

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 84, Spring 2023



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Contents

3 From the Editor

Focus—Inclusion from Many Perspectives

5 Between Worlds: The Fairytale as a Threshold Experience

~ Holly Koteen-Soulé

9 Thinking about Fairy Tales and Gender Bias

~ Jill Taplin

11 Creating an Inclusive Environment

~ Stephanie Gill

16 Diversity, Representation, and Inclusion through Dolls in the Waldorf Kindergarten

~ Rachel Ford-Blanchard

19 Inclusion with the Heart through Child Study

~ Sky Melcer

21 Inclusion through Traditional Circle Games

~ Nancy Blanning

24 Inclusive and Gentle Language—A Letter to Families

~ Jessica Oswald

25 Bridging the Gap—A Spatial Dynamics Perspective

~ Jaimeen McMillan

For the Classroom—

29 Birthday Celebration Adventure Circle

~ Laurie Clark

32 Ladybug Tales: A Sheltering Puppet Story

~ Suzanne Down

35 The Little Seed Story

~ Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt

38 The Switchling

~ Emily Lalande

38 The Story of Kasa Jizu

~ Shizu Lee

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Cover art by Sheila Harrington from *The Singing, Playing Kindergarten* (WECAN, 2015). Available as an art print in the WECAN online store; see the Publications section for more information

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Inclusion from Many Perspectives

Inclusion is the general theme that weaves through this issue of *Gateways*, as we continue to wrestle with issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Looking at the DEI issues individually, “diversity” is kind of “noun-ish.” It is a fact that life is diverse; we observe many differences among ourselves and cannot change the literal facts of skin color, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, ability, and so on. “Equity” is also noun-ish as a concept, but it is different from diversity in that it is something that is achieved through a process. Getting to “equity” requires activity and vigilance to adjust as situations shift.

Now when we come to “I” for Inclusion, things get “verb-ish.” One dictionary defines inclusion as “to have as part of a whole. . . to consider as part of a whole.” And this can include many differences in addition to skin color. We “do” inclusion when our environments reflect diversity in the dolls and puppets, and when our words are gender-inclusive in our stories, rhymes, and circle times; when a child with challenging or puzzling behaviors is companioned, and when our games naturally include everyone in the circle. Every time we gather together, we have the opportunity for intentional and conscious inclusion.

In this post-pandemic moment, we can see in the children and experience in ourselves that our parts—physical, emotional, and social—are in disequilibrium and disorder. We need to consider how we can reintegrate ourselves, how to include all of our parts of our self “as part of a whole” so that we can become again capable of inclusion in social life.

This issue’s articles speak to these different aspects of inclusion.

The lead article, “Between Worlds” by Holly Koteen-Soulé, asks for consideration of a more subtle and grand inclusion—that the spiritual and earthly words meet “as parts of a whole.” This is not something much acknowledged in the mainstream world, but it

is essential to the character and intention of Waldorf education. “Between Worlds” invites us to consider how we can keep our awareness of contact between spiritual and earthly realities integrated, offering an inclusive thinking and feeling environment in which both realities can live and guide us.

We are indebted to the UK early childhood journal, *Kindling*, for the next three articles by British Steiner/Waldorf early years educators. “Thinking about Fairy Tales and Gender Bias” takes a practical look at gender stereotypes and exclusive language in traditional tales. The author’s observations and questions leave much for us to think about. “Creating an Inclusive Environment” focuses on an inclusive embrace of gender identity and diversity. This research article presents evidence of the reality of gender fluidity and how we can approach this with pedagogical and social sensitivity. “Diversity, Representation, and Inclusion through Dolls” takes dolls beyond skin color to make suggestions about gender representation, hair style, and clothing, giving more open-ended options for children to imagine into with their play. Thank you to Jill Taplin, Stephanie Gill, and Rachel Ford-Blanchard for these contributions.

Another population within our classes is the perplexing, tricky-to-manage, withdrawn or whirlwind children. How can we find ways to include them in the fabric of our classroom life, both pedagogically and socially? In the next article, “Inclusion with the Heart through Child Study,” Sky Melcer shares an experience of opening up her understanding and her heart toward a perplexing child.

We need practical suggestions for how we can bring inclusion into the classroom, and also recognition of where we *already* do it. “Inclusion through Traditional Circle Games” discusses how simple circle games are naturally inclusive, and encourages us to play more of these games at all levels. As another practical tip,

teacher Jessica Oswald offers an example of how we can communicate with parents through a letter she sent to her class parents. She demonstrates how to mention sensitive subjects and give guidance to parents through inclusive, objective, gentle language. Jaimen McMillan, founder and director of The Spacial Dynamics Institute, rounds out this section with practical advice on how to address the post-pandemic dis-ease of social estrangement. He points out that we have to re-integrate ourselves before we can again achieve social inclusion.

For the Classroom has many gems that we can bring into our classrooms right away. Laurie Clark's "Birthday Celebration Adventure Circle" opens a new door to the birthday celebration. Through this circle imagination, everyone can be included in active participation, honoring each child's special day with a journey story and healthy movement for all the children. Next, a healing and reassuring gesture comes through Suzanne Down's sheltering story "Ladybug Tales," accompanied by a description of the sheltering story as balm for children's anxious souls. A nature imagination of "The Little Seed" comes from Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt. Directing the children's attention to the wonders and promise of growth in the natural world carries its own reassurance. "The Switchling" comes from Emily Lalande. This story presents gender-fluidity in a sprightly, delightful way.

And finally an unexpected picture of inclusion comes through a beloved Japanese traditional tale adapted by teacher Shizu Lee. "The Story of Kasa Jizo" subtly mirrors the opening article "Between Worlds." A humble man and woman sacrifice their own needs in order to honor godly statues—representatives of the spiritual world. This wrapping together of heaven and earth is a concluding reminder that all human beings are included in both the spiritual and earthly worlds.

Publication announcements include the recent release of *Covid-19 Pandemic: Responses and Consequences in Steiner Waldorf Kindergartens and Early Childhood Settings*. This informative Text research confirms that the distresses we see the children carrying are real and seen world-wide. And we are reminded of the lovely art prints available for classroom and home, perfect for uplifting and refreshing our environments in the spring or summer.

Considering the many facets of Inclusion, we can look at DEI as a call to healing. It challenges us to embrace the diversity of all-that-is, initiate processes that create equity, and sincerely include everyone. As we strive toward these goals, we can add to our shorthand the "J" for "Justice" that lifts our activity into a proclamation of doing. Let's keep being "verb-ish"! ♦

Focus—Inclusion from Many Perspectives

Between Worlds: The Fairytale as a Threshold Experience

~ Holly Koteen-Soulé

During the past three years, we early childhood educators have had to open our arms wider than ever and reach even deeper for the inner strength to meet all of the seemingly endless challenges. What has kept us going? How do human beings face the little bumps in the road and the huge gaping chasms? Not surprisingly, this is the stuff of the fairytale world.

For thousands of years the cultural wisdom of previous generations was passed down through stories. In our current times, stories are seen less as guides for our development, and more as entertainment, especially when they come to us through technology. Because of this I wonder if modern human beings understand or even grasp the inherent power of stories and storytelling, not only for children, but for all of us.

At a recent conference where I was asked to speak about fairytales, I asked the participants to participate in a short experiment in order to explore this question. I asked each person to find a partner and for both partners to share a favorite fairytale, story or book that they treasured as a child and any thoughts they might have about how they felt connected to that story.

Individuals offered a variety of comments: participants were transported back to their childhood; the memories still felt real in every detail; the partners experienced finding a common ground. Participants were then asked to describe what happened to the space between the partners and how it changed during their conversation. A few more comments were offered.

What happened is an occurrence that we can easily take for granted. In sharing our biographical experiences—our stories—something arose between us that did not previously exist. From what was it created? It arose out of our imaginations! Together, our imaginations created something that did not previously exist; it brought to life something that was only potential or seed-like in our souls.

When I started thinking about how early childhood teachers could deepen our capacities in relation to

fairytales and storytelling, a particular phrase kept coming to mind, “between worlds.” Between worlds is where stories live. They live between my world and your world, between the visible world and the invisible world, between the physical world and the soul world, between cultures, between generations, between individuals and humanity.

Stories live in the space between! They mediate between our physical-bodily nature and our soul-spiritual nature, between the worlds within us and the worlds outside of us. They form a bridge between different realms of life and bring us to the threshold where we can experience the concurrent reality of more than one world.

The Oral Story as Guide, Teacher and Healer

A 1979 issue of *Parabola* Magazine focused on Storytelling in Education. Among the articles was a short piece titled “A Note on Story” by depth psychologist, James Hillman, that moved me deeply. In this piece he wrote about “story-awareness” as an indicator of soul resilience in his clients.

“To have had stories in childhood, oral stories, rather than watching them on a screen, puts a person into a basic recognition and familiarity with the legitimate reality of story. It is something given with life, with speech and communication, not something that comes later with literature. Coming early in life, it is already a perspective on life. One integrates life as a story because one has stories in the back of the mind (unconsciously) as containers for organizing events into meaningful experiences.”^[1]

It is my firm conviction that unless we Waldorf teachers have a sincere grasp of the power and wisdom inherent in the images that live in myths and in folktales and fairytales, we cannot embrace or embody these universal truths in such a way as to keep that bridge between worlds open for the children. In



Photo by Holly Koteen-Soulé from *Truer Than True* (WECAN, 2021) - puppet play of the story "The Silent Maiden"

actuality, the bridge exists for them when they are very young, and the real danger is that we inadvertently destroy it or teach them not to trust it.

Joseph Campbell was a collector of stories, and he speaks about how the picture language of fairytales encompasses both the path of the individual soul and universal human experience. While the motifs of folktales and fairytales are "plucked from the tree of myth," the stories themselves are artistic revelations of eternal principles through earthly, mortal things. Fairytale descriptions, he explains, while not being naturalistic, are nonetheless, precise expressions of spiritual realities. If there was ever an art that the

whole human community worked on, it is the folk and fairytale. "The folktale is a primer of the picture-language of the soul."^[2] Campbell calls these stories instruments of "instructive wonder."

These wonder tales have arisen and evolved in every culture. While certain symbols may be unique to a specific culture, more often than not, researchers have found common elements, themes, and types of characters among the fairytales from a variety of cultures.

Sacred Stories

Not all stories speak to us in our deepest soul. Anne and Charles Simpkinson gathered together and

published the talks by a variety of individuals who presented at a conference on Sacred Stories. In their introduction to their book, they quoted Jane Yolen, a well-known author of children's books. For Yolen, sacred stories are those that tell us about who we are and how we are related to the world and the gods. The Simpkinsons highlight two essential aspects of sacred stories. The first is that they allow for a transformation in the self. The second is that they connect us to our fellow human beings. It seems to me that social life in our current times is longing for both of these elements. In their view, the content of a sacred story is less important than the process it ignites within the listener. Even if we do not understand the message intellectually, we are still aware of the profundity of the lesson.^[3] This is always the case for children.

For Joseph Bruchac, a storyteller from the Abenaki Nation, the story "is a living presence." This is a particularly notable quality of storytelling in indigenous cultures. For Bruchac, telling a story is like calling on the gods. At times, the storyteller can feel as if the story is telling itself.^[4]

For me, the essential characteristics of a true fairytale are transformation and healing. In a fairytale the outer experiences bring the main character to a crisis that can only be met by reaching into the depths of the soul life. There are, however, always helpers in the crisis. The helpers may be nature elementals, enchanted beings, animals endowed with magical powers, or wise men or women, often disguised as beggars or ordinary people. Through the successful navigation of the crisis, the soul is transformed and healing occurs. Clarissa Pinkola Estes (author of *Women who Run with Wolves*) refers to the flow of images in a story as "medicine."^[5]

Waldorf educators know that the fairytale proper is deep soul nourishment for the kindergarten child and the first grader. We offer simpler stories to younger children that are appropriate to their stage of development. Each kind of story builds a foundation for the growing story-awareness within the child.

For example, stories for the one and two-year-old are typically concrete, because at that age, young children are discovering the world. Stories of everyday things and events help preserve their inborn capacity for WONDER. Rhythmic stories, in which concrete and magical elements exist side by side, support the development and understanding of RELATIONSHIPS

for the three- and four-year-old. Folktales and fairytales, as culminating story experiences for the first seven-year period, build the capacity for creative IMAGINATION in the five- to seven-year-old child.

Archetypes and Stereotypes

In exploring fairytales in our current times, we need to acknowledge concerns about cultural stereotypes that appear to be at odds with our desire not to perpetrate harmful biases. Understanding the important difference between a stereotype and an archetype can be enormously helpful.

The word archetype is derived from the Greek, meaning original pattern or model. In Plato's philosophical treatises, archetype meant ideal form. Carl Jung, the psychologist, studied both dreams and mythology from many cultures. Out of his research he formed a theory of a collective unconscious within which can be found universal symbols and images that he called archetypes. It was primarily his work that brought the word archetype into common usage in literature as well as psychology.

One of C.G. Jung's gifts to psychology was the notion that we are all of the characters in our dreams. Like the dreamer, the listener is, in the same way, related to all of the characters in a fairytale. In a fairytale, each and every aspect of the soul is in conversation with all of the other aspects.

