

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 85, Fall 2023

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



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Examining an inchworm. Photo courtesy of Vicki Kingbury.

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Inviting children back into the fullness of life

We all want children to be healthy and happy, to find security and confidence in being in their physical bodies, and to experience goodness in life with optimism for the future. Fostering security, confidence, and optimism is now especially challenging, as we deal with the negative consequences the restricted pandemic years have inflicted upon everyone, and especially on young children.

At the World Teachers' Conference in Dornach last April, it was confirmed that these challenges are worldwide, as teachers from over sixty countries had similar stories. During the months of isolation, children were seriously deprived of chances for expectable physical and emotional growth, sensory strengthening, and socialization. Waldorf education is by its very nature nurturing and healing, yet many children now have needs that interfere with their ability to participate in our pre-pandemic curriculum and be nourished by it. A pediatrician at the conference said that children now need additional sensory movement support and soul enrichment during early childhood and beyond, up to third grade.

This sobering picture provided the impulse for this issue of *Gateways*, as the situation calls for us to offer children a kind of mini-emergency pedagogy to circle back to where the children were diverted from or halted on their usual developmental path, and escort them forward. This is not a replacement of our usual rich, wise pedagogy, but added enrichment. We can think of this as giving someone who has been ill and needs to rebuild their forces extra, nutritious snacks in addition to regular meals.

This issue shares several approaches to putting this nourishing, healing pedagogy into practice, largely centered around outdoor education. Many programs found satisfaction with an outdoor curriculum when they moved their early childhood classes outdoors during the pandemic, and have continued outside of classrooms. In our lead article, "The Healing Power of Nature," Vicki Kingsbury compiles research done for her teacher training, as she wished to not only describe the anxiety and dysregulation seen in children, but to offer strategies for actually reducing it. Vicki's thorough exploration of nature as healer speaks on behalf of what the other articles in this issue emphasize as well.

This is followed by "Hope, a Tonic for the Future" by Laurie Clark, which shines a light on how stories, arts, movement, and similar activities offer nourishment and healing to our children in all classroom settings, indoors and out. "Hope" will be included in an expanded form in a forthcoming book from the WECAN Research group, which will speak of practical healing gestures for the wounds and deprivations of the pandemic era.

In "Time in Nature," Lisa Miccio describes an outdoor-based program that has reached out to Head Start and public-school kindergartens in the area to bring children with little access to nature on weekly outings, and help them explore how they can bring more nature experiences to their own children. This is Waldorf reaching out to make the wonder and sense of connectedness to the wider world an accessible reality for more children.

Aimee de Ney has a beautifully fierce connection to the land and its indigenous history. Her early childhood work in the Pacific Northwest focuses upon healing the land from the many colonial injustices and exploitations that have occurred. "You are my other me," her picture of honoring the land, wherever we live, offers a reciprocal healing both to the land and to the people who offer care to the earth.

This section concludes with "Healing Presence," in which Jane Swain and Janene Ping discuss how screen time for young children can cause a disconnection with our sensory environment and with other people. Practical suggestions are given for how we can invite children back into the natural and social world.

For the Classroom responds to the question of "What can we do?" to bring reassurance, hope, comfort, and healing to children, through stories, circles, games, movement tidbits, and two helpful examples for calming anxious little souls.

A truly "star-filled" event of the the 2023 WECAN February Conference, which continued the commitment to creating healing dialogue and action toward Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice, was the puppet play of "Harriet and the Stars," written by Leslie Wetzonis-Woolverton. The story of Harriet Tubman's childhood is offered in two versions for use in our classrooms, so that this inspiring picture can live beyond the conference.

Suzanne Down's article on "sheltering stories" describes how we can create reassuring images of protection, soothing to the soul. Also included is a story of birdies in the nest to offer when spring awakens. Lisa Miccio shares a reassuring story of shelter she wrote for a child on the autism spectrum, "The Shepherd Boy." We are grateful for these reminders of the healing potency of stories. In addition, two short descriptions of calming and reassuring activities from the classroom are contributed by Marianne Bockli and Kate Lawes. Thank you for these reminders of simple but powerful remedies that are always accessible.

New circle time material is always welcome. Reassurance that the light really will come again after the long, dark winter comes from Diane Van Dommelen of Alaska, who created "Old Gnome's Candlemas Circle" to picture the light returning after a candle foretells this happy event. A different climate is pictured in "Shelter from the Rain," an adaptation by Holly Koteen-Soulé of a Russian folk tale in which a little community of animals shelters from the rain under the umbrella of a mushroom. The images and lively, playful speech are delightful.

Traditional circle games offer much to encourage social life—visibly interrupted by the months of isolation. Ruth Ker, author of *Please, Can We Play Games?*, reminds us of this heritage of movement games with rhythmic song and interesting, engaging

speech. In these games we have tried-and-true images in verse and song that have helped generations of children in their growing.

The hand gesture games created by Wilma Ellersiek are favorites with young children. The final WECAN volume of Ellersiek games, *Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves*, currently in preparation, focuses on the elemental world. Lynn St. Pierre offers a preview with "What Scoot Does in Wintertime," which may become a new favorite.

A review of a new publication, *Raising Sound Sleepers*, by Dr. Adam Blanning, announces a valuable new resource of practical advice for parents. The rising difficulty in developing good sleep habits is a modern crisis. This book, available through the WECAN online bookstore, can help us understand how both children and adults can find a place of rest for sleep.

We must end this preview of the journal with a sad note. Marjorie Thatcher, a pioneering early childhood teacher in Victoria, BC, crossed the threshold on September 17, 2023, after many, many dedicated years of service to Waldorf early childhood. Marjorie Thatcher was an inspiration to so many students, faculty and WECAN Board members. The gratitude owed to her life and work will be expressed in the spring *Gateways*.

Wishing you warmth and light of heart and spirit,
—Nancy Blanning

INVITATION FOR SUBMISSIONS

for *Gateways* SPRING 2024

The Fall 2023 issue of *Gateways* has featured contributions celebrating the healing possibilities of outdoor education, but programs in other settings without access to woods and forests are also providing healing, encouraging, enriching education. We seek your contributions out of this work, to provide inspiration for indoor and play yard activities.

Please share:

- Small movement vignettes that engage and guide children in transition times—extra opportunity for developing foundational senses
- Interesting rhymes and verses that invite listening—building phonemic awareness and auditory discrimination retarded by mask wearing
- Traditional and original circle games for sensory building indoors and in the play yard
- Obstacle course ideas for inside and out
- Practical activities that engage the limbs indoors and in the play yard
- And so on to share the wise and engaging things we do already without being aware of their potency, and new things we have developed in response to our children's needs

We eagerly await sharing this festival of useful ideas with all teachers in all settings.

PLEASE SEND SUBMISSIONS TO gatewayscollection@gmail.com BY DECEMBER 15, 2023

For clarification and discussion about submission ideas, please send your question to gatewayscollection@gmail.com.

Focus—Inviting Children Back into the Fullness of Life

The Healing Power of Nature

~ Vicki Kingsbury

All of nature begins to whisper its secrets to us through its sounds.

*Sounds that were previously incomprehensible to our soul
now become the meaningful language of nature.*

—Rudolf Steiner

Research has shown that the pandemic reduced the amount of time preschoolers spent with peers and time outdoors. “COVID-19 not only suspended normal childhood activities such as attending school, interacting with extended family and friends, playing outdoors, and exploring nature but also disrupted the consequent socio-emotional benefits that accrue from children’s engagement in these experiences” (Levickis, et al., 2022). As a result, there has been an increase in anxiety and dysregulation in the children and their caregivers. In my work as the lead teacher in Wonder Garden, a preschool class at Prairie Hill Waldorf School in Pewaukee, Wisconsin, I am observing more separation anxiety, more children needing sensory input (proprioceptive, oral, vestibular, etc.), and more children experiencing difficulties with transitions. Everyone has been traumatized to some degree by the pandemic. As a result, we early childhood teachers have been struggling to meet the growing needs of the children in our care.

As a response to the pandemic, and the longing to remain in person rather than virtual, Prairie Hill Waldorf School built outdoor classrooms. After 20 years of teaching in Waldorf early childhood programs, I observed how being outdoors in nature during the majority of the day helped reduce anxiety in the children and ultimately their caregivers. This extended experience of nature play and the teacher’s intentional use of language—consistent, positively-framed phrases, which create shared agreements as well as healthy boundaries and encourage children to connect with each other and play with minimal

intervention from adults—has helped to reduce anxiety and dysregulation in the preschool children in Wonder Garden.

There are hundreds of articles for parents/caregivers and teachers on how to cope with preschool anxiety, but practically no strategies for actually reducing it. So my goal has been to identify and compile some strategies, resources, and practices that are being used to reduce anxiety and dysregulation in preschoolers in my class, in hopes that it will help others.

The Challenges: Observations and Examples of Anxiety and Dysregulation

As part of my capstone project at Great Lakes Waldorf Institute, I surveyed and talked with a number of colleagues to learn what they are seeing with the children. A higher incidence of anxiety was reported, including an increase in support needed for transitions, the number of staff needed, and children needing more assistance working socially with one another. The study commissioned by the International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE), reported similar results in the book *Covid-19 Pandemic*. Increased general anxiety and vulnerability in Steiner kindergarten children were reported, along with speech and movement delays (Boland, 2023, p. 99). These findings are widely reported across the education sector and numerous non-Steiner studies are underway.

There have been many more incidents of separation anxiety since the pandemic, including more children reluctant to attend, arriving late, and unable to

independently transition. Children protest as they are handed over to us teachers to hold. Pandemic closeness to parents has made it more difficult to separate from them.

Our Wonder Garden class is outside about 75% of our day. Being outdoors seems to provide wider opportunities for a child who is looking for a safe and soothing place while experiencing anxiety. In addition to just sitting with a teacher on a swinging bench, children typically seek solace in the hammock, the spider swing, or the fort—all places where they seem to feel safe enough to express their feelings and emotions. And then when they're ready, teachers can help them to down-regulate. What is that?

