
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"! ♦