There are several authors that offer interpretations of the images and symbols in well-known fairytales. While these resources can be helpful, the beauty of a symbol is that it can have more than one, and sometimes, many layers of meaning. It is a good practice to think about all of the various meanings of a fairytale image, such as an apple, a shoe, a wall, a key, a gate, a dark forest, a desert, a sea monster.

If the images in folk and fairytales are truly connected to our universal human consciousness, then, in time, we can learn to trust our own capacity to discover what is being revealed through the pictures being presented. This, of course, requires dedicating time and effort to contemplating and living with the images, characters, and themes of the story that we are preparing to tell. However, it is also important to do research on the meanings of symbols in cultures with which we are less familiar. In studying African fairytales, for example, I learned that the frog often serves the role of a messenger.

While an archetype is an image in which many people can see themselves reflected, stereotypes are overgeneralizations that are limiting and not open to new information. We can all think of many racial, cultural, and gender stereotypes that exist in popular culture. We can also find stereotypes in some traditional stories. We can also find modern themes in traditional stories, for example, stories about non-binary gender characters or role reversals. Our task is to choose stories that speak livingly to us and meet the soul needs of the children in our classes.

Timeless Treasures

If we allow ourselves to be educated by the deep wisdom of the truly universal folktales and fairytales that have been passed down through the ages, then we can also become genuine story creators. We can engage in all aspects of the story process with greater confidence, including reshaping a traditional tale, fashioning a nature story, or developing a therapeutic story for a class or an individual child.

The gifts to children from humanity's storytelling heritage are many, but three gifts stand out to me as especially critical in our times.

Through the oral story and fairytale, children experience the radical power of the IMAGINATION.

They receive an education in TRUST, trust in oneself, in our helpers and in the web of our relationships.

They take in the GOODNESS that is contained in the great basket of sacred world stories.

Stories also help us learn how to compose a life, according to Mary Catherine Bateson. From the visual arts, she says, we learn about the balance of elements. From the musical arts, we learn how to work with transitions in time. In stories, we find lenses for interpreting our experiences. This process is not a matter of establishing a true or false narrative, but rather a recognition that we have freedom to choose how to frame our lives.^[6]

The oral stories of childhood are like seeds nestled in the soul that remain until they are needed as "picture medicine" to help us solve our life's riddles. A

seed is built up from the forces of earth, water, air and finally, the sacrifice of fire. Once formed, it remains suspended outside of time, eternal, until the conditions for regeneration are met. In the first stage of growth, the inner physical substance of the seed dissolves itself entirely, when giving rise to the new seedling. In the soul, the renewed spiritual pattern or archetype flames up and shines like a light on what might otherwise be an unpredictable and perilous path. ♦

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2. Campbell, Joseph, Folkloristic Commentary in *The Complete Grimm's Fairytales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1944, 1972), 864.
3. Simpkinson, Anne and Charles H, *Sacred Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1.
4. Ibid, 2.
5. Ibid, 6.
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This is a transcript of a presentation at the Northern California/Nevada WECAN Early Childhood Regional Conference in November 2022. Holly began by acknowledging the way in which early childhood educators throughout our movement have lovingly carried and continue to carry children and families during a difficult time.

Holly Koteen-Soulé is Early Childhood Director for Sound Circle Center in Seattle. She served as kindergarten and parent-child teacher for 25 years at Seattle Waldorf and Bright Water School in Seattle. She is a member of the Pedagogical Section Council and a WECAN board member.

Thinking about Fairy Tales and Gender Bias

~ Jill Taplin

I can remember hearing and reading fairy tales when I was a child and I have been telling them to young children for decades. When I first heard fairy tales told in the kindergarten I found some of them uncomfortable and was not sure what I wanted to bring, but I listened to more experienced kindergarten practitioners and researched the value and deeper meaning of fairy tales for myself.

I grew comfortable with the idea that traditional fairy tales were for earlier kinds of consciousness with which young children are much more in tune, that they contained images of spiritual truths which could not be expressed in other ways, that the flat characters are archetypes to represent different facets of the universal human being, and that each story presents an aspect of the journey of the soul, with its challenging struggles between good and evil forces. The marriage of the prince and princess who then lived, in great prosperity, happily ever after, represented the final union of soul and spirit which would enable the spiritual blueprint to shine out. They gave hope to those who first told and heard them, as well as to us, and to our children.

Over the years, I expanded on these ideas to parents and students, hoping to nourish in them the love for traditional fairy tales which had I developed through my deepened understanding. However, gradually thoughts about gender bias in many well-known fairy tales, among other questions, began to intrude and bring a re-think to how I choose and tell fairy tales for young children, and how I talk to parents and students about them.

This was fuelled when I read a book review of a book published in 2020 with the title *Gender Swapped Fairy Tales* (authors: Fransman and Plackett). In this book, several well-known fairy tales have, using a computer algorithm, had all the genders of the characters changed to the opposite sex. This gives us “Mr. Rapunzel” (with a long golden beard) and “Jacqueline and the Beanstalk.” Not only the genders of the main characters are changed, but all the characters, so we meet wicked wizards, wise old queens, huntswomen, and we soon find that the rich merchant in “Handsome and the Beast” is female, as is the beast, of course. I was interested to discover that I

was not worried by this new take on some old friends. According to the book reviewer, when she tried these on a young child, they were just as acceptable as the original versions.

In the authors’ introduction to *Gender Swapped Fairy Tales* the point is made that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries those who collected the fairy tales from oral sources among the villages and farms would have moulded them, to a greater or lesser extent, within their own cultural norms in a strongly male-dominated and paternalistic society. In fact, the story books of fairy tales published under the name of Andrew Lang (*The Blue Fairy Book*, *The Lilac Fairy Book*, etc.), Lang eventually admitted, had mostly been translated and transcribed by his wife, Nora Lang, although she never got her name onto the cover alongside his!

Then I found various compilations of traditional stories chosen to show that the women can be the strongest characters who take the most active roles, such as the tales “Kate Crackernuts” and “Petronella and the Tower.” One of these is the Osbourne book, *Forgotten Fairy Tales of Brave and Brilliant Girls* which has a short foreword written by Kate Pankhurst (with the suffragette family in her background). Another compilation in the same vein is *Fierce, Fearless and Free: girls in myths and legends from around the world* collected by Lari Don. In both these books, the editors have made some changes to the tales. For example, in *Forgotten Fairy Tales*, the beautiful story of Snow White and Rose Red is retold. In this re-telling, the ending is that Snow White marries the prince, who has been freed of his enchantment by the death of the bear, but her sister, Rose Red, does not marry his brother. Instead, she goes off into the world seeking further adventures. There is something satisfactory about this ending when I think about the two sisters as representatives of the introspective side and the extrovert side living in everyone’s soul.

Research suggests that the brothers Grimm tried to keep close to the originals, fired by their belief in the purity of the folk soul, but Perrault, for example, did plenty of sanitizing to make his stories more acceptable to his aristocratic French audience. There is a compilation of Grimms’ fairy tales with the title

The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm, edited by Jack Zipes, which includes versions of each tale included in various editions of their book, beginning with a handwritten text of 1809. The final edition overseen by the brothers was published in 1857 and is the source of the texts commonly accepted as definitive today. Zipes suggests that the originals can be seen as “blunt and unpretentious” because the brothers had not yet “censored them with their sentimental Christianity and puritanical ideology.” He suggests that the brothers saw all their sources as “only as mediators of the treasures of ancient storytelling of ordinary people.” What mattered most to the brothers was that “their informants took the tales seriously and made every effort to preserve the simple orality and naïve morality of the tales.”

This edition of Grimms’ fairy tales, made up of fragments and earlier versions of the stories which found their way into the definitive edition published fifty years later, is an interesting read, particularly the introduction which gives the history of the collecting process and interprets the brothers’ motives for making changes. What I find most significant is that the brothers Grimm had no hesitation about their own roles as “mediators.” Their rationale was that their connection to these traditional tales, and their appreciation for the importance of this folk heritage, had become a foundation from which they were able to retell them for their middle-class central European nineteenth century audience. By making the stories acceptable, while remaining, they believed, authentic to the original impulses, they preserved the stories and made them popular and sure of survival.

What does this mean for us today, as we try to meet our own qualms, not to mention questions from parents about aspects of the traditional fairy tales which we choose to tell in the kindergarten? I believe that it emphasizes the importance of developing connections to fairy tales and of deepening our understanding of all the images in them. With an appreciation of the spiritual nature of many fairy tale images, we can develop what might be described as a relationship of trust. Books which I can recommend in this connection are the following:

- Rudolf Meyer (1988), *The Wisdom of Fairy Tales*. Covers many aspects of fairy tales and their importance and meaning. Many of the Grimm collection and some others are discussed in different chapters, from a Christian and anthroposophical outlook.

- Bruno Bettelheim (1991), *The Uses of Enchantment*. Bettelheim (1903 – 1990) was a leading psychoanalyst, born in Vienna, interned in Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps during the Second World War, and then moving to the USA. He shows a very keen awareness of the importance of fairy tales in child development. However, his interpretations (mostly in the second half of the book) are based on psychoanalytic formulae and I am less convinced by some of these.
- Daniel Udo De Haes (WECAN, 2018), *The World of Fairy Tales: A path to the essence of the young child through fairy tales*. This is a companion volume to *The Creative Word: The young child’s experience of language and stories*. This book looks at the young child aged four and upwards and how fairy tales meet their needs.
- Friedel Lenz (WECAN, 2022), *The Picture Language of Folktales*. This book includes 25 Grimms’ fairy tales with interpretations.

Fairy tales are a world-wide tradition, with more than 300 versions of Cinderella, for example, and we can find the universal images embedded in culturally differentiated environments when we discover fairy tales from many different parts of the world. It is well worth pursuing fairy tales from many places for the different aspects which we may find highlighted. For example, “The Wooing of Kwelanga” is a Zulu tale where, although the hero is the one who appears to be active, the heroine is the agency behind everything which happens. With its theme of courage, and its inclusion of a powerful female character supporting the courageous male, this makes an excellent Michaelmas story.

With a sure foundation of a “relationship of trust” which will only be established through time and effort, I believe that there is then the possibility that we will be able to mediate traditional fairy tales to meet contemporary needs. For example, it is not necessary to learn stories “word for word,” which could seriously restrict stories told in the kindergarten to the short and easily memorised. My approach is to create the images in my mind’s eye as I read a story I want to tell, live with those images, and then tell the story from the images as I recall them. There is an inevitable shaping of the story in this process.

I am beginning to think that we can also reach a point out of a place of love and understanding, where we might make changes around gender and other elements in fairy tales which we find extremely

problematic. Of course, there are potential dangers of hasty, unthought-through cleanup operations not based on deep connection with what the tale has to offer. I am not advocating “Disneyfication” or sanitizing of all the uncomfortable elements in traditional stories. Images of evil characters and gruesome events are an essential part of the fairy tale world and should not be removed, though they need to be told in a carefully unemotional, objective way. My approach for a mixed-aged kindergarten is to choose stories where evil is not so graphically represented, and leave the grimmer stories for older children, who love the natural justice of the pecking out of eyes and dancing to death in shoes of burning coals.

What I am arguing for is some freedom in our approach to fairy tales, based on our understanding of their importance to the development of children from the age of around five years old. They are a vital source

of “soul milk” around the birth of the etheric, in the same way that mother’s milk is vital just after physical birth. We should keep them in our kindergartens, talk to parents about their value, and feel empowered to mediate them for the place we are today. That does not mean modernising for the sake of it; it does mean thoughtful review. ♦

This article is reprinted with kind permission from Kindling, the UK journal for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education and Care.

Jill Taplin *has been, amongst other things, a kindergarten teacher, teacher advisor, teacher trainer, and most important, grandmother. Jill works worldwide in teacher education, and has written a book, Understanding the Steiner Waldorf Approach, with Janni Nicol.*

Act, which applies to schools, names sexual orientation and gender reassignment as protected characteristics.

Educating ourselves

It is important that we create safe spaces and study groups to focus on understanding gender identity and expression, and have time to discuss our practice with colleagues, parents and community.^[3] It is important to also raise awareness among non-teaching staff as they may be the first point of contact for people entering the school community. This awareness needs to be embedded in policy and practice. At St Paul's we have recently amended our application forms so that as well as identifying the child's sex (the only options prescribed by the system are male and female) we also ask for their preferred pronouns. It is a small but significant change, which signals to parents and carers that we have a more inclusive picture of gender than the male/female binary.

Making our language more gender inclusive

We are preparing our kindergarten children for a world in which attitudes to gender are changing. Young people who have recently started college say that introducing yourself with your chosen pronouns is now an everyday part of life. We can model this awareness of gender sensitive language in kindergarten. For example, when telling stories or playing circle games about a farmer, we might choose sometimes to use the pronoun "she," sometimes use the pronoun "he," and sometimes use the pronoun "they" to ensure that children take on board the concept that being a farmer is a role open to all genders. When we use the non-binary pronoun "they," we get into the habit of talking and thinking about gender in a non-binary way. For example, we have a verse that we share at the start of our early years meeting and we used to alternate using "he" and "she" pronouns within this verse. In recent years we have chosen to use the pronoun "they" instead.