Molly Maloney, a therapist, articulated the concept of down-regulation beautifully in my survey: "Great news! Our nervous systems are actually designed to respond to threats – and go into the fight or flight (sympathetic) nervous system. That's what's so amazing about the nervous system... it knows how to be activated AND it knows how to come down. The problem is that we live in a society that has forgotten and quite frankly doesn't leave space to down-regulate, so we become stuck in flight or flight and that stuck pattern causes anxiety, panic, and the other ills associated with living outside our 'resiliency zone' as we call it in therapy. To engage in 'rest and digest,' the parasympathetic nervous system needs space, unstructured time, co-regulation, self soothing, deep breaths, etc...to down-regulate. I don't believe we give enough of this to ourselves as mothers and as a result to our preschool aged children. So their little bodies don't learn how to down-regulate."

"Rest and digest" can be offered in many different forms, especially outside where there is plenty of space for children to find what they need; including playing in the sand, lying in the hammock, sitting by the fire, swinging, and climbing on or hiding in our stick fort. And we provide plenty of unstructured playtime in our daily rhythm for them to down-regulate without rushing them. Sometimes just a hug or time in our laps or by our sides (e.g., sweeping or doing a chore) can help them co-regulate, as long as we adults are feeling self-regulated.

The Gifts: Benefits of Being Outdoors

The benefits of being outside are well documented and widely known. These include reduction in stress and anxiety, improved motor development from active physical play, exposure to fresh air and sunshine, healthy eye development, supported risk-taking, improved cognition/executive functioning skills, more time and space to "be," improved emotional regulation and co-regulation, expanded sensory opportunities, growing appreciation for the land and environment, and taking time for caretaking the





Climbing. Photo courtesy of Vicki Kingsbury.

environment and its resources (Beaven, et al., 2023, p. 12).

In our school, we have always promoted daily, extended contact with the natural world. The seasons, discoveries, and transformations in nature are a healing balm to the young child. Children are able to form bonds with the earth, which later transform into stewardship (Cassidy et al., 2023, p. 6).

When children are outside, and in the elements, able to move, run, climb, shout, roll down hills, build sandcastles, etc, they are more easily engaged in their work, which is play. There is no substitute! And there is simply nothing more universal, more necessary, more unifying, than play (Hobson, 2027, p. 3). There are so many curative benefits, but one of the most impactful ones that I've observed is that it organically leads the children to be more fully in their bodies. And as a result of being fully in their bodies, they are fully present. And when a child (or anyone for that matter) is "present" they are not worrying about what comes next, or where they are, or where their parents/caregivers are, and so on. Why is this important? When children are fully present, they don't feel anxious. Rudolf Steiner captures the essence of this phenomena and the healthy result so exquisitely by stating: "If a child has been able in his play to give up his whole loving being to the world around him, he will be able, in the serious tasks of later life, to devote himself with confidence and power to the service of the world" (Steiner, 1988, p. 96).

Medical experts and the American Medical Association state that nature play boosts cognitive, social, and emotional skills, and concludes that children will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier, and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors (Louv, 2005).

Therapist Molly Maloney points out that gross motor activities can support full nervous system integration and regulation. She explains, "What we forget is that somatically speaking, our nervous system wants to down-regulate and it knows how to down-regulate if left to its own inner wisdom. However for the nervous system's own inner wisdom to take over, it needs space, quiet, stillness—the nervous system cannot down-regulate in front of a TV, on a tablet or phone—the power of nature with children is that if we can create an environment that is soothing for them—the big blue sky—the inner wisdom of their nervous system can have space to remember its programming. However, if a young nervous system does not have this frequent opportunity, then it will unfortunately not learn how to down-regulate because it was never given the chance and that is where heightened levels of anxiety can carry on at burdening levels into childhood and beyond."

Amber Chavez, an early childhood educator and expert in trauma-informed care, shared her insights about being outdoors: “Overall, the space and sensory environment of outdoors is very helpful. The sky overhead, birds singing, wind blowing, these can all be very calming. What I like best about the outdoors is the freedom for big movement and big noises! There is a huge link between body systems and emotions—being able to get these body sensations out through movement and expression can reduce anxiety.” Places to build and experience controlled risk (such as logs), walking in nature, doing meaningful work, opportunities for heavy work (e.g., carrying logs to fire, moving wood chips) and digging in the sand pit provide lots of good sensory input and opportunities for creativity. Often by just observing the children, we can see what they need. Being outside can provide something truly therapeutic and healing.

The Interventions: How Language Can Reduce Anxiety

Another research question for this project was: “How does language use decrease anxiety and dysregulation in preschoolers and their caregivers?” Spending two snowy days with kindergarten teacher Monica Zamzow at Tamarack Waldorf School in Milwaukee allowed her to share her ability to protect the forces of childhood by refraining as much as possible from verbal instructions.

Rudolf Steiner discusses protection for the forces of childhood in *A Modern Art of Education*: “Although it is highly necessary that each person should be fully awake in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination in which his early years of life are passed” (Steiner, 2001). His wisdom allows for a child to play deeply, which is the child’s work, and in doing so, a child can be at one with their environment, not thinking about anything else other than what’s before them. A child can then become “present” in their body and in their world. One of our goals as Early Childhood teachers is to strive to keep the children present so they are not thinking or asking about what is next, which is what I’ve observed in many of the children who have anxiety. When they begin asking questions about what is next, my typical reply is to pause, look at them and say: “I wonder...” Most of the time, this is just what the child needs to hear. The pause, and the connection when I look at them, is important so they know that they are being heard

and seen. I try not to answer their question directly, as I know it will just bring on more questions, and prevent them from engaging in their work and play.

When observing Miss Monica on those two days, I did not hear the children ask a lot of questions. Instead I observed that this teacher employed four things that could in fact keep children in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination that Steiner is referring to.

1. The teacher implemented a rich rhythm of the day, where the children were carried by the in-breaths and out-breaths and knew what to expect.
2. The teacher used gestures (non-verbal cues) as a model for the children’s imitation.
3. The teacher repeated specific phrases as a reminder of the expectations or shared agreements.
4. The teacher sang or played the lyre during transitions.

Over the years, I’ve curated a list of positively-framed Wonder Garden Phrases that we teachers use consistently as a common language base. These phrases help us cultivate healthy boundaries as well as encourage the children to connect with each other and play without a lot of interventions from adults. By practicing these phrases, we are all working out of a common language base to support children in connecting with their peers and building their social skills. These phrases model the positive action the situation calls for. Here are some examples:

- ☞ We use our hands for doing good work. (versus hitting, pinching, etc)
- ☞ Please use your inside voice. (when someone is yelling inside)
- ☞ Please use your walking feet. (when someone is running inside)
- ☞ We take good care of our things. (when they are being too rough with something)
- ☞ Watch out below! (to ensure the coast is clear before swinging, or moving something big)
- ☞ May I have a turn please? (when someone wants something that someone else has)
- ☞ Sure, when I’m done. (when someone is asked if they can have a turn next)

We start the year off by speaking these phrases. For example, if a child is arguing with another because s/he wants to get on the swing, we stand behind the child wanting to have a turn and suggest: “May I have a

turn please?” and magically the child mirrors not only our words, but the tone we use. As the child repeats what the teacher says, this reinforces the words and the gestures that we expect. Before you know it, the children are using these phrases and helping their friends use them as well because it becomes part of their habit life. It’s transformational for the children. It frees the teachers from speaking and helps our children self-regulate and “discipline” themselves.

Equally as effective has been to limit the amount of speaking that I do as a teacher. Instead, I strive to use nonverbal communication and sing as an alternative to speaking. There is a song for every transition in our day which provides an imagination rather than instruction. For example, when we have a fire drill, instead of providing verbal instructions, the children hear the song, “Come little bluebirds, I know you are there, come little bluebirds, come gather ’round here.” The children drop what they’re doing and join the teacher.

The absence of language—silence—is such a valuable tool for us as teachers, as it creates a calm environment which can help young children engage more deeply in their work. Silence also provides a soothing and peaceful atmosphere that supports children’s self-regulation and emotional well-being. We actually weave a few periods of silence into our daily rhythm, including “quiet chewing” for about 15 minutes at the lunch table, and when we do artistic activities, such as wet-on-wet painting, coloring, and wet-felting. I strive to speak only when necessary. Then when I do speak, it is more impactful.

Wonder Garden Strategies, Resources and Practices

The goal of this project was to identify and compile practical strategies, resources, and practices to help reduce anxiety and dysregulation in preschoolers to share with other early childhood teachers and their caregivers. In his book *Covid-19 Pandemic*, Dr Neil Boland recommends that a “detailed examination of the incidence of anxiety and vulnerability in Steiner kindergarten children is called for, including pathways to ameliorate this which have proven successful in practice” (Boland, p. 99).

These strategies have proven successful in practice in Wonder Garden:

1. Dressing for the weather and remaining outside as long and as much as possible.

2. Using positively-framed phrases to cultivate healthy boundaries and encourage the children to connect with each other and play without a lot of interventions from adults.
3. Paying attention to your body, and using a mindfulness practice if you get dysregulated. One of my favorites is *I’m a rock in a river*. Just pretend you’re a rock in the middle of a river, picturing yourself holding steady and let the water of emotion flow around you and over you. Feel yourself refreshed by the sounds of the water flowing, birds in trees, feel the warmth of the sun shining... Take a deep breath. Then another. If you can, close your eyes for a moment. You are a rock in a river. Now you can be more present for the children!
4. Observing each child without judgment and asking yourself: What is this child needing right now? Then offering something of support.
5. Partnering with the parents/caregivers to mutually share observations of their child’s gifts, challenges, and interventions that have been helpful.
6. Working with colleagues to support one another by sharing our experiences with the children and then sharing help and suggestions. (This is on our agenda in every department meeting.)
7. Inviting guest speakers and holding workshops on topics like trauma-informed caregiving, de-escalation strategies, or other workshops that offer tools to help with regulation of teachers and children.
8. Creating a Waving Window outside for the children to use if they want to run over and wave goodbye to their caregivers after drop-off time to help with separation anxiety.
9. Blowing kisses and well-wishes up into the sky to caregivers, and any friends who are absent from school that day. (This has helped with separation anxiety.)
10. Communicating the program’s tenets, procedures, and policies which communicates our boundaries with warmth and clarity in a written handbook.
11. Working with a verse (one that resonates with you) in all Department Meetings, Conferences with Caregivers, and Parent-Guardian Meetings.
12. Sharing articles with caregivers on the benefits of nature, and less talking, to help support keeping the children present. (We now have a database full of the best ones that we can access by topic.)



