
From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Focus—The Healing Gifts of Waldorf Education

A verse given to doctors by Rudolf Steiner offers a picture of how “healing” and “health” apply to Waldorf education. From the point of view of initiation consciousness, he said, every human being can be understood to be ill by nature. Education was once seen by the wise guides of humanity as a process that restored health to children as they matured.

“Healing” in this sense means addressing the ways in which something is incomplete or not “whole.” It restores wholeness to something that has fallen out of that original or archetypal condition. When we understand education as a healing process, we mean that it is a process through which children can develop themselves as whole and achieve fullness as true human beings. This is urgently needed now.

Many situations in the world are intensifying our experiences of anxiety, discord, fearfulness, and disintegration of our capacity to feel ourselves as secure and whole human beings. In response, this issue of *Gateways* is extended as a **healing basket full of gifts** of insight, encouragement, and reassurance, complemented by celebrations of three outstanding lives, and practical imaginations to use in our classrooms.

These gifts begin with a lead article by Steve Spitalny, “Agitation and Anxiety and a Disturbed Sense of Life.” This article explains how the life sense is under assault, clearly describes its importance to health, and gives practical ideas to bring into the classroom right away. Heike Adamsberger follows by pointing out how practical work in the early childhood classroom is strengthening and healing, too.

Puppetry and its power to reassure, heal, and create connection is the focus of the next three articles. The first article shares a keynote presentation given by me at last summer’s World Association of Puppetry and Storytelling Arts (WAPASA) conference, in which I elaborate more on the meaning of “healing,” including the verse mentioned above. This is followed by a description of a unique collaboration between puppeteers in Michigan and Maryland, which bore fruit in a performance of “Sukey and the Mermaid” at the recent WECAN East Coast conference. Thank

you, Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton and Anne Birney (and faculty of the Ann Arbor Waldorf School) for this inspiring deed. Next, Maddigan Stavenger describes making finger puppet friends that can come out of the teacher’s apron pocket as imaginative “helpers” at especially active, or perhaps dysregulated, moments in the day.

Caitlin McGinn-Nice then explores the healing power of story through “Tunuri and the Blue Deer,” a reassuring tale of connection and enduring support from the natural world that comes from Mexico and the Huichol indigenous people.

The focus turns now to a consideration of birth-to-three caregiver-and-child classes. This article by Anjum Mir describes the power of “less is more” with young children in our overstimulating environments. The caregiver-and-child class can become a haven of peace and quiet where the child feels secure while the senses rest.

Three very special Waldorf early childhood teachers crossed the threshold into the spiritual world in this last year. Marjorie Thatcher, who trekked from New Zealand to Vancouver, BC, was a pioneer of Waldorf early childhood in Canada. Elisabeth Moore-Haas, a prominent Swiss Waldorf educator, was among the first mentoring teachers to come to the North America and share her love of stories and music in the mood of the fifth. And Susan Starr, a beloved teacher who spent time on both the east and west coasts, passed last March, leaving a legacy of generosity and puppetry. We honor each of them for their pioneering, generous spirits and the wisdom and artistry they shared with us during their earthly lives.

Our For the Classroom section is a cornucopia of resources, all contributed by Waldorf colleagues who responded to our request for healing, encouraging, helpful imaginations to share with children. These are gems. Melody Birdsong-Shubert shares an encouraging story of social inclusion. Chinyelu Kunz offers a sheltering story depicting a safe place in times of upheaval. Karen Fjestad’s story gives a transformational picture to acknowledge the lives lost in the residential

schools to which Indigenous children were forcibly sent. Andy Ward shares a lovely, simple story of Grandmother Milkweed, full of nature's benevolence.

A circle time for toddlers comes from Kathryn Meyer, and Casey Powers shares a lively, humorous, yet reverent circle for the mixed-age kindergarten while also encouraging care for the earth. Thank you both.

We are treated to one of the Ellersiek hand gesture games from the long-awaited new book *Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves*. This delightful and surprising elemental imagination, "Will o' the Wisps," is accompanied by a video link so all can see the game demonstrated by Lynn St. Pierre.

Little vignettes to slip in at odd moments are wonderful to have in our basket. Tess McNatt shares a fun imagination to encourage running feet to become walking feet, sent to us from Edinburgh, Scotland (where our "blacksmiths" are called "farriers"). And this section closes with an amusing traditional tongue twister to recite when feet are not fitting right into socks. Thank you, Stephanie Hoelscher, for this fun ditty.

Publication News includes short descriptions of two new publications: *Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves*, which is full of lively movement and gesture games featuring beings of earth and water, fire and air, and *Speech Development in the Digital Age*, which describes the hindering effect screens and digitalized speech are having on young children's speech development and communication skills. This research-based booklet

presents compelling evidence that human conversation and relationship are what call forth children's capacity for communication and connection.

While celebrating new offerings, we want to emphasize the importance of two older WECAN publications for our renewed attention. *Understanding Child Development* is a guide book that gathers indications by Rudolf Steiner for early childhood, accompanied by commentary and interpretation to help us explore what is essential to our work. This book is recommended for EC faculty study as well as a handy personal resource. And finally, another essential study resource, *The Seven Life Processes*, is like the hidden cave Aladdin opens to vast treasures when he rubs his lamp, both enlightening and exciting. It helps us to understand how fundamental these processes are to the protection and enlivening of our etheric or life body, and how when we understand and support them, it enables us not only to grow healthy bodies but to generate new thoughts, full of healing forces for our world.

And this brings us back full circle to the lead article's focus on the life sense, our etheric life, and our potential for wholeness as human beings. May this issue provide a basket full of gifts for our work and offer a conscious healing impulse into the world. ♦

Be well.

—Nancy Blanning