Allowing our broader understanding of gender to inform our interactions with children

How can we bring our awareness into kindergarten in a developmentally appropriate way? We can ensure that we talk about "children" rather than "boys and girls," and in this way guide the children away from

dividing the group according to gender. Even counting how many boys and how many girls there are in the group reinforces the idea that everyone is either one or the other. The experience for those who don't feel they are either a boy or a girl or who are mis-assigned a gender they don't identify with, is that there is no space for them. Equally, saying "parents and carers" rather than "mums and dads" signals our awareness of different family structures such as people who are single parents, sometimes through choice. Taking care around Mother's Day and Father's Day is important, as this may be sensitive for donor-conceived children or those with same-sex parents. Being aware that co-parenting is a term used by LGBTQ parents who have decided to create a family together, as well as also referring to shared parenting by separated parents, can help us to understand family structures. When we raise our awareness of the possibilities, we can avoid making assumptions when first meeting new families. "Who was waiting for you when you were born?" is a wonderful inclusive question that meets all children, the answer to which is visualized in our kindergarten birthday story.

As teachers, we can also open up the representation of a wider range of family structures. If two children are negotiating who will be the mother in their role play, we can suggest that perhaps this house has two mothers, for example. I have found that coming alongside a conversation, and adding to it, is an effective way to widen the representation without making this conscious for the children. If a child is talking about going to a family wedding, we might add our experience of attending a wedding where the grooms both wore beautiful roses in the buttonholes of their suits. Without overtly raising the issue of same-sex partnerships, we can widen the picture of marriage to become inclusive. Sometimes we just need to allow space for the children's conversation to develop. I've heard children talking about who they will marry within the group, and when a girl chose another girl, another friend said that it needs to be a boy and a girl to get married. I waited to see what would happen next, and another child added, "Two girls can get married." I chose to gently reinforce this by saying "Marriage is for two people who love each other." By focusing on a simple message of understanding, we can celebrate difference.

Presenting our circles and games in ways which are gender sensitive and allow children to self-identify

It may be beneficial to reflect on the language and gender roles in our circles, games, and finger rhymes. In our school we have noticed increasing questioning from parents who ask us about our choice of rhymes and if they perpetuate gender stereotypes.

This is the way the lady rides, trit trot, trit, trot.

And this is the way the gentleman rides, a-gallop, a-gallop, a-gallop, a-gallop.

Traditional rhymes such as this can be problematic for parents, and it is worth considering if we can make adjustments. With this example, I alternate the lady and the gentleman, so that it is not always the male rider going faster.

We have a game where one child is chosen to be the Pumpkin King or Queen, surrounded by a circle of children who make the castle wall. The King or Queen falls asleep and the pumpkin is hidden away, then they awake to search for it. I offer each child the opportunity to decide if they would like to be a King or Queen. This opens up the possibility of choosing for oneself, and choosing differently next time. In the play, I have observed children talking about themselves as both genders, in a fluid way, and another child will try to insist they are one or the other (usually the gender that matches the child's sex). I have gently said "Each of us knows who we are," as a way of planting the seed that it is important to listen to how people self-identify and respect their choices.

Those who work in early childhood settings will be aware that young children are curious about gender and explore this in their language and behavior, such as referring to themselves as both male and female. It is important to acknowledge this gender exploration as part of child development and not map adult perspectives onto young children experiencing gender in a fluid way, while supporting their freedom of self-expression. The term "gender creative" acknowledges this curiosity, and is perhaps more helpful than transgender or non-binary for the young child. Equally, we understand that some children will need

to come to an awareness of gender by adhering to more fixed roles and behaviors. We can accept this as part of their developmental journey. We need to be aware that "children who feel their gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth may experience increased social anxiety because they want to be the same as their peers, but realize they don't feel the same way".^[4] All children do best when their parents or caregivers show them that they are loved and accepted for who they are.

Telling stories which include characters that challenge gender stereotypes

Increasingly, parents question our choice of kindergarten stories, and there is a particular emphasis on needing positive, active role female role models as well as male ones. When we are telling traditional fairytales, it might help to explain to the parents about the way in which they embody archetypes. Otherwise, we can face resistance from parents interpreting fairy tales more literally, concerned about outdated gender stereotypes and passive female characters. It is also good practice to reflect on our choices and balance our repertoire by including fairytales with active female protagonists such as "Katie Crackernuts," or "The Sleeping Prince," who is rescued from slumber by a female character who evades giants and has travelled all points of the compass, until her iron shoes are worn away.

Finding inclusive stories

Our choice of stories and books is significant in terms of representation. We can strive to achieve a balance of traditional fairy tales with stories that challenge gender stereotypes and represent diverse families. Fairy tales such as "The Twelve Huntsmen" and "The Magic Tree," where the female protagonist cross-dresses as a man, open up a transformative space where gender is fluid and able to change. Although fairy tales meet the children and offer them soul food appropriate to their development, we need to look elsewhere to find positive representations of stepmothers or stepfathers, families with same-sex parents, and adoptive families. We can seek out or even write stories which show different family structures, and make space for these alongside our traditional stories.

List of inclusive stories

- ***The Lost Fairy Tales: Fearless girls around the world*** by Isabel Otter—This enchanting anthology of 20 overlooked and forgotten fairy tales has been collected from different cultures around the world. Every story features a strong female heroine, who approaches life with humor, wit, cunning and bravery.
- ***Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales*** by Virginia Hamilton—Female protagonist fairy tales from African American storytelling tradition.
- ***The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans*** by Johnny Valentine—A collection of modern fairytales which represent non-traditional families.

The following books bring representation of diverse families to kindergarten

- ***Under the Love Umbrella*** by Davina Bell, ***Love Makes a Family*** by Sophie Beer, ***Who's in a family?*** By Robert Skutch—These books all celebrate diverse families.
- ***And Tango Makes Three*** by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson—A true story of a male penguin couple who adopt a chick together.
- ***Mr. Seahorse*** by Eric Carle—A celebration of one of nature's examples of a male caregiver.
- ***Julian is a Mermaid*** and ***Julian Goes to the Wedding*** by Jessica Love—Joyful picture book with a message of a child and their self-expression being accepted by a supportive grandmother. The sequel depicts a wedding with two brides in a joyful celebration.
- ***Plenty of Hugs*** by Fran Manushkin, illustrated by Kate Alizadeh—A day in the life of a bi-racial same-sex-parent family.
- ***Who's Your Real Mom?*** by Bernadette Green, illustrated by Anna Zobel—A child with two mums answers their friends' questions, enabling them to understand that they are both "real" parents.
- ***Why don't I have a daddy?*** By George Anne Clay—This is a delightful story of a young male lion being raised by a single mother. He notices that other lion cubs have different sorts of families and asks the question in the title of the book that many children of solo mums ask. This gives his

mother an opportunity to give him a positive explanation for his family set-up.

- ***The Growing Story*** by Ruth Krauss and Helen Oxenbury—Beautifully illustrated book about a child and his mother, experiencing the seasons together. Positive representation of single-parent family.
- ***I am Perfectly Designed*** by Karamo and Jason Brown—An exuberant celebration of loving who you are, exactly as you are. In this empowering ode to modern families, a boy and his father take a joyful walk through the city, discovering all the ways in which they are perfectly designed for each other. Positive depiction of a single-parent family.
- ***In our Mothers' House*** by Patricia Polacco, ***Mommy, Mama and Me / Daddy, Papa and Me*** by Leslea Newman, ***My Two Mums and Me/My Two Dads and Me*** by Michael Joosten—These books celebrate same-sex-parent families.
- ***Two Mums*** by Carol Robertson—A great picture book for two mum families, regardless of how their child came into their life (story does not specify), celebrating diversity of LGBT family life with humor and warmth.
- ***Two Dads*** by Carolyn Robertson—An adopted boy muses on all the benefits of having two dads. A charming ode to diverse (and mixed-race) families.
- ***This Day in June*** by Gayle E Pitman—Picture book celebrating Pride.

Resources that question gender stereotypes or open up the possibility that gender is not fixed and can be chosen.

- ***Want to Play Trucks?*** by Ann Stott and Bob Graham—Jack likes trucks and Alex likes dolls but they find a way to play together.
- ***William's Doll*** by Charlotte Zolotow—One of the first books to address gender stereotypes, William's grandmother finally understands his longing for a doll to care for, saying his nurturing skills will stand him in good stead when he has his own family
- ***The Mountains of Tibet*** by Mordicai Gerstein—A delightfully thought-provoking children's story introducing the concept that life and death are

parts of one whole. A little boy is born, lives a full and happy life and when he dies chooses to reincarnate as on the Earth as a human child, with one difference: "This time I'd like to see what being a girl is like."

- ***A House for Everyone*** by Jo Hirst and Naomi Bardoff—A picture book about a group of friends who build a den together, which includes a range of characters that challenge gender stereotypes and represent children with a range of gender identities and expressions.
- ***Phoenix Goes to School*** by Michelle and Phoenix Finch—A story to support gender-diverse children and to introduce cisgender children to empathising with and understanding the transgender community. Worried that she may be bullied for her gender identity, this is a heartwarming story about Phoenix being accepted by her classmates, which demonstrates how she has approached talking about gender to her friends. ♦

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1. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/lgbt-inclusive-education-everything-you-need-know>
2. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/how-lgbt-inclusive-education-can-change-lives>
3. <https://genderspectrum.org> This poster defines sex, sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity clearly and concisely: <https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Teaching-Tolerance-Know-the-Difference-Poster-Summer-2015.pdf>
4. Taken from <https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/gender-identity>

GLOSSARY

From <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms>

CISGENDER OR CIS - Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

GENDER IDENTITY - A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

INTERSEX - A term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Intersex people may identify as male, female or non-binary.

LGBT - The acronym for lesbian, gay, bi and trans.

NON-BINARY - An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with "man" or "woman." Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

TRANS/TRANSSEXUAL - An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-fluid, non-binary, etc.

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Diversity, Representation, and Inclusion through Dolls in the Waldorf Kindergarten

~ Rachel Ford-Blanchard

It feels important and relevant that I start this article by naming some of my own social identities. I am a white, cis-gender^[1] woman who lives and teaches in a primarily middle- to upper-middle-class village. I have a passion for inclusion and strive to grow in my knowledge of my own privilege and how it shapes my biases. From that I continue to grow in my own practice and life finding ways to create inclusive environments for the children in my care. I am not at an end point of this journey, but right in the middle of it, and it continues to evolve as my learning grows. One of the most effective tools for diversity and inclusion^[2] I have in my toolbox right now is the dolls in my kindergarten.

Diversity is often defined as having a variety of racial, sexual, gender, class, religious, ethnic, abled, and other social identities represented in a space, community, institution, or society. Inclusion and representation are keystones to working with diversity in the early years. I have heard kindergarten teachers say that we are inclusive by nature because “everyone is welcome in kindergarten.” In my own experience of being white, in a primarily white, neurotypical,^[3] able, cis-gender environment with the majority of families being heterosexual results in a situation where we are saying that children who look like you, act like you, have families like you, are welcome. It is through our conscious decisions to be inclusive that we can bring diversity into the kindergartens in a way that is in alignment with our pedagogical practice. Because we work through gesture, the open-ended nature of dolls and how we care for them provides one way for children to directly observe and imitate the care and love we have for all that dolls can represent.

Representation is very important for the young child. It can shape how society views minorities and how minorities view themselves. “Minorities,” as a term, can mean any marginalized portion of our society, and within each society, who those marginalized people are is different. For example, making sure you have dolls with different skin tones is important, but it isn’t the only social construct

to consider. A child having the opportunity to see themselves in a doll, or someone they love represented by a doll, and seeing that doll looked after by their friends, is a gesture of great value to us all. Sometimes, just through the nature of play surrounding dolls, topics of diversity come up, which lends itself to “in the moment” teaching opportunities for topics surrounding inclusion.

Babette Brown, founder of Persona Dolls and perhaps one of the most famous diversity-promoting doll makers, wrote a book called *Combating Discrimination: Persona Dolls in Action*. She created a training program that allowed teachers to examine discrimination and promote inclusion. There are doll makers, Waldorf and non-Waldorf, all over the world who are striving to find ways to support representation for the young child. Wheelchairs, stoma bags, artificial limbs, body scarring. It is both exciting and much needed.

Here are some examples of how dolls can support inclusion in a kindergarten through four different social identities:

Racial: Research shows that children not only recognize race from a very young age, but also develop racial biases by ages three to five (Katz and Kofkin 1997). What is race? This question alone is worth its own essay and its own investigation on how dolls and representation can support unconscious bias. Essentially it is a grouping of people not by culture or religion but by the color of their skin. For dolls, puppets, and nature table characters, there are so many skin tones available for doll makers now. Having a wide range of skin tone, natural hair colors, and eye colors allows children to see themselves as well as others that are different from themselves, in the form of a doll. It is important to think broadly in this way, to think what your own demographic is and to judge what representation is needed for inclusion in your space.