13. Singing during transitions, instead of providing instructions. Look for opportunities to sing or play the lyre during the times in the day when you observe children are needing to down-regulate.
14. Outdoor gems: going on meadow walks, rolling down the hill for sensory input, playing in unstructured places, visiting the “gnome home” and leaving gifts (e.g., shells) for the elementals, doing purposeful work like carrying logs, pushing wheelbarrows full of wood chips & raking them, rich sensory experiences like playing in the sand and mud kitchen.
15. Building obstacle courses with stumps, planks, mini-trampoline, tunnel, balance beam, etc.
16. Telling a pedagogical story about a magic gold ball at the beginning of the school year, and then using an actual brass ball whenever friends need to find the warmth in their heart and bring it into their hands. Their hands are then magically transformed from hurtful hands to helpful hands when they hold the magic gold—just like in the story! (An image of self-regulation)

Summary

There is enough evidence to suggest that the pandemic did indeed increase anxiety and dysregulation in preschool children and their caregivers; but even if the data is not yet conclusive, the fact remains that anything that we can do to help preschool children down-regulate will help support them therapeutically.

There’s so much Waldorf early childhood education can offer educators to help children and their caregivers reduce anxiety and dysregulation. This consideration has focused on *being outside* and *leveraging the power of language*. Being outside in nature counters the higher level of anxiety and collective trauma. There are fewer rules and interventions, and more opportunities for climbing, rolling, jumping, running, balancing, splashing, playing and working. And one of the most powerful and transformative practices that I have learned as a Waldorf teacher has been to reframe words and phrases so they are filled with love and positivity. ♦

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Vicki Kingsbury has been a Waldorf early childhood teacher since her own two children started at Prairie Hill Waldorf School in 2003. She has a B.A. in Communication Studies from the University of Massachusetts, graduated from the LifeWays Early Childhood and Human Development program, and from Great Lakes Waldorf Institute. But Vicki wholeheartedly learns more from the children than anything else!

Hope, a Tonic for the Future

~ Laurie Clark

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (etymonline.com), the word hope comes from the Old English hopa, which means confidence in the future.

When children are confronted with the troubles of our world, it can cause them a great amount of anxiety and distress. Following the recent pandemic, the traumatic impact of isolation still casts its shadow on the young child's path of development, along with the fear that Covid-19 carried with it.

Intellectual explanations about the worries of the world obscure rather than clarify the situation for the young child. The young child thinks in a pictorial way and has no "filters" to shut out the foreboding within dire situations. The children depend on adults to offer a protective shield around them while still offering them truth within the bounds of hopefulness.

Engendering Hope in the Early Childhood Classroom

As we find our way into the future, what is really needed? What healing gestures can teachers provide so that the children in our care can feel safe, secure and full of trust as they navigate their way through life? How can we engender hope in their lives? The teacher can become a kind of sensing organ to see what is needed to bring assurance to the children.

Hope is something that we need to cultivate. It involves the ability to live with the uncertainty of the future, while still holding the confidence that whatever it brings, we will find a way to meet it. The cultural destiny that we all find ourselves in at the moment is calling for us to awaken and meet each unprecedented situation with strengthened inner capacities.

Hope involves envisioning the future while recognizing that there will be challenges, setbacks, and unknown circumstances to face. The ability to have courage for the future, even when things seem to be moving in the wrong direction, involves the resilience and power of the indomitable human spirit. It enables us to keep going in the face of adversity. When the care-providing adult has assimilated hope into their inmost being, the young child, who learns through imitation, will be able to absorb it because the child has

placed their utmost trust in that person. For a child, the starting point for feeling hopeful comes streaming into them from the person that they trust.

There are many things that we already do in the classroom which help the children build trust in themselves and others. When we understand how these activities can also soothe and comfort the children, they can be even more nourishing and supportive.

Strong Rhythm and Routine

It is essential that the children are carried through the day with a strong and predictable routine. One activity follows the next just as day follows night. Knowing how the day unfolds helps the children to self-regulate. Each snack has its own day. It is very reassuring to know that every Monday, for example, is rice day. If something else appears other than rice, panic may set in, especially for the extremely sensitive child who needs to know things in advance in order to feel secure.

The child who often asks, "What is happening next?" may have anticipatory anxiety. They have excessive worry about future events and can even have panic attacks. Young children cannot verbalize why they have anxiety or where it is coming from. Questioning the young child about such things can cause even more anxiety. Often these children need more time to prepare for transitions from one activity to the next. The teacher can let the child know, before the rest of the class, what will happen next. Preparing these children before transitions and providing them the gift of extra time can help before they become overwhelmed. The old saying, "All things come to those who wait," is something to keep close. This kind of empathy by the caregiver for the child's soul situation is a welcome gesture that gives relief.

Creative Movement Possibilities

If a child has experienced trauma, the child may cope by disassociation, which causes loss of contact with themselves and the world. The child can have a kind of soul soreness and feel excluded. They may "move away" from themselves through aggression or depression, and may feel stuck and unable to "move"

from one soul state to another. There can be a sense of disorientation that makes it difficult to make sense of how life works.

We can find ways to be creative with these children who are experiencing painful soul movement by carrying extreme sensitivity and understanding with them. It is important to help them find interest in daily life. Inviting the child to help cook and bake, wash dishes with the teacher in warm water, and sweep the room together gives the child the opportunity to move. When we accompany the child in this way, it lifts their heaviness of soul, gives them mobility, and assures them that life is good. All is well.

Humor also is a lifting gesture for all of the children and especially those who have had trauma. It is important to bring developmentally appropriate silly things that make the children laugh. Laughter is a breathing out, a kind of letting go. In a circle, humor might come in the little chickadee verse: "On a hazel branch I spied three little chickadees side by side. On the left is Felix, on the right is Hans, and smack in the middle is SMARTYPANTS Franz." A little bit of naughtiness can be hilarious to the young child.

Circle time provides many benefits. Everyone is welcomed and warmly greeted. Cooperation is needed to move in the same direction, hold hands, and become somewhat aware of our friends. We build community as we move, sing and recite all together. This cooperation with others plants the first seeds of a healthy social life, the very first experiences of being helpers to our friends.

Spatial awareness, motor planning, balance and body geography can all be integrated into the circle adventure to give the children lots of movement opportunities, accompanied with seasonal imaginations that weave a story motif.

Free Drawing

Drawing freely with no instruction from an adult gives the child the opportunity to express what they are not able to verbalize, including their thoughts, feelings and worries. If the child has had a traumatic event in their life, it can become a therapeutic tool to "draw out" what would otherwise remain unspoken and stuck. Drawing gives children a safe space to express on paper what they are inwardly experiencing, all the way from joy to soul stress, a means for powerful feelings to safely come to the surface.

The teacher does not comment on what the child draws, but views this communication with unconditional acceptance. Observation and contemplation of these drawings may bring the teacher deeper understanding of what the child is trying to express

Festival Life

Festival celebrations play an integral part in early childhood and throughout life. These celebrations remind us of the wonder of how the human being, nature and the spiritual world all work together. We are all citizens of the earth and of the spirit.

The autumn Lantern Walk is a good example. Days shorten, nights darken and become longer, and nature dies away. As the sun's power lessens, our inner light seems to grow brighter. Lantern light will shine like the stars in the heavens. In community with family and friends, we brave the dark night and carry our precious lantern light accompanied by song. Together we will find our way. When future uncertainty challenges us, we can find spirit courage and give spirit courage to others.

Festivals throughout the year ignite our lives with living images that guide us with spirit. They are a touchstone for our true being, and give life meaning as we celebrate in community. Festivals can be healing, reminding us of spiritual wisdom that stands over and above our lives.

Fairy Tales

Sharing fairy tales with young children is like giving them a beautifully wrapped gift. As the teacher tells the story, the children unwrap this present as the pictures unfold. In their own imaginations, they "try on" each of the characters and situations.

In many of these stories, there are three very difficult, seemingly impossible tasks that the main character must accomplish to achieve the goal they are seeking. Often there are helpers that come to the aid of the person who has taken on such an adventure. The main character performs a helping deed out of kindness offered without any expectation of reward. Yet those helped return the favor. This kind of theme runs through all cultures.

The resilience and fortitude of the one with these unbelievably hard tasks are a wonder! The characters overcome their difficulties and become transformed in the process. How can this happen? It

seems beyond human capacity to find the way through such challenges. How often in our own lives might we relate to this kind of experience when it seems that our tasks are beyond what we think possible? Yet we go ahead with spirit courage, even with uncertainty of how things will turn out. Perseverance through adversity when working to do good in the world makes one stronger. The children picture themselves in the story and deeply feel that they are able to achieve these victories. The perseverance, resilience, and courage in these tales are all needed to fortify hope for the future.

Fairy tales strengthen the heart and the forces of the soul. These stories bring an inner security and reassurance to the child amongst the harmonies and disharmonies of life. Fairy tales gift the child with encouragement now and for the future, and remain a living force throughout life.

