it? Well, with a duck's beak and a cat's tail. With a bit of feathers and a bit of fur. And it had four legs, but on all four it wore duck shoes.

How did it speak?

Monday, Wednesday and Friday it said "meow."

Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday it said "quack."

And on Sundays? On Sundays Gatopato was turulato without knowing what to say.

On a hot morning Gatopato wanted to take a bath and went to the Gulubú Lagoon. The ducks didn't welcome Gatopato very nicely.

"What is this?" said the ducks. "A duck with a cat's tail?"

And since it was Monday, Gatopato answered, "meow."

Just imagine! Can you imagine?

The ducks gathered in a flock and kindly asked Gatopato to leave, because cats often hurt ducklings.

So Gatopato very quietly left, because if it protested, it would say another “meow.”

Gatopato walked to a corner of the forest where all the cats were in assembly under the sun. And as Gatopato greeted them by saying “meow,” they let Gatopato stay with them for a while, but not without stopping to stare at their visitor with distrust.

Poor Gatopato felt very uncomfortable among such distinguished people and spent many days completely turulato, crying inside of a zapato.

Until one afternoon Princess Molinda passed through the forest, all dressed in silks, and saw Gatopato crying without consolation inside a shoe.

“What a beautiful Gatopato!” said the princess.

“Do I really look beautiful to you?” asked Gatopato.

“Why, yes, hermoso!” replied the princess.

“Yet, here in the forest no one loves me,” lamented Gatopato.

“If you want, I can love you,” said the princess.

“Yes, I want you to love me! As long as you want me to want you to love me,” replied Gatopato.

“I do want you to want me to love you! I wanted a Gatopato in the palace for years!” And she delicately picked him up, pampered him, and took him to the palace, where Gatopato played, worked, studied, and married a wise Gatapata. The princess took care of the entire Gatapatil family, giving them rich tapioca porridge with chantilly cream every day. And they lived happily in the palace up to the age of 99 and more. ♦

Translator’s note:

I tried my best to be truthful to the words but wasn’t completely exact. I added or took out some words, changed some others to fit the English language, and made decisions on where to leave in or insert Spanish words.

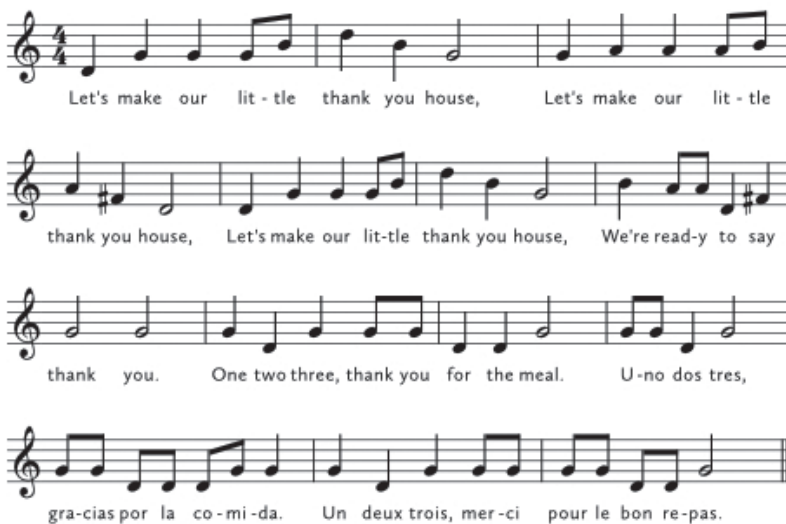
Maria Elena Walsh (1930-2011) Argentine poet, novelist, musician, playwright, feminist, writer, composer, and activist, fought for human rights through her songs and stories during the Dirty War (civic-military dictatorship of Argentina between 1976-1983). She is best known for her songs and books for children, including the most popular children’s songs and books in Argentina.