Class/Economic: When consisting of an assortment of plain cotton and wool garments, dolls’ clothing is neither “rich” nor “poor,” but it is respected. It is well taken care of, well-used and loved, it is washed and dried with care. Even with dolls’



Photos courtesy of Rachel Ford-Blanchard and *Kindling*

clothing, we work with archetypes, so our dolls do not wear high fashion. However, we can work to counter bias by the way we tend to the clothing. For example, in fairy tales and children's stories, if a character is poor, they are often depicted dressed in rags and unwashed. We also need to consider whether the clothes in the group represent both the traditional and modern clothing worn in the wider community. When consulting for a school in India, we discussed traditional vs. modern clothing—should saris be in the basket? In this case, yes—because the children's grandmothers and many of their mothers wore saris. Should I have a sari in my English kindergarten basket? This is a more nuanced question, but one that is important to keep living in our own practice. For my own kindergarten, I strive to have dolls' clothing that is neutral, but beautiful and well-kept.

Gender: The Mayo clinic writes “Most children typically develop the ability to recognize and label stereotypical gender groups, such as girl, woman and feminine, and boy, man and masculine, between ages 18 and 24 months. Most also categorize their own gender by age 3 years. However, because gender stereotypes are reinforced, some children learn to behave in ways that bring them the most reward, despite their authentic gender identity. At ages 5 to 6 years, most children are rigid about gender stereotypes and preferences. These feelings typically become more flexible with age” (Mayo Clinic, no date).

The dolls we use in the kindergarten are made with a gesture of openness; the gender of the dolls can be what the children want them to be. Some things to consider is having dolls with both short and long hair, having clothing and bedding that is gender neutral with different colors, and not naming your dolls for the children. Allow the children to name the dolls in their own play. The care of dolls is also a tool for gender identity inclusion. Children see each other, both boys and girls and their teachers, cuddle and love the dolls. The majority of kindergarten teachers are women, and in caring roles in general. It is important to normalize boys and men showing care. Children process their own home lives, and the gender roles in their own families, within the kindergarten. At tidy up time, having both boys and girls tuck the dolls in, or put back on the doll clothes as well as both putting away the heavier benches are positive ways to promote gender inclusion.

Sexual Orientation: The statutory guidance on Relationships and Sex Education in the UK states students should know “that families are important for children growing up because they can give love, security and stability” and that “others’ families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children’s families are also characterised by love and care” (UK Department of Education 2019). One of the most common “in the moment” teaching opportunities that arises

and gives opportunities to meet the requirements for this statutory guidance falls into this category when we hear “You can’t have two daddies” or “You can’t be a mummy without having a daddy.” More often than not, this happens during play in the home corner with dolls. After hearing adults respond with “There are so many ways to be a family, you can have...,” I heard a child respond in kind to their friend, and carry on with their play.

There are so many ways which we can use the tools we have in our kindergartens to explore diversity, inclusion, and representation in our pedagogical practice. The ideas in this article are just some of the steps that can be taken. There is so much room for creativity that can unfold in our work in a natural conscious way. Taking the time to explore individual privilege (the ways which we, as individuals, have an advantage over another group) will lead to an understanding of the unconscious biases we all hold, and will support a deeper understanding of inclusion, because it is true... everyone is welcome in kindergarten. ♦

Notes

- 1 **Cis-gendered:** denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.
- 2 **Inclusion:** The notion that an organization or system is welcoming to new populations and/or identities. This new presence is not merely tolerated, but expected to contribute meaningfully into the system in a positive, mutually beneficial way. Derived from Carter-Hicks, J. (2015). “Inclusive Education.” *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice*. Vol. 1. (Ed. S. Thompson). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. P. 412-3.
- 3 **Neurotypical:** refers to anyone who does not have developmental disorders such as autism, ADHD, or DCD. It is a term that is used in the neurodiversity community as well as the scientific community.

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Inclusion with the Heart through Child Study

~ Sky Melcer

B is one of the quietest, most timid, brooding-feeling-left-out children I have ever had the pleasure to know. But I did not know this right away when meeting him, as I had not yet been introduced to the book *Working with Anxious, Nervous, and Depressed Children* by Henning Köhler (AWSNA, 2013). This book has opened my eyes and is shedding light on behaviors I see in particular children, what they might be experiencing, and why this is happening. As soon as I read Köhler's description of brooding-feeling-left out children, my mind immediately went, "B! This is describing B to a T!"

B is the youngest of four children and is very much the baby of this big Indian family; he is doted upon. His two older siblings were also shy and reserved in nature and action, but they had much more social connection and were able to participate freely in circles and join in different types of play with friends. While B first reminded me of his reticent siblings in many ways, something deeper was sensed almost instantly, but I could not quite put my finger on it.

Whenever I met B, he would shy away from making eye contact, look away or down at the ground, and cling to mom or dad when it was time to join us each morning for school. His walk is slow, with timid feet, shoulders slumped with head down, hair falling over his eyes. His movements are typically languid, with a lot of stumbles over his steps and feet dragging sluggishly along. B is physically slender and lean. He has smooth, soft, dark skin and a tumble of dark, wavy hair that often falls over big, round, shining brown eyes. He likes to gaze out from under his hair "mask." His shoulders slump inward, contracting his body whenever attention is drawn to him.

I usually have a knack for connecting with children, drawing out a smile or making their faces light up, but not with B. My smiles were met with a straight face and lack of expression or acknowledgment as I tried to engage him. It took many weeks before I could say I even truly heard B speak at school, even with his friends. When we returned to school after COVID, I first thought this was just his taking time to get used to being at school again with friends from preschool

or known through his siblings. He was four on our return to school, with his fifth birthday coming in March. But week after week, he would be alone.

Typically arriving after classmates had, it took time to coax him into comfort and convince him to let go of his mom or dad and join us on the playground. Sometimes there were tears; but more often than not, we could find a way to get him to stay with us at school (although frequently his parents gave in and let him have a home day). When he did join, he would sit the entire time on a bench, in a corner, or sprawled in the middle of an open area. Sometimes he watched other children in their play and would get closer and closer watching, but mostly he would sit and mutter to himself and gaze up at the sky or down at his feet. When I invited him into a craft activity or tried to help him enter into a game with friends, he would turn around or walk away, shaking his head. He always pulled away from touch. Sometimes I offered my hand to him, and he would back away. If I ever tried to brush the hair from his face or lightly put a hand on his shoulder, he ducked away from my touch.

B typically stands or sits and watches during our circles, movement games, and playtime. Even when we are walking in a line for a nature walk, he often gets out of line, finds his way to the back, and takes his time following. I have not seen him participate in any movements in any of our circles. He stands still, legs together, sometimes feet crossed, and looks down. Sometimes he sneaks glances around from under his mop of hair or will watch his own hands wringing in front of him. Sometimes, even if everyone else is standing, he drops down onto the floor and splays out. He spends much time on the floor or ground, especially in our classroom. When we are inside for playtime, he will find a spot on the periphery and just lie there. He is often on his back, legs up in the air. He likes to grab his toes and wiggle his legs around. His movements remind one of an infant as he plays with his toes, feet in the air, babbling to himself. He will also spread his limbs out, sometimes like a starfish floundering around while the rest of the class is completely engaged and in their own world of play

without him. Sometimes he will scoot closer and closer to a game or friends. But when asked if he wants to join, he shakes his head and retreats again.

When I started reading and discussing the book section about the sense of motion, I found myself having my first few “Aha!” moments with B. The first thing that struck me was when Köhler was talking about mastering movement on an “unconscious level” and how “This has an effect on our overall sensing of aliveness” (Köhler, p. 83). One of the first things I noticed was B’s lack of smiling, laughing, playing, and aliveness that I see coming so freely from young children. Something seemed to click into place for me with that notion. I immediately felt the behaviors I saw in B were related to being unsure in his movement. When Köhler spoke further about young children not innately having this freedom of self through movement yet having to “integrat[e] into the world’s movement patterns,” my gut-sensing knew that this was tied directly to what I saw in B—underdevelopment of movement patterns and some retained reflexes perhaps (p. 91).

With further study, B more fully fit Köhler’s picture of an anxious and broody-feeling-left-out child. Descriptors included “antisocial and shy of contact,” “sitting alone...but not really absorbed in what they are doing,” “standing there forlornly or run in the wrong direction,” and especially “their bodily posture makes one think of the sad knight in the story book.” Each strengthened the sensing that B was showing underdevelopment of his sense of self-movement (p. 97). As well, when Köhler said, “Liveliness and grace in social situations, the ability to communicate and converse, are not gifts that some individuals are born with, and others lack; the first and basic prerequisite for acquiring them is the orientational security provided by the sense of motion,” I immediately thought of B’s hesitance to interact with his classmates (p.92). And again, this description of “Children who brood or are easily alarmed, who tend to be timid and nonjoiners, lack adequate imitative capacities,” I again thought of our friend, B (p. 98).

I am so grateful that not only did the book and discussions evolve around recognizing specific characteristics of these anxious, timid, broody-feeling-left-out children, but also focused on ways to support, care for, and encourage them to overcome some of these limitations and challenges. I think the first insight into these behaviors that opened up a new way of looking was reading that “Anxious, timid

children have special need of protection. More than other children, they feel deserted when they part from their guardian angels and feel helplessly abandoned to life’s dangers” (Köhler, p. 100). I could see how essential this need is for B. When I recognized those tendencies were living within him, I realized I needed to provide more security and comfort during school.

So that was the first thing I shifted within myself when working with B. I immediately knew I needed to be more attentive and show B that even if he was not participating directly, he was still an essential part of our class, liked, included, and cared for. I needed to be his guardian angel there and share my warmth with him. As well, hearing that brooding children “are helped by being involved in easily understood series of practical actions or simple steps in doing or creating something, getting them first to take on one particular step in the production while merely observing what preceded and what follows it,” began to open some incredible doors for our work together (p. 101).

This was the advice I chose to start with and use to support B. Instead of having my older students help with a task, I began to ask B to assist me. I would do the first part, then have B help with something he was capable of. Then he would watch and “help” me finish. I would warmly and gently encourage him along the way and thank him for his very fine help. The more I did this, the more I started seeing little glimpses of change in him. After providing different instances where B could be my successful helper with others witnessing, he even started vocally requesting to help or participate. Eventually, right before our winter Spiral of Light, B came up to me out of nowhere and ASKED ME if he could be the first one to walk the Spiral and light the candle! This made my heart explode with pride for him. I honored his request, and he started our spiral and walked it so well—yet still very slowly. From there, he became more vocal around his classmates and me.

When I noticed him drawing closer to other children in their play, I started sitting very close by and helping the other children engage B instead of asking B if he wanted to join. I immediately started seeing a spark of joy in B when I assisted his friends to include him in a game. One day I heard some friends talking about bravery. B and I were standing right there, so I said: “You know who is so very brave? Your friend B, who walked our Spiral of Light first and lit the way for each of you!” B’s face broke into a radiant smile.

His friends immediately came and stood around B and started asking him questions and then expressing that they didn't know what to play next. So, I offered, "Why don't you ask B what he might like to play?" And B chimed in with, "Well, I have an idea for a game. I play it at home all of the time." And they all listened to him and went off to eagerly play his game. It was one of the only times I had ever seen B interacting with his peers. He was engaged, smiling, and stayed with the group for longer than I expected.

This book was benevolently sent to me at the perfect time. Everything learned was applicable, impactful, and pertinent. It's humbling to realize that one can observe so much about a child yet be missing the link that ties observations together with what is healing and will support the child to grow and develop their full potential. I had random pieces of a puzzle that would never have fit together without this guidance. Eyes are now more open to approach children presenting these behaviors and to recognize the many diverse causes of what could be the underlying challenge. I would not

have homed in as quickly to B's need for movement support and the other methods offered without this book's guidance. Yet once seen, everything I knew fit together into a complete picture. Seeing B as he has become versus his first few months in school is like night and day. Our school's student support team will also bring healthy movement for B to imitate and work toward. His future looks bright. ♦

Sky Melcer is a Sunbridge graduate who has worked in early childhood education for 14 years. Fluent in American Sign Language and proficient in Spanish, she has enjoyed bringing other languages, cultural experiences, and inclusion into the kindergarten classroom during her seven years of classroom experience. A product of Waldorf education, Sky encountered the work of Henning Köhler in her Sunbridge program. She is now completing a degree in EC Education, and in her free time, she enjoys photography and swimming with her dog, Beans.

Inclusion through Traditional Circle Games

~ Nancy Blanning

*Let's make a circle,
Make a circle 'round the sun.
Let's make a circle
That includes everyone.*
(Traditional)

Circle time is an essential activity in our Waldorf early childhood classrooms. As teachers we work hard to make these movement times imaginative, artistic, and engaging through pictures of the seasons, of practical life and spiritual truths. We are gratified when the children enter with anticipation and expectation of what will come in the imaginative journey we are taking together through gesture, active movement, song, and speech.

Circle time is a regular activity in our mornings that we strive to call into being as a part of our rhythmic flow. Yet we know that some days are more successful

than others. Some children are more responsive than others. In our post-pandemic days now, even what used to be ordinary moments can be a challenge, and circle can be particularly problematic. Teachers consistently report that the isolation and social restriction of the pandemic have created a serious developmental gap for the children. They are highly individualized. Through lack of social experience, they have not developed the social skills and awareness of the group that in pre-pandemic times we could build upon. Children have not been able to practice being social or to recognize and enjoy others. The children seem bewildered by what collective times—circle, snack, story, play interactions—ask of them.

Additionally, with the pandemic came the collision of the urgent call to acknowledge and counter discrimination and exclusion across race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender identity and expression, and

more. How do we acknowledge the beauty, dignity and worthiness of every human being in our school communities? How do we invite and practice inclusion?