Strengthening Our Inner Capacities with Spiritual Hope

In a lecture entitled “Faith, Love and Hope,” Rudolf Steiner implores us to embrace and permeate ourselves with “spiritual hope.” Steiner goes on to say, “The forces of hope are life-giving and bring confidence for the future. We cannot take a single step in life without the force of hope. We actually know nothing about the following day, even whether or not we will be alive. We know about the future just as much as we need to know. Life would be impossible in the physical world were not future events to be preceded by hope. Would anyone sow seeds if we had no idea what would become of them?”

Hope counteracts uncertainties and provides a powerful antidote to despondency. It encourages steps towards the future, even as we know that our plans might need to completely change to before we can reach our destination. Flexibility and adaptability at every turn are needed. To bathe one’s soul with spiritual hope provides an inner gesture of healing and will be a gift to the children in our care.

The spiritual hope that we hold in our hearts can be enkindled through the advice given by Henning Köhler in his book *Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children*. He prescribes qualities that teachers must develop to help children who have experienced trauma. These are **protecting attentiveness**, **comforting trust** and **accompanying interest**.

Protecting attentiveness requires teachers to extend their understanding to “listen in” with deep devotion and reverence to what each child needs. The teacher adopts a quiet and alert attention without talking about it with the children. This kind of inner listening initiates a sense of “listening acknowledgment” that embraces the children.

Accompanying interest involves patiently “standing at the child’s side with a waiting attitude.” Trauma and anxiety do not disappear quickly, but accompanying the child creates the quality of being deeply interested and involved. This gives the child the gift of time without expectations to hurry through their ordeal or change. This kind of teacher’s participation is subtle but powerful and respects the process of the child’s development without demanding results.

Comforting trust is perhaps the most important of all. The child’s emotions need to be met by the teacher with empathy and confirmation. A most important way to establish comfort and trust is through providing all the healthy things we know to do for the young child. Strong and predictable rhythms, nourishing food, homelike activities and being in nature create security and well-being. Simplifying and reducing our transitions can be helpful in changing from one activity to the other. However, Köhler describes that the most comforting way to establish trust is to ask for help from the child’s angel. This is the key that opens the door to true comfort and will instill the deepest trust between the child and teacher.

Henning Köhler describes healing as not “an elimination of illness but rather a guidance to the essential. Healing means giving hope, to give hope means to have hope. A person’s hopeful thinking about a person is loving thinking.” ♦

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Time in Nature: A Fundamental Right for All

~ Lisa Miccio

The rhythmic serenade of creaking branches, accompanied by the melody of a nearby stream, lulls kindergarten children to sleep in tarp-covered hammocks. The hammocks hang between tall trees, and softly sway in the breeze as teachers from Acorn Waldorf School (AWS) wave silent goodbyes to their afternoon colleagues. Miles away there are more trees and more children awaiting them. In those spaces the hum of uninterrupted play harmonizes with the music of nature, as children soar between trees on zip lines, call confidently from the tops of boulders, build branch beaver dams, and quietly listen to the wind. But these are not Waldorf early childhood programs. These children are in public Pre-K, Kindergarten, and Head Start classes. The early childhood teachers who've joined them are breaking with long-held assumptions to engage in a new kind of Waldorf school outreach as they shift into their afternoon roles as mentors for the Neighboring Tree Project (NTP).

When children are at home in nature, they are also at home in the world.

—Joan Almon

Since the late nineteenth century, researchers have documented the interconnected relationships between human beings and nature, along with the benefits of spending time in nature for both children and adults. Studies point to the impact nature has on human capacities for resilience and regulation, as well as the positive benefits for children with social, emotional, and behavioral conditions. Moreover, limited opportunities to engage in outdoor learning have been shown to negatively impact children's group social play and interactions (Bento, G & Dias, G, 2017). Yet not all children have equal access to play and learn in outdoor spaces, and a recent survey conducted by the Natural Start Alliance shows that "of 121 outdoor preschools identified, only three percent of students were Black, seven percent Hispanic, and less than one percent Native American" (Beaven, Floyd, & Turner, 2023, p 9).

For Acorn Waldorf School's founder/director and kindergarten teacher Motria Shuhan, whose dream of opening Acorn Waldorf School sprang from her own seminal childhood experiences of playing in the fields,

forests, and meadows of the Ukrainian camp in upstate New York that her NYC family escaped to each summer, this racial disparity was unacceptable. Believing that time in nature is a fundamental human right for all, Motria and her colleagues at AWS began exploring new ideas for furthering their school's commitment to racial equity and access. But instead of wondering how to get children from more economically and racially diverse communities into AWS, the teachers started focusing on how to bring a healing relationship with nature to the broader community.

Those who look for the laws of nature as a support for their new worlds collaborate with the creator.

—Antoni Gaudi

Inspiration came from groundbreaking research by forest ecologists and scientists, who discovered that trees have a cooperative underground network connection that allows them to communicate and share resources with each other. The idea of cooperative connection led these teachers beyond the fields and forests of Acorn Waldorf School into the cities of Kingston and New Paltz, NY. It was nature's intelligence, modeled by forests working as social, cooperative beings, that inspired them to reach beyond the borders of AWS and develop the Neighboring Tree Project (NTP).

NTP is a grant-funded initiative of Acorn Waldorf School that develops partnerships with local early childhood educators, schools, and centers who are interested in adding a nature-based learning element to their programs. Through these mutually beneficial partnerships, early childhood teachers from AWS come to know teachers in their neighboring schools, have opportunities to learn from educators working outside of Waldorf education, and create a social community of colleagues who are united in the belief that bringing young children into forests and meadows is a fundamental human right. By branching beyond the borders of Acorn Waldorf School, NTP creates socially symbiotic relationships with educators in the public sector.



Children in the forest. Photo courtesy of Lisa Miccio.

Within a threefold order of the social organism, human beings will find it possible to work together in such a way that out of this cooperation, they shall create what cannot be brought about by any programmatic theory.

—Rudolf Steiner

In addition to NTP's cooperative connections with neighboring schools and centers, NTP has collaborated with Trust for Learning (TFL) and its Round Table members representing Waldorf education. Together they have explored questions on how Waldorf education can broaden its curriculum, be more inclusive, include more multicultural content, and most importantly, align with other educational movements that are also striving on behalf of all children.

The work of NTP represents a broader social gesture. Rather than asking how to get more children into our Waldorf schools, there is outreach into other communities to bring something to them. Waldorf education was not meant to be an exclusive education limited to only those children enrolled in independent schools. It was meant to foster social renewal by cultivating human capacities in service to the individual and society. Perhaps instead of asking how we can get people to come in, we might instead

begin asking how we can go out to meet others and form respectful relationships, offering what might be truly helpful.

NTP is demonstrating how Waldorf teachers can collaborate with non-Waldorf teachers, schools, and centers. At its core, NTP's goal is to help teachers and administrators bring their students into the forests, parks, and fields near their schools. They do this by offering their neighboring colleagues:

- Identification of natural spaces for play, design of outdoor classrooms, and site-specific equipment
- Faculty professional development training and workshops
- Guided observation visits to Acorn Waldorf School's forest classes
- Onsite mentoring for faculty
- On-site lesson demonstrations in the forest classrooms including nature-based crafts, circle time, story time, and puppetry
- Outdoor clothing and gear for all students and teachers, including rain suits, rain boots, winter snow suits, snow boots, and waterproof mittens

As they enter the program's fourth year, the NTP team has learned that achieving their unique goals requires new perspectives, habit changes, and actionable steps



Gathering of the Neighboring Tree Project. Photo courtesy of Lisa Miccio.

to get to where they want to be. NTP mentors are new to working with public school Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers, and with administrators/principles within elementary schools who may or may not have backgrounds in early childhood development. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that NTP partnering teachers and NTP mentors are often coming into relationships from very different places. They begin by exploring these discrepancies and acknowledging that there are vast differences in their approaches, including the values placed on play versus academics, the roles of the teachers, and the notion of concepts such as safety, fun, nature, and childhood. NTP mentors meet weekly with one another for professional development so that they can share their challenges, dig into their biases, transform their antipathies, and learn from one another. They courageously “embrace self-development as an essential part of their professional and personal life” while finding new ways to show up for their partners, and build the necessary bridges for healthy, mutually supportive collaboration (Gambardella, 2007, p 3). In addition, they carve out

intentional time for regularly scheduled conversations with their mentees to ensure that their mentees feel supported, heard, valued, and understood.

We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. In this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of critical mass. It's always about critical connections.

—Grace Lee Boggs

NTP mentors begin relationships with new partners by inviting them into an opportunity to experience or “perceive” a forest nursery or kindergarten in real time. New partners visit Acorn Waldorf School and sift through what they can or cannot implement and adapt to their public programs to incorporate a forest learning component. It is essential that the public school partners experience a sense of ownership and professional agency regarding their individual journey of becoming forest early childhood educators. An example of this process is described by an NTP partner from Meagher Pre-school:

Adding a nature-based component to our Pre-K Program at Meagher has brought so many positive experiences to not only my student's lives, but also mine. I feel like it is the piece of early childhood education that I didn't know I was missing. Now, it is hard to picture our program without it.

Seeing my students truly engrossed in the outdoors, getting "lost" in their play, learning through all of their senses, exploring through all seasons/weather, and taking risks is a special thing to witness. My personal relationship with nature has always been strong, but nature-based programming has shown me how to enjoy that love for nature alongside my students.

When we first started going out into the Forest, I had many worries [but] my mentors guided me and made me feel confident with my students in a non-traditional teaching setting.

I have learned many things from our partnerships and mentors. However, my biggest takeaway has been learning about the value in uninterrupted play and exploration. I have witnessed my students become more resilient, confident, creative, and physically stronger individuals. There is a peacefulness and hum of play that exists out in our forest that is difficult to recreate in the classroom. It is an amazing place to be, and I am so grateful that our school is able to provide this essential piece of childhood to our students

(Schneider, personal communication, 2023).