Manuela de Mattei is currently a student in the Sunbridge Early Childhood teacher training course. A native of Argentina, she is Parent-Child teacher at the Harbor Waldorf School in Sag Harbor, NY. She delighted her classmates with her translation and adaptation of “Gatopato.” She is also the busy mother of five children.

The Thank You House Song

— Denise Crenshaw, adapted by Jennifer Voggeser

This “Thank You House Song” is a hand-gesture song sung at the end of snack. It was composed by Denise Crenshaw and taught to Jen Voggeser, a kindergarten teacher at River Song Waldorf School in Fort Collins, CO. Jen has added verses in French, German and Hebrew. Seeing this done with a class was a lovely conclusion to ending the snack time with an intentional expression of gratitude for the meal just ended. Hands can be folded or tented to make the “thank you house” to start the song. The other indicated gestures come with the counting and the sign language for “thank you” and “meal.”



Additional verses:

German:

Eins, zwei, drei, danke für das Essen

Hebrew:

Echad, Shtayim (shThai-eem), shalosh,
 Todah (toe-dah) al (all) ha aruchah (aroo-chah)

Gestures:



1



2



3



thank you



meal

Jen Voggeser is a lead mixed-age kindergarten teacher at River Song Waldorf School in Ft. Collins, CO. Interested in sharing a wider multicultural embrace in her class, she has adapted the “Thank You House” song to add more languages.

Creating a World Family at Advent Time

— Holly Koteen-Soulé

Editor's Note:

Truer Than True, a new WECAN publication of multicultural stories collected and adapted by Holly Koteen-Soulé, is reviewed in this issue.

The “seed” of that book and expansive way of thinking was first publicly described in the Spring 1997 issue of Gateways in this brief article by Holly. Reconsideration of how we celebrate festivals is now under deep consideration in our schools, so some vocabulary from almost 25 years ago may call for reforming, such as “Winter Festival Time,” for example. The image of “the world family,” however, can serve as a practical and potent inspiration to bring into our classrooms at any time.

It is a particular pleasure to see a connecting thread from an impulse described in a past Gateways carried forward in deepened form to our current important considerations of diversity, equity, inclusivity, and social justice in our classrooms and schools.



For the last two years in our kindergarten, the children and I have created a new way to mark the days between Advent and Christmas, which I would like to share with you, my kindergarten colleagues. It began with a desire to re-enliven the journey for the whole class and to honor the diversity of the backgrounds of the children in our kindergarten. The image that kept recurring to me during the Fall was of a wreath on which there stood a circle of children representing all the different parts of the world.

While I realized that I could make the figures and dress them appropriately, what I really wanted were authentic dolls made out of a variety of materials and which carried something of the soul quality of the country where they were made. So, on the weekends in November I began scouring the ethnic shops and holiday markets in Seattle. (The most difficult

requirement was the size—between two and five inches). My first find was a pair of exquisitely sewn woolen dolls from Bolivia. The girl was carrying a black lamb in her arms and the boy was playing a wooden pipe. After that I looked for pairs of dolls, and they came made of woven straw, carved wood, handmade paper, cotton, and silk, from every continent, including North America.

Every day during Advent, one of the children opened a wooden box in which the new dolls were lying wrapped in a small piece of blue silk. We began with the oldest child. The youngest ones who had watched last year now had their turn to “bring out the dolls.” Even in this second year, the mood was incredibly reverent, more so than my experiences with the tissue paper Advent windows (as beautiful as they are). The new dolls sat next to the candle during morning verse. As we walked, singing, to the table, the opener of the box took the position at the end of the procession, so that he or she had a free hand to carry the dolls. Then they were placed (with a sewing pin or toothpick) on the straw wreath in the middle of the table. The family grew every day until the wreath was full.

This year the first two dolls were handmade paper angels with corn silk hair from India. They “flew” above the wreath on short branches stuck in the straw on either side of the wreath. The Advent candles stood in four star-shaped holders, which were set around the perimeter of the wreath along with a few sprigs of cedar and some tiny alder cones. I watched in particular the responses of the children whose other-than-American cultures or ethnic backgrounds were represented by the dolls. Although they did not say much, I had the impression that they felt met by this experience. Wonder at the “cosmic child” in every child was certainly there for all of us, as well as a picture which I believe our children also need.