We can look to traditional circle games as a bridge, both to address the pandemic deprivations and to offer playful and developmentally appropriate experiences of inclusion.

When traditional ring games are offered, children always respond with enthusiasm. Children love these games. Even our socially deprived little ones will step into the ring and be carried along. What is going on? What gets their bodies to move and touches their hearts to override their reluctance to join in?

“Circle games” or “ring games,” whatever we call them, are an enduring part of childhood culture and tradition. These games are a heritage which has been passed down from generation to generation in villages, towns, and cities. The “ring” can be as few as two people, such as in a hand-clapping game, or can embrace many in a large circle. The ring moves through the guidance of rhythmic movement and speech, gesture, and song. In the simplest games, everyone moves together, imitates the same gesture, and sings the same song. These games acknowledge that everyone has a place in the ring; everyone is included. In moving, gesturing, and singing together, a social unit is also formed.

Long-time Waldorf early childhood educator, Ruth Ker, has authored the WECAN publication *Please, Can We Play Games?* Ruth has the heritage of these games from her own Canadian childhood and has researched them deeply. The contents of this book can help us understand how these simple games—with circling, falling to the earth, weaving, connecting to one another, leaving the ring and then returning—touch the children’s pre-earthly memories deeply. The introduction to this volume describes the richness these games offer, and is recommended as a valuable resource for all kinds of games.

The circle is a timeless, cosmic image—the circle of the zodiac, the circling pathways of the surrounding planets, the yearly circling of the earth around the sun. The circle is eternal and is always inclusive. A place for every individual is always standing in readiness; their bodies just need to come in and fill the space. The circle is said to remind the children of the spiritual,

cosmic world from which they descend when they come into a physical body.

Out this vast circling comes a moment of falling down—*kerplop*, into a physical body and incarnation. The beloved traditional game “Ring around the Rosie” follows this pattern. “Sally go ‘round the sun” (Ker, p. 68) follows this pattern of circling with a sudden stop, a jump, and a “whoop!” to say “Here we are!” In the Dutch game, “Ringle, Ringle, Coxes” (van Haren 1990, p. 23), is pictured a universal experience of coming to earth from the spiritual world. And in the ring, we are all included, moving together, bringing all of our different selves to do the same movements, synchronizing our breathing together to sing the song. There is no exclusion because the circle is infinitely flexible and embracing.

Such games additionally support healthy sensory development, particularly of the four foundational senses of touch, well-being/life, self-movement, and balance. Circling, rocking, jumping, and falling strengthen both balance and self-movement. We can develop tolerant touch by holding hands. Circling and jumping and falling bring laughter and luster to the cheeks, showing a happy life sense. On subtle levels, when these physical senses are strengthened, there are also social virtues birthed.

- Trust through healthy touch
- Tolerance through healthy life rhythms and predictability of care
- Compassion and empathy as self-movement becomes an internal capacity to “move” with and be moved by the experiences of others
- Equanimity and a sense for justice through balance (Blanning 2022, 22-26)

Many circle games also depict practical work activities in life. These games acknowledge and honor human work. Workers represent more than the literal work they perform, as serious scholars have confirmed, including those such as Rudolf Steiner who look from a spiritual perspective. Professions also represent different parts of our human selves. We are spinners when we think thoughts. We weave together a tapestry of life through our biographies. We are transformers and “alchemists” when we cook, transforming the raw food stuffs into nourishment for body, soul, and

spirit. When as kitchen helpers and servants we tend the cooking fire to maintain transforming warmth, getting our faces smeared with soot and ash, we tend our inner fire to transform ourselves into our most true form—a magnificent, radiant being who has been in disguise but is now recognized.

Recently a teacher proclaimed, “But those games are so morbid!” She was thinking about games that have associations with dying or a literal mention of death, such as “Ring around the Rosie,” which is associated with the Black Death, another traditional verse, “Old Grumbler is dead. . .” and “Wally, Wally Wallflower. . .” (Ker 2018, 80-81). When we look at these words with modern, literal eyes, we recoil. But when we can allow ourselves to consider the more vast and cosmic pictures that are seen standing behind them, the doorway opens for a different appreciation. Children are not literalists, and they love to go around the ring, fall, and then get up—again and again and again. They tremble in delight to lie on the floor as Old Grumbler and then jump up with joy, surprising the old woman picking up apples. Their celebration suggests that they are experiencing something that our intellectual approach to life has lost sight of.

There is one more “wondering” about how circle games can help us repair social damages from the pandemic. Circle games develop in a progression from a unified circle where everyone does the same (appropriate for our youngest children) and then develop in complexity (van Haren 1990, 18-21). As intentional research, we can trace our way back to these very simple games and their forms to gather the children together. Their young developmental selves are at a stage of these simple games where they move easily. Offering these simple games, and building up from there, offers the opportunity to fill in what they missed. It is a therapeutic principle that when a disruption in development has occurred, we look back to where the development stopped and starts to build up from there with what would have been appropriate activities. These simple ring games for our socially deprived children may be just the place to start. We can scoop back to fill in the gap of deprivation and bring them forward toward more typical and expectable sensory and social interaction.

The circle awaits everyone and holds everyone. It is naturally inclusive by its very form. All skin colors, all gender expressions, all abilities, all sizes, all voices are welcomed. The children are carried by our joy and conviction that what we are offering to them is physically and socially healthy and spiritually true. Moving freely and laughing is balm for our adult human souls as well.

*A tisket, a tasket,
A green and yellow basket.
I wrote a letter to my love
And on the way I dropped,
I dropped it, I dropped it.
And on the way I dropped it. . .*

Now, dear teacher, pick up these games, and put them in your pocket. ♦

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In exploring sources of circle games, the online resource of bethsnotesplus.com was discovered. There are free resources of traditional circle/singing games from many diverse populations. This looks like an exciting collection for us to investigate. <https://www.bethsnotesplus.com/2012/12/circle-games.html>

Nancy Blanning, editor of *Gateways*, is an early childhood educator with a special interest in movement and has been working with young children in Waldorf settings for nearly 40 years. She has served as Denver Waldorf School faculty since 1987 as both lead kindergarten teacher and educational support staff.

Inclusive and Gentle Language—A Letter to Families

~ Jessica Oswald

Editor's Note: *Communicating our work to the loving families of the children in our classes is an art. Family members want to know what is going on with activities, and we want them to know that we are bringing DEI issues to their children in age-appropriate and artistic ways. We also want to share suggestions with families that will allow their children's lives to be childlike without adult worries and concerns. And we don't want these caring adults to feel scolded or rebuked.*

At the suggestion of Andrea Gambardella, who is constantly looking out for helpful material to share in Gateways, this parent letter from Green Meadow early childhood teacher, Jessica Oswald, is shared with you. It is a gem of a letter that communicates so much, with warmth and respect for the caregivers, all wrapped in protective love for the children.

Dear Families,

We had a most enjoyable week of school despite our rhythm being turned all around. We are working on making bird seed cookies and creating window hearts. We enjoyed warm bowls of oatmeal, freshly made bread, and the most delicious vegetable soup. The children are playful and industrious in all that they do. Our classroom community is filled with love and care—the children work hard together each day to listen to each other and help when needed.

Our dear Paprika came out to visit us for story time and we reminded each other of how Paprika does not feel like a girl or a boy, but rather they feel just like themselves. We talked about how Paprika likes to be called they/them...the children love Paprika!

We had a fun adventure walk all over the school campus. The imagination was going to the zoo and we had to roll down the hill in front of the kindergarten building to get onto the “zoo train.” There, Mother turtle met us and played a body geography game with us (touch your nose, toes, shoulders, elbows). Then we joined the bunnies and hopped around, crawled like polar bears, and balanced across a long fallen tree. We were ponies galloping across the big green field. I always say, there is so much joy found in being comfortable in one's body.

I am immensely grateful I get to spend my days with your beautiful children.

We know the world is not an easy place to be a child right now. At our lunch table the other day, there was talk about war in Russia and the recent news of a “spy” balloon and countries wanting to take over. There is a lot of discussion about climate change and how we are “killing the planet.”

I can guide the conversation, always, to be kind and appropriate, but I can't stop it because the children need a place to digest their sense impressions. What goes in needs to come back out.

Many years ago, I had a father who brought his children to school on his way to work. When the child arrived in the classroom, he needed to report everything he heard on NPR on his morning ride to school. When I brought this to his father's attention, his reaction was, “Oh, I did not know they were listening.” Children hear, see, and feel everything.

I am very well aware that we are all trying to do our best; and, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to filter out the adult world. This means we need to work harder to do so. How? It is a question we all have... including myself as the mother of a 14-year-old. How do we create/believe in a world that is good? This is our work with young children. The curriculum for Waldorf early childhood education is, *The world is good.*

Do you want to bring a child into a world such as this? Which is a fundamental question of whether or not it's good. It is an act of faith to declare that it is good. Am I going to act as if it is good? And, what would happen if I did? The answer is, the more you act out the proposition that it is good the better it gets.

I came across the above quote recently...I have not been able to locate the source. It is powerful and could be the answer we are looking for. Our children learn strictly through imitation. So, where do we (adults) find and create joy? What do we nurture in ourselves and pay attention to? How do we live in wonder and awe of the world? How do we love and care for each other? Cultivating all the goodness in us is a daily practice and can balance out the heartbreak and allow our children to truly live in a world that is beautiful.

We teach our children to have a heart for the world by having one ourselves.

For the young child, it is simple. They do not need to know about climate change and all the facts at this time of their life...that will come later. Right now, the young child needs to feel the joy of riding a bike, learning to jump rope, the thrill of jumping in a puddle, the peace of looking up at the clouds. Feed the birds, make cookies and a card for a neighbor who could use some good cheer, speak kindly to each other and about others. Learning how to pour a glass of water and offering a hug to someone in need does wonders for the giver and receiver—they need to know who the helpers are in the world and how they can be one too. *Lecturing and facts do not warm the heart—it is in the doing.*

Here is an article I found quite helpful to read. It is about helping our children regulate their emotions.

When reading it, pay close attention to the importance of the adult being able to find beauty and awe in the world. It's through our own inner work that we can help our children.

Parents League of New York, "How to Teach Children to Regulate Their Emotions"

<https://www.parentsleague.org/blog/how-teach-children-regulate-their-emotions> ♦

Jessica Oswald founded and teaches in the Forest Preschool at Green Meadow Waldorf School, a place where children find joy in the simple outdoor rhythms of the day. Jessica has two children in the school; her eldest daughter graduated with the Class of 2017. She grew up in Brooklyn, NY and has somehow found herself spending her days with a wonderful group of children in the forest.

Bridging the Gap: A Spatial Dynamics Perspective

~ Jaimen McMillan

There is a furtive dis-ease spreading as an outcome of the drastic distancing measures taken during the COVID 19 pandemic: **social estrangement**. Together with the COVID casualties, we are witnessing long-term, adverse impacts resulting from the hurried attempts to protect us from the disease. Slowly, as experience and knowledge of the virus grows, and wide-spread fear loosens its frantic grip, we can see a gaping social chasm emerging as a second epidemic.

There is an alarming weakening of the faculty to relate to each other, with an accompanying increase in asocial behavior. A spatial component of this diminishing relating to others is a shrinking withdrawal, a retreating to seek shelter and protection. In a similar way that children had to be taught to separate themselves from others, they must now learn to re-connect.

We must invite our children and youth out of hiding and reawaken their interest in the surrounding world for them to be able to interact and connect and enjoy being with others.