At the heart of the NTP mentorship program is a deep commitment to nurture trusting, authentic, long-term relationships with their neighboring public school and center mentees. To allow time for this, NTP mentors consciously balance the standard practice of giving and receiving of professional advice, critical feedback, and instruction, with the curiosity, genuine interest, and warmth of a friendly embrace. NTP mentors strive to practice "acceptance without judgment" and sensitivity to new forest teachers' budding questions (Koteen-Soulé, p. 6, 2014). Through this mindful balance, deep, socially symbiotic relationships, like those in a forest of neighboring trees, begin to develop.

In what ways [can] Steiner education...benefit from these discourses and build on them in order to create anti-oppressive, decolonizing approaches?

—Neil Boland and Joaquin Munuz

As recently reported by the Trust for Learning, "we stand at a critical moment to advocate for equitable access to nature-based early childhood education initiatives in service of all children and communities" (Beaven, Floyd, & Turner, 2023, p. 4). The Neighboring Tree Project is responding to these calls for action by pushing beyond the boundaries of their Acorn Waldorf School campus, breaking down insulating and isolating barriers of thought that have separated them from their neighboring public school and childcare center colleagues, and moving beyond their comfort zones as educators to policy making influencers who are actively "adapting to changed circumstances and changed times" (ibid., p. 4).

Representing just one example of how Waldorf educators can engage in new approaches to social justice and outreach endeavors, NTP operates similarly to a Waldorf school committee. According to Motria Shuhan: "The mission of NTP is possible because the work being done and the relationships NTP mentors have formed are valued as integral elements to Acorn Waldorf School's identity." AWS leadership supports the flexibility that NTP mentors need to schedule afternoon visits to their mentees, and by opening its campus to neighboring NTP partners, Acorn Waldorf School has become a welcoming place where they can explore nature-based education resources, test and develop nature-based models, nurture new ideas, and observe first-hand demonstrations of forest classroom practices.

This is the BEST day ever!

—JFK Kindergarten student

A NTP public school teacher smiles up at a beaming student who has just climbed a steep hill. "I did it myself!" he shouts. She notes another group of students shouting "Building, building. That is what beavers do best." The group of busy beavers has amassed an impressive dome-shaped lodge, made from a collection of twigs, bark, and broken branches. A small child quietly crouches at the base of a nearby, tall tree, and whispers, "I'm going to be the coyote who spots the beavers! Shhh....don't tell them I'm here. I want to surprise them!" Reenacting and reciting lines

from Henry Cole's book *Building* demonstrates her students' emerging literacy skills, comprehension, and capacities for sequencing, and she makes a mental note of her observation. Then she leans over to her NTP mentor to share: "The literacy talk is great, but I have seen children who didn't socialize now opening up in the forest and playing, and even sharing, with others. That, and their growing confidence in moving their bodies, is what I find most rewarding."

Soon after, the teacher plays a merry tune on a recorder, signaling that it's time to return to school. The little fox has emerged from behind the tree to take hold of the visiting mentor's hand and to tell her: "This was the best day ever." Joanna Dorman, who is both an NTP mentor and an AWS nursery teacher, smiles tenderly as she continues down the mountain to where her car is parked. She feels a deep sense of gratitude and joy, as one often experiences when observing the mysterious and marvelous, and thinks, "Someone says that every time we visit the forest!" ♦

Lisa Miccio provides early childhood mentoring and professional development to educators after a long career as kindergarten teacher at Green Meadow and Garden City Waldorf schools. She is lead instructor of Sunbridge Institute's summer introductory EC course. Retired from classroom teaching, she now directs playgroups and family programs in Warwick, NY. This article arose from Lisa's role with Acorn Waldorf School as the Neighboring Tree Project Specialist. Her current project is to add Parent and Child classes to the programs in Warwick.

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“You are my other me”: Honoring and Learning from the Land

~ Aimee de Ney

Editor’s note: *This article shares prominent passages from a much longer original article, which has been edited with the goal of highlighting the deeply caring perspective the author carries toward the land. The article begins by describing the many ways the land has been misused and abused. The land has been unjustly taken from the Indigenous first stewards and protectors of the land for possession and profit to benefit a few. Peoples have been displaced, resources exploited for economic gain, care for the land ignored, and so on. The list is long and the consequences to climate, vitality of the earth, and repercussions in social life are serious and deeply concerning. The earth is suffering and human beings are suffering. Aimee states directly, “Our culture is harmful and in need of collective transformation. We are at a turning point in time, when the repercussions of colonial, racialized capitalism are making life untenable for the global majority, human and more-than-human—all of life—Land, waters, soil, fire, trees, plants, animals, fungi, rocks, and so on. We are all a part of Mother Earth.”*

The term “colonization” is used throughout the article. This word’s short definition is: the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people (usually by force) and appropriating their place or domain for one’s own use.

In the months leading up to the pandemic, we teachers had been asking what transformation the next hundred years of Waldorf education is calling for. Now is our chance to hear that call. Working with young children and families in Waldorf schools, we have the freedom and opportunity to meet what is coming to us from the future, as witnessed through our young children.

At a regional gathering of Waldorf early childhood teachers in February 2023, many teachers voiced concern over the development of the children and their challenges in terms of social relationships and participation in the curriculum, along with the stress parents are carrying. Positive news came, however,

from a handful of teachers who shared that their classes were healthier than ever before. These were classes that had moved outside at the start of the pandemic and continued as outdoor programs. Additionally, the adults were actively working to uphold the principles of DEI—Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice. Why has this seemed to make a difference?

The land has much to teach us about what it is to be human, what it is to be a living being in the living world. Colonization has separated us one from the other—races, ethnicities, genders, species, and so on. It has given access to the few and separated us from remembering that we are a part of the land. Our children know this and sense the pain of the land and its creatures and want to protect and heal the earth. There is suffering and injustice in all parts of life; there is no real shelter from this awareness. Healing can arise for all if we look around us and meet the needs of the land and the “other.” If we center the land and ourselves as a part of land, our children’s needs will be better met than by focusing on them to the exclusion of the land and all the “others” around us.

Practically speaking, what does this look like? It will look different, depending upon the land in which we live and the peoples (human and all beings) and stories that have lived there from time immemorial. A deeply land-based pedagogy is a trauma-informed pedagogy. None of us are free from the traumas of colonization, whether we fall on the side of the oppressed, the side of domination, or in the grey areas between. Being separated from the land, our ancestors, our humanity, and the truth of life is our collective trauma.

For years, I have been working to form a land-centered pedagogy. Through my research, I discovered Land Education, a framework being used primarily in Indigenous communities in Canada with the explicit goal of decolonization, which means the rematriation—“a return to a spiritual way of life with respect for Mother Earth”—of Indigenous lands to Indigenous peoples (Land Back). Since then, I have been working with three tenets: turning to the land

as first teacher, turning to Indigenous leadership, and dismantling settler colonialism.

I offer a few ideas to start working in this way of land-based culturally-relevant trauma-informed pedagogy, but please understand this work is not only external. It is also about critical self-reflection, questioning all we hold to be true, and actively listening to voices that have been silenced for far too long—human voices and the voices of more-than-human beings.

Turning to the land as first teacher—investing in reciprocal and loving relationships

- * Introduce yourself to the land out loud and often; be open to hearing what she has to say.
- * Ask permission from the land to be there and listen to the answer. Offer her gifts.
- * Practice reciprocity—make sure we are giving and receiving in equal measure (or giving more than receiving, considering our histories).
- * Get to know the names of the plants. Are they Indigenous, naturalized, or invasive? What are their gifts? Their stories? How do they change over the seasons? What can they teach us?

Turning to Indigenous leadership

- * Seek out opportunities to learn and participate with Indigenous communities, always remembering how colonizing actions have affected these communities, and act respectfully to not perpetuate colonization and cause further harm.
- * Learn the stories of the land, and practice proper protocol in telling these stories.
- * Only tell stories you have permission to tell (stories in public domain have been offered).
- * Check your sources and make sure they are authentic.
- * Before the telling, share which peoples this story belongs to.
- * Tell the lineage of who you learned the story from.
- * Do not profit from the telling (financially or with enrollment, status, etc.).
- * Check your intention: are you honoring the land and bringing the children into reciprocal relationship? Are there other motives? Be clear before telling these stories.

Dismantling settler colonialism

- * This includes the work of antiracism. Learn the truth of our collective and individual histories, no matter how unsettling and disturbing it may be.
- * If we are going to bring forth change and new culture, we must begin by telling the truth with ourselves and with our children. Experiment with age-appropriate truth telling.

Being out-of-doors with young children offers an opportunity to help them find right relation within the context of all of life. We meet the plants, birds, and fungus networks as friends and relatives who care for us as we care for them. We practice being guests in the homes of the plants and animals. We strive to do no harm thorough erosion and trampling, by staying on the paths. We practice listening and observing. We witness the transformation of our friends (plants and animals) throughout the seasons, learning their ways, gifts, and stories. We acknowledge the Indigenous peoples whose land we are on and understand that we are settlers who have a responsibility to the land and her peoples. This is a practice of finding ourselves and remembering who we are within the whole, learning to practice cultural humility.

Our children are our mirrors, and we all are reflections of our collective, dominant culture. But we are also the hope that the future holds. We can stand up and refuse to continue the way things have been and transform both individually and collectively. This is what our children are demanding of us.

This past June, I closed my little school to focus on this work of centering the land and remembering our interconnection more broadly. To honor the beauty of our school community, about 200 people attended our final circle time, the focal point of the celebration. We shared a familiar song with adjusted words to acknowledge new friends from the plant world—Cedar and Rose. We closed our school with a giant spiral dance, each of us beholding the other as we danced joyfully together, singing:

Make new friends and keep the old;

some are Cedar and others are Rose.

*A circle is round, it has no end,
that's how long I want to be your friend.*

Let us take an example from Rose and see the beauty and heart-medicine in the thorny difficulties before us. And may Cedar guide us with benevolent wisdom, generosity, and steadfastness as we navigate these times of change. Transformation is afoot. We can rise up and be part of the change that is required, hard as that change may be. Our children are counting on us, as is the land that grants us all life. ♦

Note on the title:

In Lak'esh there is a Mayan greeting that translates to "You are my other me" or "I am another yourself." It was perhaps made famous by Luis Valdez's 1972 poem.