Thank you and blessings on your Advent journey, whatever form it takes. ♦

Originally published in *Gateways*, Issue #32, Spring 1997

Book Reviews

Stories to Light the Night

Susan Perrow

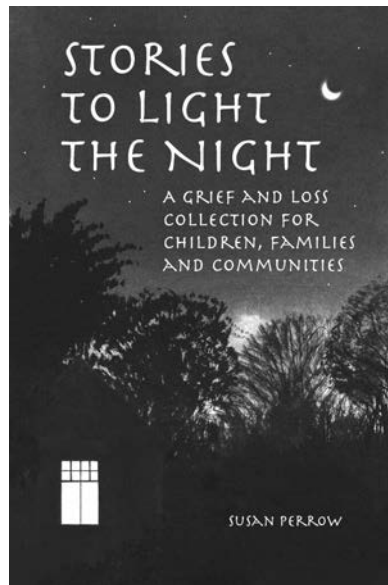
(Hawthorn Press, 2021)

Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

Whenever a new collection of therapeutic stories by Susan Perrow comes out, it is a welcome event. The most recent volume, *Stories to Light the Night*, could not have come at a better time. These 94 stories are focused on addressing grief and loss for children, families, and communities. Grief and loss, whether caused by enormous catastrophes or by quiet, nearly unnoticed disappointments, are affecting humanity worldwide. The pandemic has brought illness and death, loss of jobs and homes, and loss of nourishing human interactions with enforced isolation in many forms. The globe is now also beset by extreme and devastating weather, fires, and more, as well as by war and violence in many places.

This is a book to remind of us of hope and give us tools to share this hope in story form. It does so by acknowledging that loss and grief come to us all as a part of human life. There is no denial or avoidance of the subject. In story form, death and loss are pictured truthfully in a compassionate and artistic way where grief is acknowledged as natural and even necessary. We have to confront our grief to make the journey through these difficult events, coming through loss to a different balance of mind and heart.

Please enter this therapeutic story-telling world through the foreword and introduction before moving on to the stories. Susan Perrow gives a clear and practical introduction to her global work in helping teachers and parents, physicians, therapists, counselors—people from all walks of life and experience—to find their story voice. She describes the therapeutic story framework of Metaphor, Journey, and Resolution (or Open-endedness). The situation to be dealt with is posed in a pictorial way through the



use of metaphor. Understanding what metaphor is and how to invoke its healing potential is urgent for our time.

Metaphor is explained as “using the medium of picture imagery... [which] speaks directly to our imaginative faculties, bypassing our rational brain. Such metaphoric byways and pathways enable us to explore the ideas, forces and powers that lie behind or beyond our rational thought.” Ken DiBenedette calls them “poetical intuitions that incarnate into thought and language through the skilled manipulation of familiar concepts.”

We live in a time when rational, logical, literal thinking dominates our approach to life. Perrow goes on to say, “Metaphoric language lives in the realm of imagination, which is as valid for learning and knowing as the realm of cognition.” And as Albert Einstein famously said, “Logic will get you from A to B; imagination can take you anywhere.”

Literalistic thinking has us trapped in the grayness of the daily mundane world, increasingly dimmed by our experiences of loss and discouragement. To move on through challenges and disappointments, humanity must be able to imagine behind, around, and inside of what is seen in the sense-perceptible world.

Susan writes further, “Stories speak to our imaginative intelligence... The ability to imagine was once celebrated as the *heart of humanness*, but now, with the emergence of science as the dominant worldview, the significance of imagination has sadly been diminished and devalued.” Our vision without imagination yields a skewed and imbalanced picture of the world. Imagination opens the door to explore the mysteries of human life and biography that we feel and intuit but cannot name in exact language. Stories with metaphor provide a balancing element.