Photo courtesy of Jaimen McMillan



Human Nature

Nature is the number one way to *bring us to our senses!* Through opening our senses to nature, we build breathing bridges from the inside world to our surroundings. Whenever possible, get out of the walls of your house. Mother Nature is simply the best teacher. The timeless rhythms of the seasons, trees, plants, flowers, insect, animals, sounds, colors, beauty...all invite us outside of our restrained boundaries to experience an unbroken continuum with our environment. Not only gentle, nature is also the teacher from the old school of hard knocks. Her immediate consequence demands attention, interaction, and respect. (Fire can burn; Sand can get in your eyes; Wet rocks are slippery;)

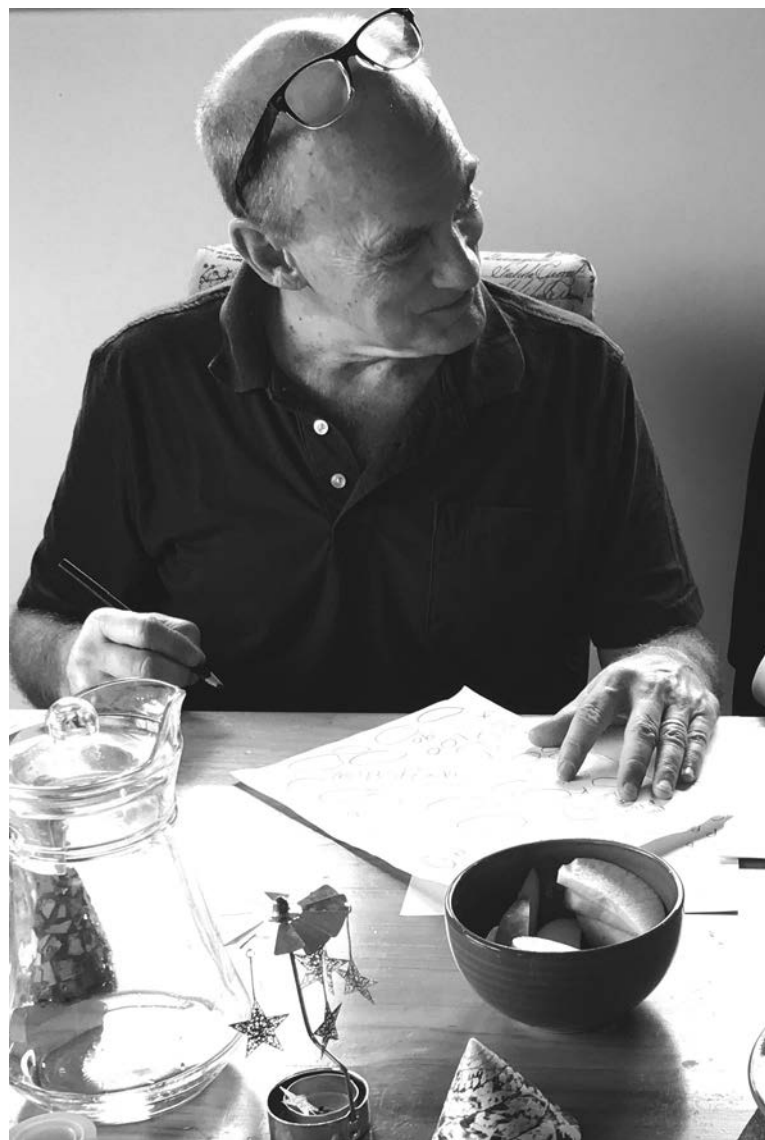
Engaging with nature always involves an interaction and evokes the experience of the interconnectedness of all creation. An awareness dawns that we too are part of nature.

Losing Face

One measure that is still being extensively used in Asia at the time of this writing is the wearing of masks. Setting aside the debate about the pros and cons of the effectiveness of facial coverings, what is not debatable is that the face plays a major role in conveying human emotions. In the first years of life the baby and the young child acquire unique qualities of emotional, cognitive, and social intelligence from the facial expressions of others. Mimicking the forms of their parents' mouths and their facial configurations when they speak are invaluable aids not only to connect, but also in learning to speak clearly and correctly.

Being able to observe the facial gestures of one's loved ones can foster the development of a rich and varied emotional and social life. This is true for youth and adults as well. It is not just the face that is masked to others. Not giving our faces full spectrum of expression can mask our own feelings from us, leading to a monotone and apathetic demeanor. Individuals who are not able to learn the art of taking social cues from others are often judged as socially clumsy, developmentally challenged, or even asocial. Young children, who have grown up surrounded by a masked world, are exhibiting a lack of ability to show and read non-verbal, social, and emotional messages that are conveyed through facial cues that signal the emotional state and intentions of the other person.

Telling stories or reading aloud for children in an animated way can do wonders to compensate



for experience lost through masking. If one watches carefully, one can see that the children are drinking in every facial gesture as if it were nectar for their thirsty souls.

Back in Touch

The sense of touch lets a baby and young child know they have a body, that it is a safe place, and it calls them forth. Progressing from holding, to cuddling, to stroking, to embracing are not only signs we use to communicate our affection, but they are also special spatial methods of helping children be aware of themselves in their bodies. It brings them to the surface of their skin through the warmth and caring quality of the contact. Touch invites children to come out of their bodies and make connections.

Photo courtesy of Jaimen McMillan



A foot rub before sleeping, or a simple slow downward outlining of the entire body with the palms of the hands, overcomes the experience of being separated into parts into a harmonious whole. In touching, stroke ever so slowly. Then have an in-between phase when you do not touch. Pay as much attention to when you are not touching, as to the contact itself. Choose a tidal rhythm to your touch, and not touching. What has gotten lost in these hectic times is rhythm. These rhythms help your child to breathe. Now take these rhythms of doing, and not doing, and give them to your child (and yourself) throughout the day, weeks, months, years. Get back “in touch” with nature’s rhythms.

Meeting Makes Us Human

Virtual reality takes place within the confines of a person’s body. Reality takes place in the space in between people. Genuinely meeting, engaging in the shared spaces, makes us really human. It is time to meet again. Time to reinstate play dates. It does not have to be a large number of them, nor for long periods, but let it be regular, rhythmical, reliable. The most important skill to learn in life is to meet and engage with others. Go for a hike, or even take just short “talk-walks” together.

To act is just the beginning, we need to re-learn to interact. Shared activities reach out to encounter, connect, and to span the distances that have been dividing us. Truly meeting, the highest of the arts, integrates awareness, interest, appreciation, and empathy for the other. Meeting mends the gap. It is the essence of play, the inter-play!

Time to Reconnect after Social Distancing

In 1985, when I first publicly presented Spacial Dynamics as a discipline used in education, movement therapy, even leadership training, there was only a somnolent recognition of the importance of space and spatial development. Embodiment, personal space, interpersonal space, social space, and suprapersonal space were terms that were foreign at that time. Today, “space” is a word one hears all over the world...even if it is often limited to such utterances as: “Get out of my space.” or “Give me my space!” Space, however, can be so much more. Space, like water, can become a connective medium. We can learn to live in space similarly to the way we live in our bodies.

Take “social-distancing.” With this phrase children are told they must keep six feet *away* from someone in order not to get sick. Space in this case is the objective measurement that *distances* me from the other.

It is possible, however, to give this same six feet a social twist. We could just as easily say to the children that we want to adjust to others, so that the other person and I *share* six feet of space, in order to keep each other safe. The difference in the second version is that the child can experience: space is something we can share. Seen this way, space is not what separates, but is an element, like water, that can unite what is not yet connected. Sharing space is a social Copernican revolution.

In the coming years we will have to give special attention to children and youth who were in critical stages of transitioning in their development during the pandemic: the first three years, the nine-year change, the onset of puberty, the transition from teens to adulthood for examples. These crossroad years are phases of life that require taking particularly big strides to move from one stage to another. Space will be abstract unless you fill it out. When you fill it out it is not empty, space is alive, vibrant, filled with you. You have to be the one to bridge the gap. You have to take that next step.

These spatial stepping stones are integral to human development. They cannot be skipped over. It will be up to parents, teachers, therapists, and communities to find ways to offer help for them to take these steps to be able to freely relate.

Returning to “Normal”? No, Orienting anew.

There is a painful awakening to the fact that we have all been slowly drifting apart. It is particularly alarming that it is getting more and more difficult to reach children. Talking louder, disciplining them, blaming, or shaming will not reestablish connections, but drive the children further away. Parents, teachers, therapists must ask themselves the questions, how do I create safe and invitational spaces for the children? How can we redirect the courses taken during the pandemic? We must re-orient ourselves, encompassing nature, what is real and true, and most of all, each other.

Shared Spaces

The whirlwind of the pandemic has left our social health and collective development compromised. Many of the cautionary measures employed to avoid COVID also simultaneously involved weakening, separating, or even breaking social/spatial connections. Our work

is to take measures to balance this disconnection by fostering relationships. The pandemic has taught us, more than anything else, just how important we are to each other. There is rift-mending to do so that our estrangement from one another is reversed to approaching one another.

As adults we must claim our own space back in order to share it with others. The Spatial Dynamics Institute (SDI) has trained over one thousand teachers and practitioners in North America alone who are trained to help others with postural problems, maintaining personal space, enlivening and encouraging interpersonal space. It is an art to learn to live in social spaces in a healthy way and is a learnable skill to get in touch with your greater person who “captains” your ship in the storms of life. More information is available at www.spatialdynamics.com.

In closing, connection to others is what makes us truly human. If the inability to connect to another person is the basis of man’s inhumanity to man, then consciously creating new ways to connect to others may be a key to opening the doors for human beings to become humankind. Warming, expanding, and humanizing the space between us may be a way for us to overcome the COVID era and move together towards a healthier future. Yes, there is work to do! But there is joy as well, for what is need most is to rediscover play, and create new opportunities for interplay. “Want to come over and play?” ♦

Jaimen McMillan *is the founder and director of the Spatial Dynamics Institute in upstate New York, a training center that teaches the use of movement to aid and support the development of the human being throughout their life. A new Spatial Dynamics training will begin in the summer of 2023.*

For the Classroom

Birthday Celebration Adventure Circle

~ Laurie Clark

I composed this circle knowing how challenging it can be for a class of young children to sit in chairs too long. With this in mind, I also wanted to honor each child's birthday with grace and depth. What emerged was a circle that included periods of sitting, alternating with integrative movement. Any of this "recipe" can be altered, for example shortening it for younger children, or making any other changes that fit the group. It is a lovely addition to have the children in the class make birthday cards a day or two before the celebration.

If the children are old enough, they can add a beautiful wish for the birthday child that the teacher can write into the card. These wishes from the children are often remarkable, straight out of the starry land, a real wonder! A watercolor painting can be folded into a cover for the cards, or another means of presentation devised. These cards are often kept and treasured by the birthday child.

It is wonderful if the parent(s) attend the birthday celebration and have a conversation with the teacher beforehand, which can be very valuable. The teacher can ask the parents to bring to the celebration two or three special events that happened each year of their child's life and a wish for their child. This wish can be very moving, as it is so rare in today's world for parents to be able to express their deepest hope in the form of a wish directly to their child. Another question to ponder is how the parents decided on their child's first and middle names. The teacher can explore the meaning of the child's name and bring it to the celebration as well.

Another possibility is to have the birthday child bring a gift from nature for each child in the class, such as pinecones, seashells, flower seeds, or beautiful stones. The birthday child delights in handing these gifts to their friends. The teacher will have a gift for the birthday child as well. The star necklace that is part of the circle can be the gift if the teacher wishes. Many more details can be added into the birthday story; this birthday adventure circle's purpose is just to bring some ideas and inspirations. Anything can be added, subtracted, multiplied or divided!

Items Needed:

- **Small Ladder** *There are ladders that have steps on both sides, which would be ideal. Silver stars can be glued onto the ladder or blue silks on the side of the ladder. The other idea would be for the child to climb up and the teacher helps then jump down the other side or simply to go up and down a ladder. If a ladder is not available, a climbing gesture can be used.*
- **A Golden Yellow Cloth About 3 Feet Wide**
- **A Key—If Possible A Golden One** *This can be a real key or one that is cut out and put on a ribbon*
- **A Star On A Ribbon That Is Worn Like A Necklace**
- **A Balance Beam, Or If You Don't Have One, A Ribbon Taped To The Floor**

"Someone's Birthday" and "The Stars Are Watching" song are from Nancy Foster's book, *Dancing As We Sing*. "Someone's Birthday" can be sung a day or two before the birthday celebration.

Someone's Birthday



To begin, the children and the teacher are seated in chairs in a circle. A small table can be next to the teacher with an unlit candle standing on it, along with as many beeswax stars as the birthday child's age. A flower that is representative of the season of the year can also decorate the table. Another possibility is to have a card from the teacher (either made by the teacher or a lovely postcard) that has a simple verse for the birthday child, either one composed by the teacher or one that is found that seems just right. This verse can be helpful to guide the

child along their path, warmed from the very heart of the teacher. It can be suggested to the parents that the verse be said in the evening when the birthday candle (which goes home with the child) is lit each night. The birthday child can wear a rainbow or starry cape and is seated in a chair covered with a golden or starry cloth, with their parents or parent beside them.

"The Stars Are Watching" (or another favorite birthday song) can be sung to begin the celebration.

The Stars Are Watching



The teacher then lights the birthday candle and asks the birthday child to come and put the beeswax stars onto the candle as the parents tell about each year of the child's life. The child's parents gave the child a beautiful name. (Parents say the full name of the child.) The teacher tells what the meaning of the name of the child is. The parents then can tell their child their special wish for them. The parents remain sitting while the children

leave their chairs and form a standing circle.

Repeat each movement:

Spoken: **Now clap your hands, 1, 2, 3, now stamp your feet (3 times) just like me. Turn around, touch the ground, put your hands around your knees, now jump up high and touch the sky and shout hurray, it is (child's name) birthday celebration today.**

Bilateral movement is practiced here by altering stamping feet, vestibular movement is used in turning around and proprioceptive movement with jumping from the ground below to an upright position.

All of the singing in the next verses can be sung to the tune of “Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush” or to this tune composed by Lori Daniels:

The teacher leads the children holding the birthday child’s hand. The children climb up and down a small ladder or

Starry Ladder



make climbing movements.

Sing: Climbing up the starry ladder, starry ladder, starry ladder, climbing up the starry ladder, my good angel holds my hand and leads me to the starry land.

Cross-lateral movement is practiced in a climbing movement; the opposite foot and hand climb up the ladder much like crawling but in an upright position.

Left palm open, right fist knocks on left palm, with repeat, right palm opens, left fist knocks on right palm

Sing: Knock, knock, knock on the door of each star, door of each star, door of each star—knock, knock, knock on the door of each star, inside is a wondrous sight, a wondrous sight.

Opening each palm wide, getting stimulation from the fist ‘knocking’ on each hand and then closing the hand tight can be helpful with the retention of the palmer reflex.