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Aimee de Ney is a long-time Waldorf early childhood teacher committed to developing reciprocal and loving relationships with the land and her inhabitants and supporting others in doing the same. A puppeteer, storyteller, and student of the land, Aimee is a doctoral candidate whose research centers on developing pedagogy that prioritizes generating loving and healing relationships with the land, other, and self through decolonial Land education toward land (climate) and social justice. Aimee is currently serving as a regional representative to WECAN and on the WECAN I.D.E.A. committee.

Healing Presence

~ Janene Ping and Jane Swain

Once upon a time—or rather, now, in our time—there is a modern fairy tale, "The Tale of Sinhold," written by German poet Michael Bauer. It tells of a hero who wishes to free a King's daughter from the slumbering enchantment of a sorcerer. He has learned that no one can achieve this alone, nor in the company of human companions. He seeks a wise woman's counsel, but when he reaches the oasis in which she lives, he finds she has crossed the threshold of death. He puts her body to rest, then, realizing that her potted violet and animal companions will die if abandoned, he brings them on his journey.

This individual finally reaches the shrouded kingdom where the sorcerer's powers have taken hold. With courage and strength, he conquers the oppressor, but after many years of darkness, the enchanted daughter of the king has lost the will to live. It is only when the warmth and light of the sun touch her skin, the scent of the violet is smelled, and the song of the bird is heard, that she is able to awaken. Through her senses, the wisdom of the cosmos touches her soul. The truth of being incarnate reveals the numinous

presence that works through creation.

As we know in Waldorf education, a healthy child delights in the sense world, taking joy in play and movement. This is a powerful source of learning in the process of incarnation, a way to become embodied and develop capacities of body, soul, and spirit. But the further modern lifestyle and societal culture moves away from being present in real time and place on this earth, the more challenging it is for the young child to healthfully incarnate. In this post-Covid world, educators and parents are increasingly finding children's development to be significantly delayed compared to before the pandemic. There are many factors that contribute to this reality, the most tragic being the trauma of loss. Beyond this, however, we must examine how the increase of screen time is a continuing crisis within itself.

In the course "Healing Presence," taught at Sophia's Hearth this last summer, a group of Waldorf early childhood educators met to focus on the effects that screens have on early development. Stories of children in crisis were shared, as well as a commitment to

bringing healing through the ways in which we teach. Awakening to this crisis involves a freedom that is both a privilege and a responsibility, and it is extremely challenging work. Although every Waldorf school represented has Media/Technology guidelines or policies for their school community, few have found success in active follow-through with parents.

The young child is immersed in the lifestyle and values that live within each family. Parent education and commitment are essential, accompanied by inspiration and compassion. Our goal is not to judge, but rather to help parents find empowerment with clear discernment to understand the short- and long-term effects of screens on human development, ethical values, family life, and societal culture.

This discernment is developed when we widen our understanding of the phenomena of screens in our time. We understand the pragmatic ways that technology, as a tool, has helped humanity. Yet contemporary research continues to underline findings of the detrimental effects of screen technology. When used on a regular basis as entertainment or in social media throughout childhood, screens adversely influence attentional capacities, social intelligence, and physical and emotional health.

Research can be overwhelming. What is the most recent and relevant information? One of the activities of our course was to collectively read and evaluate the clarity and relevance of several books and articles on this subject. What is helpful to us as educators? What is accessible to parents?

Then there is the living research of our own work. Every child who compulsively spins out with aggressive movements and behaviors imitated from screen programming, every child who chants theme songs from commercials when the group is otherwise engaged in curricular activities, every child who is delayed in simple small and large motor coordination because these have not been actively developed through physical engagement in work and play, every child who has attention deficits that inhibit listening and other skill development...they are the students we long to help, and they are the students we can learn from.

As in the fairy tale at the beginning of this article, we cannot do this alone. We must work hand in hand with parents. Together we can break the spell of enchantment to free the child and let the wisdom of the cosmos nourish their development. In this area,

our work with parents also needs to be collegially shared. In the course, Sierra Humphreys, a student at Sophia's Hearth, presented her research on this subject. She had asked the parents of the children in her early childhood program to help her research the effects that screen programming had on the child's creative capacities for play. A large portion of the parent body was willing to turn off all screens surrounding children (including their own use, except in an emergency) for three weeks. Sierra was able to document significant change for the good within the children's behavior and play. Some families found this experiment so positive that they continued to uphold no or minimal screen time within their homes.

As we explore what it means to be human in a time when machines and artificial intelligence are increasingly taking over our human lives, we have stories to tell. Each story can be a conduit for our own awakening. The healing potential of story holds a poetry of soul that lives within every human. It is the poetry of what is, and of what still might be, filled with beauty and hope. It is moving to enter that vulnerable place in the heart where the transformation of darkness, such as fear and addiction, becomes a pathway to freedom.

Practically, the optimal intervention towards freedom is to stop the child's screen exposure. If this is not achieved, what may the teacher do to serve children who are adversely affected by repeated screen exposure?

Many teachers experience the same phenomena. The class is playing in the forest, where most of the children might be balancing on a log, building a fairy house, cooking up a mud pudding, constructing a house out of logs, breaking down a decaying tree stump, watching a bug, or simply feeling the sensations of sand, soil, and pine needles. Meanwhile, there are others who are seemingly oblivious that they are even in the forest. Instead, they are trapped inside a movie scene that they have previously watched. They may repetitively chant a phrase from a movie or make robot-like gestures or gestures of fighting, whacking, pointing, and cutting which they have absorbed from screen images. These children have difficulty engaging in play with their peers. In essence, they are under the enchantment of the movies that they have seen. How are we to break the spell? How may we make sense of these behaviors? One interpretation of the situation is that these children are displaying a profound lack of connection. They show a decrease of connection



Balancing. Photo courtesy of Janene Ping and Jane Swain.

with their own bodies, with other people, and with the world around them.

We can observe that these children are disconnected from their bodies by the awkward, stilted, tension-filled quality of their movements. When children with these types of gestures are observed, what stands out is that their movements are not peripherally oriented, i.e., they don't move in relationship to the environmental conditions around them. In healthy movement, the movement *originates* in the periphery. For example, when walking through the forest, the body is constantly making adjustments *in response* to the uneven terrain of the forest floor. Additionally, in healthy play, children *interact* with the raw materials of the forest. They may have an idea that they want to build a stick structure, for example, but the specific features of each stick influence how the child uses it in the structure.

This often isn't happening in the child who is preoccupied with images from a screen experience. Instead of being peripherally-oriented, these children's movements are often centrally-oriented—their movements originate in their heads. They are playing out the screen images that are stuck there. As a result, their movements are tight, and lack ease and fluidity. These children have difficulty being present and feeling comfortable in their bodies.

The four foundational senses (senses of touch, life or well-being, proprioception or self-movement, and balance), are the doorways through which the child may walk in order to achieve a comfort-filled connection to their bodies. Unfortunately, screen time emphasizes just visual and auditory input. When the child is partaking of the screen experience, they are being robbed of opportunities to develop their four foundational senses.

Exploration of these foundational senses supports these children. Course participants experienced many different balance activities, including specially designed Spacial Dynamics therapeutic interventions for balance. Many of the students commented that they experienced a profound feeling of grounded-ness from these experiences. Proprioceptive experiences with weight

and its impact on balance were also explored.

Important consideration was given to the child's experience of disconnect from other people and from their environment. In healthy interactions in the "real world" a person experiences two-directional movement—subtle incoming and outgoing gestures. In *The Renewal of Education*, Rudolf Steiner describes that when we listen to another person, we "fall asleep" in our experience of what the other person is saying. In contrast, our comprehension of what has been said is a kind of "waking up." Steiner explains: "Ultimately, our entire intercourse with the world rests on this faculty of being able to enter into an outer situation." In other words, the movements of healthy interactions happen via two-way streets. We go out into the world and have an experience, and the location of this experience is "out there" in the world. Then we come back to ourselves and register what just happened. There is a reciprocal ebbing and flowing gesture.

One of the most tragic things about screens is that they involve one-way streets, with everything coming in. There is not an outward gesture from the watcher. Indeed, if we observe children on screens, there is a certain hollow paleness that they may develop. Their pupils dilate and their bodies become still. We can sense a gesture of withdrawal, as if they are retreating back inside themselves, trying to avoid the assault of



Building. Photo courtesy of Janene Ping and Jane Swain.

the incoming images. Indeed, the child may appear as just a shell of themselves after watching a screen for an extended period.

How can the teacher help the child develop the needed two-way gesture of healthy encounter? One way is through classic children's activities that are specifically designed to enliven the rhythmical system, as the rhythmical system is the place in the body that was designed for connection. These include hand clapping games, twizzling yarn into cords, throwing and catching bean bags and balls, and even passing out bowls of soup. We also tossed felted balls onto long silk inclines, watched them roll down the incline, and caught them at the bottom. These movements are designed to facilitate the in-and-out gesture of the rhythmical system.

As the opening fairy tale implies, *connection* is needed to break the enchantment of the isolation and imprisonment of our times. We all long to connect with each other, but often we don't know how. We want to be able to discuss media policies with our colleagues and with our parents, but somehow it is so hard to move forward towards connection. In the course, we explored ways that movement with back-and-forth gestures can be used to help build connections with our colleagues and with the parents in our

communities. Movement is the universal connector!