Many of the stories shared in *Stories to Light the Night* were created by inexperienced story tellers. What motivated them was deeply wanting to offer

some comfort and care to others suffering grief and loss. To find their way into the pictures, they were interested and observant and “listened” literally and figuratively into the situation.

In the section on Imagination, Susan includes advice on how to nourish and strengthen our imaginations. Here are many practical and inviting suggestions for how to soften our thinking and feeling to find the right story pictures. These suggestions can help would-be story tellers take the first steps.

The stories in this collection cover many types of loss—of a loved one, family connection, a pet, of health and well-being, and of place. Environmental grief and loss—a heavy burden on the souls of young and old together—is addressed, as well as other examples of change and transition. For the most part, the stories are short and are arranged in each section with the simpler stories for young children coming first and then increasing in complexity for older children,

adolescents, and adults. There is wonderful story food here for everyone. The book is easy to pick up and read two or three stories at random. Each has its special situation and encouragement toward finding a way forward toward the light. Two simple stories that stood out for younger children were “Grandmother’s Cloak of Light” and “Sylvie and the Stars.”

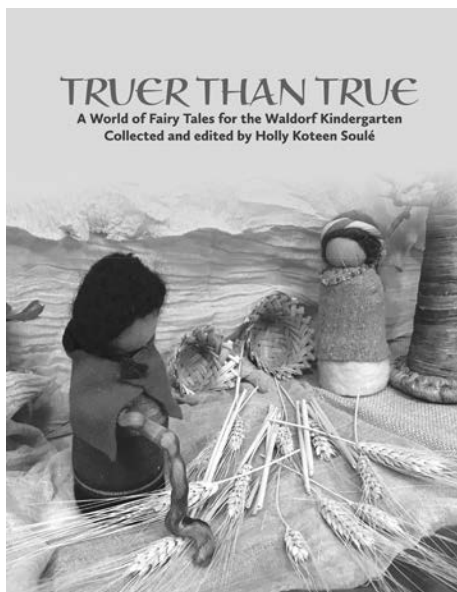
The world is out of balance. Susan Perrow has given us tools and inspiration to help restore balance—no matter how little a story might seem to offer. The creation of these stories is a gift for both recipient and author. Every imagination created out of this selfless motivation to lighten the load and sorrow of another—and to sometimes heal oneself—brings *Light to the Night*.

Thank you to Susan Perrow and her story collaborators for providing us with these inspiring and encouraging examples to motivate our own steps into the therapeutic story realm. ♦

***Truer Than True: A
World of Fairy Tales
for the Waldorf
Kindergarten***
(WECAN, 2021)
Holly Koteen-Soulé
Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

The stories collected in *Truer Than True: A World of Fairy Tales for the Waldorf Kindergarten* are a generously shared treasure. Speaking of her deep interest in international fairy tales, author Holly Koteen-Soulé tells us in the introduction:

“It was important to me that the children in my class were exposed to a variety of cultures through the story curriculum, and especially that children in the class with a particular cultural heritage heard stories from their own culture. In our current times, the need for cultural inclusivity, along with other aspects of diversity awareness and sensitivity, has become more pressing than ever.”



Holly has shared her story collection, each story written out lovingly by hand, with the students at Sound Circle Center teacher training institute over the years. The urgent cry for recognition and celebration of diversity and inclusivity that exploded in the summer of 2019 moved her to offer a selection to the wider Waldorf community. WECAN gratefully leapt to the opportunity.

The four sections indicate stories coming from Africa, Asia, Europe and Russia, and the Americas. The twenty-six stories are diverse in more ways than one. They all, of course, come from different geographies,

languages, and cultures. Diversity comes in the gender perspective with many of the stories centering around female heroes who save others and guide their own destinies. Holly shared that her classroom practice was to alternate any story featuring a male protagonist with the next story featuring a female character. Six of the

stories have previously been shared in other WECAN publications, so these may be familiar to readers. *Truer Than True* now puts them together with twenty more stories for easy access.