Two children hold a golden yellow cloth to make a gate, the good gardener (one of the children) uses the golden key to ‘open’ the gate, the yellow cloth opens and the children go through.

Sing: Now we come to the golden gate, golden gate, golden gate, the good gardener opens the golden gate with a key made of sunlight bright, with a key made of sunlight bright.

A child can be Grandmother Star Weaver and give the child the star necklace. Make a weaving motion with one hand crossing over the other and then both hands rest crossed over the heart region.

Spoken: Grandmother Star-Weaver weaves blossoms of light, weaves for you a star, wear it over your heart. This dear one I give to you, it will give you love and courage so true. Opportunity to cross the vertical midline

Standing, shift from one foot to the other, or lie down on back with the hands holding the back of knees and rock back and forth.

Sing: There comes a boat with sun moon and stars, sun moon and stars, sun moon and stars, there comes a boat with sun moon and stars to take you to your home from afar.

Vestibular movement rocking back and forth in standing position, and even stronger stimulation when lying down and rocking

The birthday child leads all of the children across a balance beam with a rainbow cloth underneath or on the sides of it.

Sing: Across the rainbow bridge so bright, rainbow so bright, rainbow so bright, across the rainbow bridge so bright, made of colorful light, made of colorful light.

Balance and vestibular movement are experienced here
Birthday child goes to parents

Sing: Your parents wait with love for you, with love for you, with love for you, your journey has made you brave and true, brave and true, brave and true.

The children repeat this verse

Spoken: **Now clap your hands, 1, 2, 3, now stamp your feet, just like me. Turn around, touch the ground, put your hands around your knees, now jump up high and touch the sky and shout hurray, it is (child's name) birthday celebration today.**

Birthday cake or snack can follow, along with singing "Happy Birthday." It is fun to sing the happy birthday song in Spanish if you wish.

*Felix cumpleaños a ti,
Felix cumpleaños a ti,
Felix cumpleaños a ti, mi amiga/mi amigo
(or child's name),
Felix cumpleaños a ti. ♦*

Laurie Clark has been involved in Waldorf early childhood teaching for four decades and is a prominent teacher trainer, author, workshop and conference presenter, and mentor. She and Nancy Blanning have co-authored *Movement Journeys* and *Circle Adventures*, Vol. 1 and 2.

Ladybug Tales: A Sheltering Puppet Story

~ Suzanne Down

Here is a sweet simple little tale that is perfect for outdoor puppet telling as well as indoor. All you need is a needle-felted ladybug puppet and some flowers, real or also needle-felted.

This tale has two elements that make it meaningful for children. One is the transformation of feeling of the flowers toward the 'different' ladybug. At first they quickly see something unfamiliar and perceive it to be ugly and make fun of it. Then over time they come to learn of ladybug's wonder and gifts, and not only welcome her to their flower garden, but wish that ladybug would choose each of them to snuggle and sleep in. This helps our own hearts open to others who are at first unfamiliar and points to the promise of their wonderfulness!

Another healing layer of this story comes when ladybug shares stories of the world around them to all the listening flowers. This is when all the flowers who first laughed at ladybug are so drawn in to the magic of the tales told that they sigh deeply with a joy and peace they had not known before. As ladybug sinks down into the softness of their flower bed, and bids

them goodnight, there is another layer that comes to settle the story into a feeling of sweetness and safety. The Night comes like a blanket to hold them in the dream and goodness of ladybug's stories. There is a quiet that surrounds this part of the story, a feeling that all is well in the world of the garden. This is a very simple story of protection as well as a wee little diversity tale.

For this to be a successful story told with puppets, it helps if we can also hold the goodness of it in our own hearts. This will help us find the right tone and pace of peaceful wonder in our own storytelling voices. Our voices then also become a layer of protection for the children. As the children listen to you and watch the puppet play, just as the flowers listen to the ladybug, the children will also feel the story like a little blessing. Hear their breathing change and go deeper.

Visually, we become more conscious of our own gestures as we so gently and sweetly have the ladybug curling up and nestling in to sleep on the one flower. We can ponder, how do we move ladybug when telling the stories to the listening flowers, so that there is

reverence as well as joy when sharing the beautiful images of the world. How softly we then bring the night blanket to cover the puppet world to bring the feeling of quiet peace. We pause for a breath or two before we bring further reassurance that ladybug will stay in the garden and bring more tales of the tender good of this world.

You can see how even the simplest of stories can carry significant value and meaning in our telling and showing with puppets.

For the night sky I use a deep blue 3mm silk gauze. It leaves the flower garden still a little visible, which also brings further confidence that all is well in the flower garden.

For more information about the value and meaning of the Protection Story, here is a link to an article on my blog.

<https://junipertreepuppets.com/blogs/news/the-art-of-the-protection-story-an-introduction>

There is also a “Part 2” article you can access on the blog for a further deepening of understanding of the Protection Story.

Ladybug Tales

One lovely warm and sunny day, there was a field of yellow flowers.

They had yellow petals with golden centers, like little suns.

But one flower had a red center with black polka dots.

All the other flowers looked at her and laughed.

They thought she was so ugly as they all swayed in the breeze.

What they did not know was that a little ladybug had flown in the night
looking for a soft bed to rest on
and had chosen the flower with the softest, nicest center.

It was so cozy on the flower bed, that the ladybug decided to stay.

He flew away to explore the world each day.

And he flew back at the end of each day.

He always rested on the same soft flower.

Then he told his flower about all the things he had seen.

Now all the other flowers started to wish the ladybug had picked them to rest on.
They leaned closer to listen as he started to tell his tale.

“As I flew out one fine sunny day

This is what I saw along the way.

I passed some grasshoppers playing their fiddles,

hey diddle hey diddle hey diddle ho hey!

I stopped to listen and sway and swoon,

I danced and danced to the sweet little tune,

hey diddle hey diddle hey diddle ho hey!

I thanked them all kindly, and then flew so free

and saw some bluebirds sitting high on a tree.

they sang and they sang and they sang once more,

tra lee tra lu tra lee lee lee.

One let me sit on his back as he flew,
and did what for birds is natural and true;
in and out,
in and out,
he dove here and there
catching flies in the air.

Tra lee tra lu tra lee lee lee,
They sang, it seemed, to me.”

As Ladybug finished telling his flower the tale of the day’s adventures,
he saw all the golden faces looking at him and listening deeply.

“Time for bed dear friends,” he said,
and he settled down on the plump, soft flower center,
and all the flowers sighed in the dream of it all,
as the night blanket tucked them in all snug and safe.

And best of all, Ladybug stayed all summer long in that field of sunny flowers.
And he told many wondrous stories for them of the beauty and magic of the world
just past the meadowland. ♦

Suzanne Down is the founder and director of Juniper Tree Puppets / Juniper Tree School of Story and Puppetry Arts, sharing training in the wonder, meaning, and magic of Puppet Theater for young children.

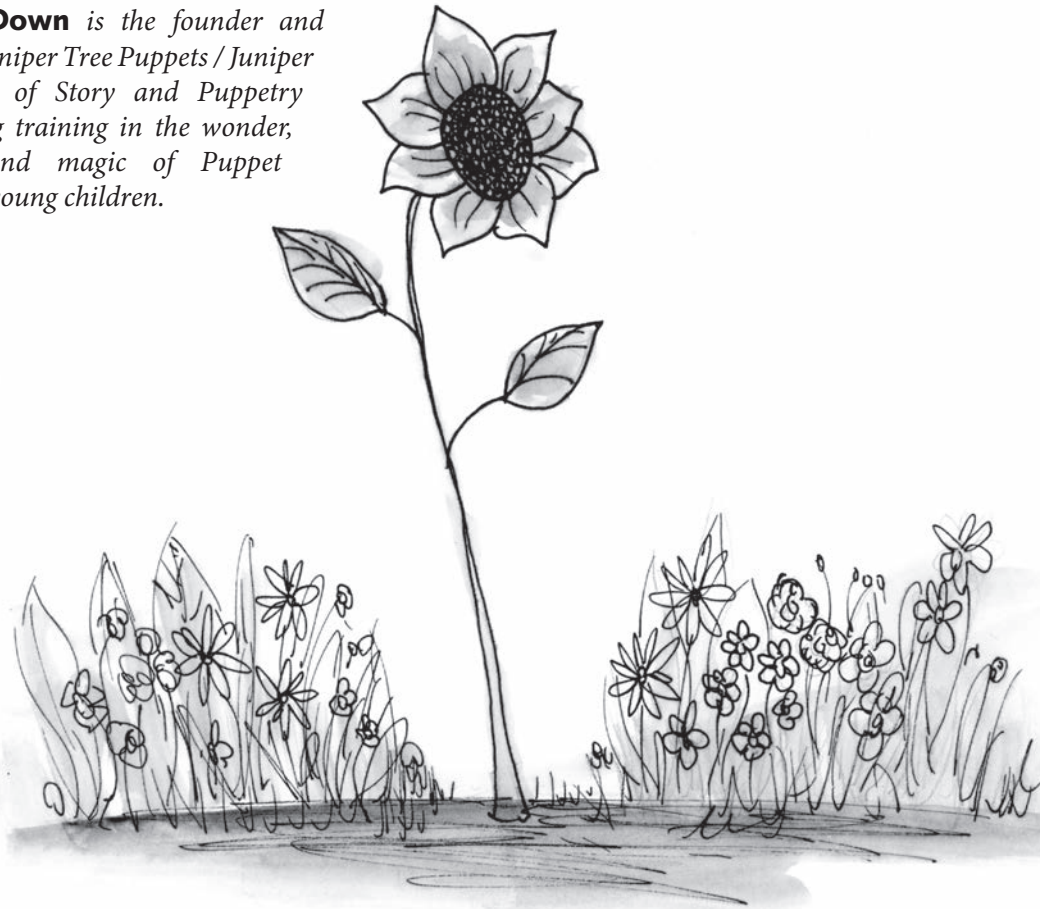


Illustration by Deborah Grieder from *Tell Me a Story* (WECAN, 2013)

The Little Seed Story

~ Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt

Begin sitting down and accompany the story text with movement and gestures. If you like, you can set the mood first with a little song. You might enjoy "Now all is sleeping beneath the snows" by Nancy Foster in Let Us Form a Ring.

Spring brings many things:
The little bird on the bough that sings,
Sun and showers, rainbows and flowers
And oh, so many happy hours!

Early one morning a little seed said:
"My roots are itching. I must get out of bed."
She peeped out of her covers, all warm and all brown,
Stretched herself tall and looked around.

Stand up with this line.

Continue telling the story, accompanying with movement and gestures.

The little seed called:
"Can I wake up?
The sky is blue
And the sun is up!"

But Father Sun said:
"You must go back to bed.
You must wait a little longer,
Till my sunny beams are stronger."

And so, the little seed, it seems,
Went back to sleep to dream her dreams.

**Join hands and walk around the circle, singing a suitable song. You might repeat the song, suggested above: 'Now all is sleeping...', or improvise a melody to the following verse.*

When will my little garden grow,
With pretty flowers in a row?
Wind, blow hard. Wind, blow strong.
When will springtime come along?

Stand after the song, and continue telling the story, accompanying with movement and gestures.

The very next day, the raindrops ran down,
Rushing in rivulets all around.
The little seed called: "Can I wake up and grow,
And wash my leaves in the water's flow?"

But the Rain said: "No!"
Sister Rain said: "You must go back to bed.
You must wait a little longer,
Till my waters weave much warmer."

And so, the little seed, it seems,
Went back to sleep to dream her dreams.

**Join hands and walk around the circle, repeating the song from before.*

Continue holding hands after the song, and then run around the circle with the next two lines.

The very next day, the North Wind blew hard
And ran 'round the garden, the house and the yard.

Sit down and draw your arms towards you, as if huddling to hide from the cold.

The little seed hid, all huddled with cold,
While the North Wind flew and blew quite bold.

Remain sitting and continue the story, accompanying with movement and gestures.

Lightening flashed and the thunder did pound,
But the dear little seed slept well and slept sound.
Time went by, but the seed was not seen.
She had gone back to sleep to dream her dreams.

Pound fists on the floor for the thunder.

A hungry fox came creeping by.
A little mouse hurried and tried to hide.
He burrowed and brushed against the bed,
Where the dear little seed was resting her head.

The little seed called: "Can I wake up like you,
And do the things that little mice do?"

"No", said the other. "You're a seed, not a mouse.
Now *shhh*, while Brother Fox is about.
It's not very safe to wander.
We both must wait a little longer."

And so, the mouse and seed, it seems,
Went back to sleep to dream their dreams.

**Optional: If you like, you can hum or sing your song from before, perhaps rocking your arms.*

Narrate the following section without gesturing, as if simply telling a story.

Over time, the mouse and the small seed (who would one day become a flower), became good, good friends. Every morning, the mouse would scamper into the world and later return to tell small seed what he had seen.

Optional: If you like, you can mention some first signs of spring that mouse saw that particular day. Or ask the children for their ideas. For example: maybe mouse saw a little brown worm, wriggling across the ground, or a curious little spider, dangling from a silky thread...

Then continue with the narration, accompanying with movement and gestures.