Early childhood is the time in life when children are meant to explore and build connections to their own bodies, to other children and adults, and to their interests in the world. The long-term goal is for the children to develop a strong bodily instrument with which to find "their people," follow their calling, and connect with their life's work. The hope is that through children's development of these connections early in life, they may ultimately find the purpose, meaning, and fulfillment of their life's destiny. ♦

*A Kindergarten teacher at the Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School in upstate NY for over 30 years, **Janene Ping** is the founder of the Magical Puppet Tree Theater (1992–present) and president of the World Association of Puppetry and Storytelling Arts. She is a core faculty member at Sophia's Hearth Teacher Education Center in Keene, NH.*

***Jane Swain** is an associate director and core faculty member of the teacher education program at Sophia's Hearth in Keene, NH. She is a pediatric physical therapist and a level 4 graduate of the Spatial Dynamics Institute. Jane is currently writing a book on movement in the early years of life.*

For the Classroom

Harriet and the Stars

~ Leslie Wetzonis-Woolverton

Editor's Note: At the third WECAN 2023 February conference focusing upon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity, "Harriet and the Stars" was shared as a puppet play. This is the story of the enslaved woman, Harriet Tubman, who escaped to freedom and became the Underground Railroad hero who escorted about 300 other enslaved people to freedom. Leslie Wetzonis-Woolverton's work stands as a stunning moment of artistry and commitment to bring pictures of racial justice forward in a beautiful and sensitive way for children. Shared below are versions of the story for different presentations.

Harriet Reaches for the Stars

A puppet story for Parent/Child & Nursery

Once there was a little girl named Harriet.
She would play with the twinkling stars and night's golden chariots.
Harriet would talk to the trees, to all the animals tamed and wild,
Happy in this only free place to her as a young child.
Harriet jumped like frogs, she twirled and danced like bees,
And watched ladybugs and butterflies sail by so openly free.
There in the fields tall corn, vast crops would grow.
As she, her sisters, mama and papa carefully placed seeds in ordered rows.
Days were long, weeks, months, and years.
Her courage and strength grew and lessened her fears.
Always, Harriet at night would reach up high above,
Wanting to catch distant dreaming stars so full of love.
"I will pull a star down right from the sky,"
Harriet said to herself as they sailed freely by.
She jumped and jumped, and caught her star golden and tall,
Upon her gallant horse leaping over a great freedom wall.
She reached and reached, reaching up with determined pride.
Those long days, Harriet dreamed of catching stars, always close by.
There in the night sky the stars would never fail.
For Harriet and all, the stars could soar and sail.
Harriet would not give up, for one day she knew
This dream of hers would find a way to blossom through.
During each and every season, she watched the wings of birds in flight.
Freedom! Those stars one day would guide her safely by foot in the night.

Harriet and the Stars: Her Journey Toward Seeking Freedom

A story for Kindergarten and older children

A long time ago, on a land not too far from the Chesapeake Bay, a little girl named Harriet arrived on the shores with her mama, papa, and sisters. Harriet was named Araminta at birth, often called Minty for short by her parents. Just like so many others, Minty's name would be changed to Harriet when she arrived in this brand new land. Harriet suited Minty fine as she grew into womanhood. Yet still, her given name would always stay close in her heart and not be forgotten. Harriet would seek peace, love, and joy in the vast surrounding lands and waters of the Maryland Eastern Shore. For this was made her home.

This new land and new home was not easy. Harriet had to learn to navigate an expected code in this new life. She did not always understand needing to be told harshly throughout the day what to do. On Sundays, her father would teach her much about the land, teaching her bird calls, how to name the many animals and their habits through days of her watchful imitative eyes. He traveled ten miles by foot for his weekly visit to his family. He lived on a different farm and distance never kept him from those he loved.

Her mother, every day, would teach her the old ways of nature medicine, herbs from the lands, and homemaking. Harriet loved mending the clothes of her family and quilting best, an art that would again be of importance later in her life. Harriet learned very early on how stories in stitching could be told to and shared with all. Harriet would also find solace, love, and joy from all the animals she cared for, from wild ones on the edge of the woods, and the busyness of bees & butterflies that always danced and played alongside her as she worked.

After long days under sun, snow, and rain filled skies the land which was becoming so familiar was now indeed her home. At nighttime, alongside her beloved sisters, Harriet would listen and discover peace in her dreams. She would listen as long as she possibly could before falling off to sleep, to the private soft chuckles and open laughter from parents, "aunts" and "uncles" in the waning hours of a darkened night so close together. In the soft and hard nights, most would be free in these shared private moments together.

For during the day, the adults and parents could not laugh together openly, daytime was ever so serious.

They would wipe their moistened brows with faded bits of cloth fragments in silence under the hot sun and place hands upon their weary and arched backs through every season. Harriet worked and understood her tasks with the land, working often in song with the many others and her family. Singing would be allowed, and if she closed her eyes she would recognize the comfort she felt often at night. If questions came to her during the day, her sisters would shush her with a finger to their lips or whisper *We'll talk later—Harriet, keep your mind to your work.* They were followed with stern and watchful eyes.

Harriet would look up to the vast night sky and twinkling stars with wonder, gratitude, and hope. She would dream... Reaching up to the stars and out to hold the hands of her sisters, Harriet would let go of the day's hard work. In autumn, Harriet would listen to the crackling of leaves as they fluttered in the wind and danced into the distance. In winter, Harriet would seek the whistling crisp sounds of ice on glass panes of the larger house, and the crunching underfoot of snow as she with others walked home. In spring, Harriet would splash her feet alongside the many newly emerged waterways along the Chesapeake, jumping in the air like the frogs that splashed heavily back into ponds.

In summer, Harriet would play with the sparkling lightning bugs fluttering into the lost light of night and landing everywhere. Harriet realized she could have silent conversations with all of nature around her. She would greet and name the trees daily, often with a bow or curtsy, walking towards the neat row of crops. Of the tiny insects that landed on her hands, arms and shoulders through all seasons during the day, Harriet would welcome them with careful, soft, open laughter, but careful in this small joy not to be seen. She admired their dizzying journeys and how freely they flew from flower to tree to flower again and again. And at night the stars would return and shine freely to brighten the night sky.

Additional text for older children

And as time moved forward many, many years later, Harriet would grow steadily into the age of her own mother. In the future days of her risk-filled pilgrimage, the stars would navigate her and those she brought along to safety. Harriet would begin to recognize friend from foe by the many sounds at night beneath the guiding stars. These moments full of great need

and courage would lead her towards her destiny and calling. Unbeknownst to Harriet as a little girl, this brave task would be called upon again and often well into late adulthood.

Harriet would continue her life seeking guidance from all beings, from every thing she loved. This wisdom acknowledged and gained from the land and all nature would become Harriet's great teacher. And Harriet would listen for the simplest message offered by the wild Cambridge woods full of thick needled pine trees, dense crab grasses, coarse brush, and hollowed fallen logs. Harriet would seek change in the wild freedom all around her. She would not give up.

The little girl, now a petite sized woman, would forever seek solace and safety from the stars at night, which would time and time again lead her way and the way of so many others following behind. Silent echoes would assist Harriet at every turn. And the seen and unseen of so many always remain close to her side.

Harriet, a brave little girl, and a strong, great woman, made the way forward. She would free at least three hundred lives. We, too, can listen to our earth and reach up to the stars. We can be brave in all things known and unknown. We can be bold when our hearts call out for change. ♦

Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton is currently a WECAN I.D.E.A Coordinator, member of the WECAN Research Group and is the co-founder of WIDEN Arts. Leslie taught Waldorf Parent/Child and Nursery classes at Acorn Hill in Silver Spring, MD. She is core faculty for Sound Circle Center for Arts & Anthroposophy, and also guest faculty at other institutes, and acts as mentor to new teachers. Leslie presented *Harriet and the Stars* at the 2023 WECAN Early Childhood Conference where she was also a keynote speaker.

The Healing Power of Shelter Stories for Our Times

~ Suzanne Down

When a young child listens to a story well told, full of warmth and wonder in the storyteller's voice and heart, something quite amazing happens. The child is taken on wings of imagination to the landscape of the story, where archetypal characters are encountered, and where both great challenges are found and resolutions can be experienced through grace and care. The child is carried to a world where the essential good resides, and receives an experience akin to the loving embrace of the "Mother." This is the power of a meaningful story, and even more so when it is a shelter story.

For a young child, the story image of a little house where a character can find refuge in a cozy, warm, sturdy, place makes the child feel safe within their own "little house," their physical body.

Our body gives us a boundary to the outer world, and is our metaphoric life shelter. In story, when we come upon a little hut in the woods, a cottage, even a hollow tree, there is resonance with the holiness of our own body. These images are always of significance in purposeful stories.

When a child hears this kind of story or views the imagination in puppet play form, they feel as though sheaths of Goodness surround them too. They also nestle in a story's hollow stump, old grandfather's boot, deep in the tulip's well, within the upside-down wheelbarrow. You may find yourselves thinking of other "shelters" as you read this, and what character may find a peaceful home there. Perhaps it is a ladybug inside a lost thimble, a spider in the welcoming knot of the wood ceiling, a mouse in the pocket of a harvest apron. As you walk in a woodland or meadow, you will notice these shelters everywhere, in the curved root of a tree, in holes made by woodpeckers, tiny caves in rock piles, under a willow's branches. Gently allow your stories to arise, for they are everywhere and within you as well!

In our world today, when a child experiences a trauma, such as the displacement of children from the Ukraine, or gun violence in a school, or high stress of the adults in their lives, what can we as educators and parents do? One of the first things is to provide them with a safe shelter; we tend to their physical safety. A

story can also be a valuable source of healing for them.

Consider the story picture of cold winds and snow blowing and a little, shivering bunny character searching for a place to keep warm. It sees up ahead a hollow log which can provide a place to get out of the cold winds and snow. When Bunny decides to make this her winter home, she is solving her first need, physical safety... a shelter. Perhaps then, she gathers leaves and moss to make it warmer, to add comfort, to make a cozy nest to sleep in. Then as the snow and wind settle down, a full moon rises in the sky and shines down a warm light. In a while another bunny comes along and asks if he can shelter there too. Yes, a friend as soul comfort!

You see how the story pictures can grow, layer by layer, and will support the listening child's sense of well-being. Below is an example of a Shelter Story. Look for five images that bring added grace in this tale. Can you think of five more new images that could be added? (Note that this is a spring story imagination to tuck away for nest-building time.)