The book is illustrated with full-color photographs of puppet plays Holly created for selected stories. These puppets and their arrangement on the puppet stage make the story visually come alive. The puppets and presentation are beautiful and effective by themselves. Additionally, we readers see practical examples to inspire how we might create puppets and staging for the children in our care.

Readers will probably be in a rush to get to the stories themselves, and that is understandable. Each story is a treat in its unique way. However, Laurie Clark's foreword about "acting out" and "playing" the story should not be skipped. There are great ideas shared here to keep the children engaged with a story over an extended time.

Also not to be missed is Holly's introduction, "The Oral Story as Guide, Teacher, and Healer," which is as important as the stories themselves. Many years of study, research, contemplation, and experience of these stories with children are embedded in the introduction. The result is a reasoned and accessible discussion of the place of fairy tales in our times. In an undogmatic way, she opens a doorway for modern readers to consider the value of the fairy tale tradition—which exists in all cultures worldwide. These stories offer pictures of experiences open to all

humanity while still honoring the differing pictures of place, culture, race, and time. Stories from culture to culture resonate with one another and provide nourishment for human souls.

With these philosophical and pedagogical discussions come practical suggestions for preparing the fairy tale—choosing the story, learning it "by heart," finding one's own relation to the story, and actually telling it. Puppet plays and "acting it out as a play" are also considered.

The final words of the introduction help put the importance of this fairy tale resource into perspective for our times:

"Waldorf education stands on the threshold between its first and second hundred years. Teachers are asking many questions about what could be left behind, and what needs to be brought forward into our work in the coming century. We tell many kinds of stories in our early childhood day—nature stories, everyday stories, and therapeutic stories. All of these are critically important antidotes to our technological age. The fairy tale is unique, however, in its capacity to offer seeds of solace and social healing to the soul-in-becoming, and to be a wise and tender guide for us all, in both childhood and adulthood. It is my firm conviction that, with a deepened understanding of how fairy tales work and a wider cultural palette from which to choose, fairy tales will remain a revered part of Waldorf early childhood education." ♦



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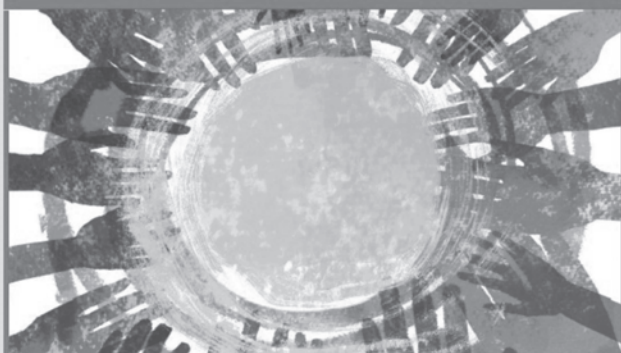


KINDLING



KINDLING

The Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early
Childhood Care and Education



Issue 39 - 2021

Theme: Diversity, Inclusion
Relationship, Community

The Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Care and Education

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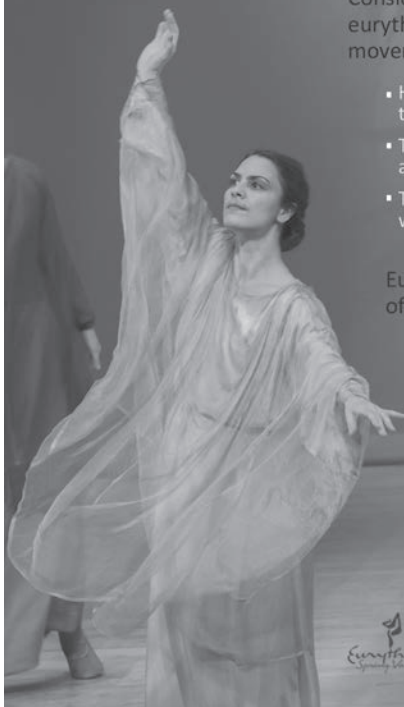
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