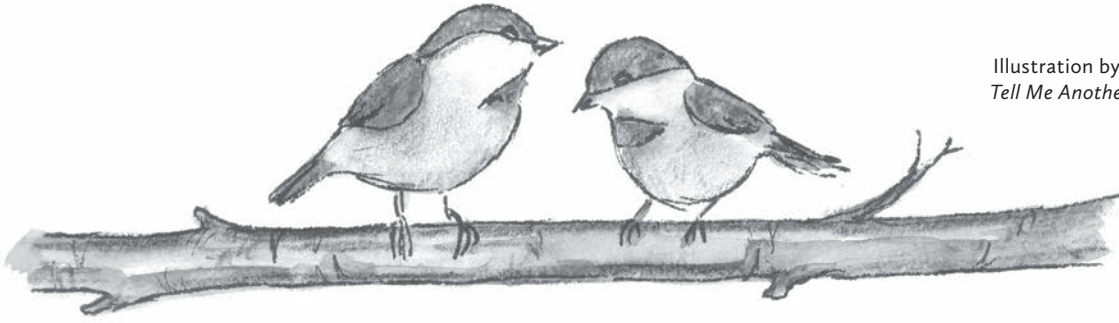
One day, the little mouse smelled something different in the air.
Quietly, he crept outside to see what it might be.

Twitch 'whiskers'
Stand up.

Take small tiptoe steps around the circle with the next three lines. If you like, you can move your arms and hands in front of you, like the front paws of a little mouse.

One day, the little mouse went out
To see if springtime was about.
He hurried. He scurried. He sniffed the air.
The sun was shining fine and fair.

Stand and form a large rounded gesture for the sun.



Then continue with gestures for the next two lines.

The pretty birds sang in the trees.
There was a hum of honey bees.
Then little mouse ran home to say
That surely spring was on the way.

Tiptoe as before with quick little steps around the circle.

Stand and continue telling the story, accompanying with movement and gestures.

But when he got home, the seed was not found.
He looked and looked all around.
He scratched the earth, scooped out a stone,
And suddenly felt all alone.
“Here I am,” called the voice of a fair little flower.
“I just woke up, this very hour.
I was once a small seed, wrapped still in repose,
But now I’m a flower, a dear little rose!”

Take hands and walk around the circle with the next lines.

The mouse and the flower remained good friends,
Though that’s not how my story ends.
Come sing and be merry. Come dance in a ring.
Away with cold winter. Come May and come spring!

**Sing a happy seasonal song and walk or dance around the circle together. See Waldorf Music Resources. You might enjoy “Tirra-lirra-lirra,” a traditional German folk song with adapted words by John Erwin. You can find this song in the book: Let Us Form a Ring by Nancy Foster.*

Sit down after the song.

Speak or sing the following verse. If you choose to sing the verse, you can use the melody noted above, from the songbook Let Us Form a Ring.

Tirra-lirra-lirra, time to rest,
When the day is done, inside your nest.
O’er the leafy branches sails the moon.
And the stars are dancing to this tune.

**Sing a quiet song or lullaby to complete the story circle. See Waldorf Music Resources. ♦*

Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt is a eurythmy teacher and therapeutic eurythmist on the West Coast of Canada with a strong background in Waldorf Kindergarten work. After many years of Waldorf teaching in British Columbia, she now lives on Salt Spring Island. There she continues to write stories and teach part-time in several Waldorf Teacher Training Institutes in Canada.

The Switchling

~ Emily Lalande

In the forest lived many magical creatures. Fairies and gnomes, unicorns, mermaids, and dragons. Each magical creature had their own special powers. The fairies helped the plants grow and opened the blossoms of the flowers. The unicorns healed the sick and wounded with their tears. The gnomes moved through the earth with ease finding underground caverns and shining the crystals and gold. The mermaids sang the songs of the water and the dragons flew high in the sky, their scales shimmering in the sunlight.

But there was one being whose power was unique. This being could become anything they liked. This little being was the Switchling. The Switchling's power was to become whatever and whoever they wanted to be.

Each day as the sun would rise, the Switchling would wake and feel in their heart who they were meant to be that day.

Some days their hair would grow long and they would braid it. Other days they had no hair at all. Some days they would dress themselves in the delicate gowns of the fairies, stitched with dew drop pearls and petals of pink and periwinkle and they would dance with the flowers in the meadow.

Some days they would wake and find their big boots already on their feet and a beard growing from their chin which needed to be combed. Then they would put on their cap and grab their shovel and dig into the tunnels with the gnomes looking for stones to polish and crystals to shine.

There were days they grew fins and a tail and swam in the water singing the songs of the sea. Days they grew hooves and horns and ran galloping through the glistening forest. And there were nights they sprouted wings and went flying through the skies, their scales shining in the moonlight.

No matter where they went, the other creatures loved them and welcomed them. Sometimes the others were curious and asked the Switchling questions.

"But what are you really?" they would say.

"I am flowers and water, fire and stones.

I am dresses and boots and scales and sparkles.

I am songs and whispers, stillness and flight.

I am a Switchling. I am as I like." ♦

Written for Bringing Cultural Consciousness through Circles, Stories, and Puppetry with Holly Koteen-Soule, Somer Serpe and Leslie Woolverton

Emily Lalande received her Waldorf Teacher training from Rudolf Steiner College in 2013 and has been an Early Childhood teacher at the Davis Waldorf School for 7 years. She has a passion for connecting young children and their families to the magic of the earth and the magic within themselves. As a singer, songwriter, story teller, and nature enthusiast, she has found Waldorf education to be a nourishing and healing environment for herself and the children. She is dedicated to bringing kindness, compassion, and reverence into education. She was born and raised in the canyons of Los Angeles and currently resides in Sacramento.

The Story of Kasa Jizo (kasajizou)

~ Shizu Lee

A Japanese tale adapted and turned into a puppet table play by Shizu Lee for the Star Garden at the Austin Waldorf School

Once upon a time, there lived a poor old man with his wife in a distant place in the mountains. They made a living by weaving straw into rice bags and sandals, which the old man brought to the local villages to sell.

One cold New Year's Eve day, the old man gathered all the bags and sandals that they had made during the whole month, packed them on his back, and started for the nearby village, saying to his wife: "Selling all

of these I'm sure I can buy enough rice for us to make rice cakes for New Year."

It started to snow, but the good old wife couldn't stop her husband from going, so she saw him leave and she prayed that the snow wouldn't get worse and that he would get back home safe and sound.

On his way, the old man passed in front of five Jizo statues that stood silently on the roadside. He looked up at them, and bowing, he said, "Excuse me for having to pass in front of you. You must be cold in this heavy snow." He brushed away the pile of snow that covered their heads.

Arriving at the village, the old man couldn't shake off the image of the five Jizos from his mind. "Oh, they must be shivering. It is so cold outside, those poor fellows." So he sold all the bags and sandals and realized that the money he earned was enough to buy five bamboo hats for the Jizos.

With the hats in hand, he hurried back home happily and, arriving at the Jizos, he was surprised to find out that there were six of them! He couldn't believe his eyes, but there they were... six of them. He brushed away the snow and put on the hats on their heads one by one. When he got to the sixth Jizo, he hesitated for a moment, then took off the piece of cloth he wore as a cap, and covered the head of the sixth Jizo with it, tying it under the Jizo's chin.

Arriving home, his wife came to meet him at the door, smiling happily: "Let's get started to make the rice cakes! It's New Year's Eve!"

"But my dear wife," the old man said, "I'm so sorry! I didn't buy the rice." The wife was upset. "But how can we spend New Year without rice cakes?" The old man told her the whole story of the Jizos. "I'm so sorry," he said to his wife, "but we have our house to keep us warm and comfortable in this weather. Those Jizos do not have anything to protect them from the snow, nor can they do anything but stand still."

His wife listened silently to all he said, "Well, if that's the reason, I'm proud of you; and surely we won't die without rice cakes on New Year's Day. A porridge would do. We can at least do the ritual of rice cake pounding, even though we don't have rice. We can pretend there is rice in the dough, and pound it."

So, they took out the dough, and started to pound it, making a clattering sound like everyone does on New Year's Eve. Then they had their porridge, and satisfied, went to bed.

Somewhere around midnight, they were awakened by a strange dragging sound on the snow, and voices that could be heard faintly. The old man woke up and said to his wife: "Don't you hear something?"

His wife opened her eyes "It's midnight...what could it be but the wind and the falling snow?" They listened to the night sounds. They heard chanting:

Up there, up there is the house of the man

Up there, up there is the man who gave us hats

Up there, up there is the man who gave us his treasure

The chanting went on and on, followed by the sound of crashing snow. Wide awake, the old man and his wife hurried to their front door and were shocked by what they saw: five Jizos wearing bamboo hats, the sixth wearing the old man's scarf, walked in two rows of three, carrying a big straw bag between them. They walked straight to the house, and placed the heavy bag carefully on the porch. Then they returned to their place by the road where they stood to protect travelers who passed by. Only then did they stop their sing-song chant.

When everything was quiet again, the man and his wife went outside. They carried the straw bag into the house. To their amazement, it was full of rice, enough for the rest of their lives.

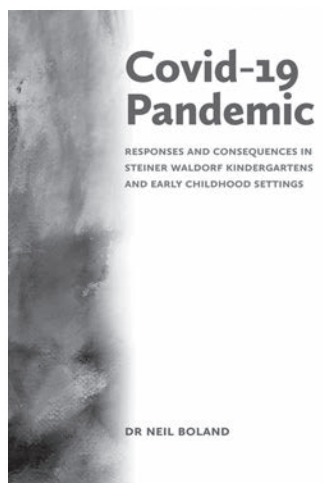
Outside stood the six Jizos, steadfast in the peaceful snow. ◆

Shizu Lee is a Sunbridge graduate who has been working as a kindergarten assistant for the last three years at the Austin Waldorf School, with over ten years of previous teaching experience in Japanese early childhood. Through learning and working in early childhood programs, she has found special interest in puppetry and storytelling. She especially enjoys sharing stories from Japan with her class children.

Publication Announcements

A Look at the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Our EC Programs ***Covid-19 Pandemic: Responses and Consequences in Steiner Waldorf Kindergartens and Early Childhood Settings*** Dr. Neil Boland

In response to the sudden isolation and other effects that early childhood families and educators experienced during the years of the pandemic, the International Association for Steiner-Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) gathered and reported on educators' experiences, opinions, and thoughts. Dr. Neil Boland, who has a background in Steiner education as an early childhood, primary school, and secondary school teacher, and now teaches at the university level, prepared the report; he came to the project after doing considerable



research on the effects of lockdown on early childhood programs in New Zealand and Australia.

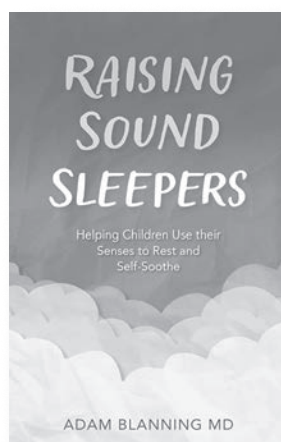
With gratitude for the support of IASWECE, which is translating the report into languages worldwide, WECAN has published Dr. Boland's findings as *Covid-19 Pandemic: Responses and Consequences in Steiner Waldorf Kindergartens and Early Childhood Settings*. It is a rich and revealing summary of educators' thoughts on how well-being, resilience, and relationships were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic,

and on how practices were modified in response. We hope this report, filled with personal accounts as well as clear graphics comparing responses from different countries, will provide valuable material for study, both individually and in groups.

Covid-19 Pandemic is available in our online store, store.waldorfearlychildhood.org. ♦

Support Children in Consistent, Restful Sleep: ***Raising Sound Sleepers*** by Dr. Adam Blanning

Sleep and rest aren't always the natural processes we expect them to be. In *Raising Sound Sleepers*, Dr. Adam Blanning offers observations, research, insight, and practical advice for helping children from infants to teenagers learn skills and habits to assist healthy sleep. The discussion ranges from how parents can avoid bedtime meltdowns to the simple, natural steps caregivers can take to help children feel calm and to encourage them to fall asleep more consistently. Detailed insights will help parents and caregivers to support children in using an anthroposophic understanding of the senses—from



taste, smell, and touch to balance and movement—to self-soothe, sleep, and ultimately build resilience for life.

Dr. Blanning, a family physician practicing anthroposophic medicine and a past president of the Anthroposophic Health Association, lectures and teaches internationally on topics relating to holistic medicine and the dynamics of human development, with a special interest in supporting children. He is also the author of *Understanding Deeper Developmental Needs*, an in-depth exploration of challenging behaviors in children.

Raising Sound Sleepers is forthcoming from Floris Books and will appear on our online store as soon as it is available. ♦



Celebrate Spring with Original Art from WECAN Cover Art Prints and Mother-Child Art Prints

Brighten and refresh the home and classroom during this season of renewal with art prints created especially for Waldorf families and teachers. Our Cover Art Prints feature beautiful watercolors by Sheila Harrington, reprising images that first appeared as the covers of *The Singing, Playing Kindergarten*, *Merrily We Sing*, and our *Waldorf Early Childhood Education: An Introductory Reader*. Sherri Gionet's Mother-Child Art Prints, *In the Garden* and *Mother and Child*, are inspired by multicultural representations of the familiar new mother holding her baby in color moods that evoke different seasons and regional climates. Each artist's work is available either individually or as sets in our online store. ♦