The Tale of Niddle, Noodle, and Noddle

Down in the green meadow where the wildflowers bloom golden, red, and white, deer came often to drink from the bubbling stream. Three friends were busy working there, filling baskets with soft summer grasses. Niddle, Noodle, and Noddle were three industrious little fairies of the grasslands.

They were known far and wide as the fairy weavers, for they helped all the birds weave their nests. They sang as they worked:

Our nests are sturdy and strong

Woven from grasses so long,

We weave together in and out,

Round and around and all about,

Soft and warm for birdies so new,

Keeping them dry from rain and dew.

Every morning they rose early and gathered the greenest grasses that bent easily for their weaving. Every evening, when no one was looking they patched up the nests that were not strong enough or were too hard for the baby birds.

All went well for a long time, but one year the rains never came and the land was dry and brittle.

The winds blew hard and a fire spread through the grasses. The deer ran away into the forest, and the stream dried up.

Niddle, Noodle, and Noddle did not know what to do. Their baskets were empty and they had to seek far from the meadow to find supplies for nest building. They journeyed across the meadow, through the forest, and beyond the damage of the fire. After a time, they found a sheep farm where long ropes of colorful wool hung on a clothesline. The farmer's wife was a weaver. She sheared the sheep, dyed the wool and hung it up to dry in long woolly ropes.

The fairy weavers were not often seen by human kind. They tiptoed into the farm yard and touched the wool. It was long like grasses, and much softer and warm. "This would be perfect for our nest building," they shouted with joy!

They had an idea of what to do and set to work. That night when the farmer and his wife went to bed, the three fairies went to her weaver's loom and, *lickity split*, finished the blanket she was weaving. Three fairy weavers are much faster than one human! Then they took some wool in exchange to use in their nest making.

In the morning when the farmer's wife went to work on her weaving, she saw to her surprise that the blanket was finished and with the finest, tightest weaving she had ever seen.

"Hmmm," she thought to herself, "only the fairy weavers can weave so perfectly! How can this be?"

She went outside to check on her colorful wool lengths and saw some of it was missing. "I will hide in my weavery and stay up tonight and see what happens." She started weaving another blanket on her loom. When night came she hid and waited.

It was quiet for a long time, but all at once the three little fairy weavers, Niddle, Noodle, and Noddle hopped and skipped into the room and set to work. Never before had she seen such fast weaving. Back and forth the shuttle went, the fairy hands so nimble and quick. The blanket was finished in no time with even, neat, and strong rows!

Out the fairies went to gather more nest making supplies from the hanging colorful wool. Then in the blink of an eye, hop and skip, the fairies were gone.

This happened every night until the grasses grew tall and strong again.

The farmer's wife grew rich from selling the finest blankets. One morning when the wife went to check on her weaving, she found a beautiful bird's nest woven

from her wool. It was every color of the rainbow and so soft and warm. Mixed with it were feathers and mosses and twigs. It was beautiful.

The farmer's wife now understood why the fairy weavers needed her wool. She never saw Niddle, Noodle, and Noddle ever again. She placed the wooly nest in the tree outside her weavery where she could see it. A robin found it and laid her eggs in it. What happy, warm and safe baby birds grew up there each and every year. The farmer's wife often left seeds out for the robins to eat, and made sure there was fresh water nearby to drink. She loved to listen to the happy song of Mama Robin, and the sweet sounds of baby birds.

As for Niddle, Noodle, and Noddle, they were content in their meadow that was again lush with grasses, where deer came to drink from the bubbling stream. Listen, you can hear them sing as they work...

Our nests are sturdy and strong

Woven from grasses so long,

We weave together in and out,

Round and around and all about,

Soft and warm for birdies so new,

Keeping them dry from rain and dew. ♦

Suzanne Down is founder and longtime director of Juniper Tree School of Story and Puppetry Arts, which offers classes for writing shelter stories with images of safe spaces for story characters, along with other training and mentoring opportunities. Visit her website at junipertreepuppets.com.

The Story of the Shepherd Boy

~ Lisa Miccio

Editor's Note: *This story was written for a little boy on the autism spectrum in Lisa Miccio's kindergarten class. This therapeutic protection story was presented as a puppet story to introduce a shepherd's tent that was hung up in the classroom. Appropriate songs can be added at various points in the story.*

Once upon a time there was a little boy who lived with his father and brother. They lived in a valley at the bottom of a tall mountain. Fir and spruce trees grew in the forest atop the mountain. The trees grew close together and formed a dense canopy of branches. Little sunlight shined through the canopy or made it down to the forest floor. Animals roamed the woods, and owl, raccoon, and a pack of wolves made their home in the forest.

Down in the valley the sun shined brightly, and even when the rain fell from the sky, the boy's father and brother would venture to their fields and meadows to tend to their sheep. The summer days were long, and as the boy played with the lambs, he dreamed of becoming a shepherd like his father and brother. He wanted to help them protect and guard the sheep.

Summer's sun soon began to fade, and the days grew short. Frost returned to the valley. As the boy was tucked into bed in the evening, he could hear the mountain wolves singing songs to the autumn moon, and he was glad that his father was keeping watch over the little lambs. He knew that they would be safe from all harm.

One night the boy awoke suddenly. He heard voices outside his window and when he peered out into the moonlit evening, he could see snow blanketing the fields and meadows of the valley. His father and brother were herding the sheep into the shelter of the barn.

The boy quickly jumped from bed and hurried to the kitchen door. He pulled on his warm wool coat, his boots, and hat, and hurried outside to where his father stood counting the sheep. A sheep and lamb were missing, and as his father turned to go back to the fields to find them, the boy tugged on father's sleeve, and shyly asked him if he could help him find the lost lamb.

"A storm is coming, and it's hard to see in the dark. I can't worry about you getting lost while I look for the sheep and her lamb," his father replied. His brother



Leslie Burchell-Fox with the Shepherd Boy table puppet play.

was busy herding sheep into the barn. Certainly, father could use help finding the ewe and her lost lamb. So, the boy looked up at his father with quiet longing and determination until his father gazed down at him and said, “Tonight, you become a shepherd.” Then together they went in search of the missing sheep.

Before long, the boy heard the bleating of the little lamb. He found it behind brambles growing at the edge of the meadow, but there was no sign of the ewe. Thick snowflakes were falling faster and heavier than before, so father took the shepherd’s tent from his pack and put it up near the brambles. The boy had never been allowed inside the tent because it was not a place to frolic and play. Only the shepherds used it. Sometimes to sit quietly after a mid-day meal or to rest at night when watching over the sheep.

“You must stay here in the shelter of the tent and protect the little lamb, while I continue to search for its mother. I will return as soon as I find her,” father said to him. Gently holding the lamb in his arms, the boy entered the shepherd’s tent and closed the flap. It was cozy and quiet inside the tent. As he gently stroked and comforted the little lamb, he felt safe and warm. Father, he knew, would be back soon.

Then sure enough, just as the boy was drifting off to sleep, father opened the flap of the tent. The snow had stopped altogether. Sunlight glowed pink and gold in the morning sky as the shepherd boy and his father returned home with the sheep and her lamb following safely behind them. ♦

Helping Gestures in Play and in Rest

The following are responses from teachers to the question—“What have you found that helps to reassure the children and to find their emotional and social balance?”

Fort Building—

One of the things we have seen children do to express their need and longing for security is building forts. At our Tree of Life Nature Playschool in Victoria, BC, this is something that we used to see just in the winter months. But this past school year it has been seen almost daily.

To support this activity, we brought in lots of boxes to add to the blankets, and every day forts of all types were built.

We have seen mainstream articles about fort building and its therapeutic, comforting reassurance to children. Here is one from the Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/05/18/why-kids-love-building-forts-why-experts-say-they-might-need-them-more-than-ever/>

Shared by Kate Lawes, Director of Tree of Life Nature Playschool, Vancouver, BC, Canada

I work and live as an uninvited occupier on the lands of the Lekwungen peoples, of the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. I endeavor in my work and life to minimize the harm perpetuated by my presence on this land and stand in solidarity with the sovereignty and resurgence of Indigenous peoples.

Quiet Outbreath in Nature—

One gift from the pandemic with my class has been the amount of time we spend outdoors.

The inspiration has come at rest time: if the ground was dry enough, we distributed children's plastic covered cushions within our wooded playground, a fair distance from each other ideally by a tree or stump. The children sat or lay upon their cushions for a long enough time to really breathe out. Some played with twigs and leaves, some hummed, some tried to get their neighbor's attention, but all of them, including the teachers, had time to feel the wind, watch the birds, see the clouds drift by, some little critter climbing on a blade of grass, see the seasons change. This was a very restorative and healing daily moment.

Shared by Marianne Bockli, EC Director, Ashwood Waldorf School, Rockport, ME

Old Gnome's Candlemas Circle

～ Diane Van Dommelen

Editor's Note: *This circle is shared by Diane Van Dommelen from Anchorage, Alaska, where she has taught at the Anchorage Waldorf School and has now had a small Waldorf home program for the last six years. The images of snow, dim light, candles, and the rising of the sun are appropriate images to encourage and reassure. Happy Jack Rabbit and foxy Sprite are surprised to find the candle in the snow, blue and still burning bright. Diane explains that she and the children had been practicing their "blowing" gestures, as well as learning when it is appropriate to blow the candle out in class, so it held some pedagogical guidance as well.*

Author's Note: *I love this story by Suzanne Down, and have performed it as a puppet play in my preschool. Last year I was inspired to adapt it to a movement circle. I emphasized its Candlemas motifs, and added a little extra love because it was also Valentine season!*

Introduction, while sitting:

One dark and misty morning in winter, Old Gnome was out early walking along a hilly path near the open meadow. He was still sleepy and a little grumpy, for he had been up all night...

While rocking back and forth and tapping fists:

Hacking and cracking the rocks and the stones deep in the earth.

While standing:

Old Gnome was tired.

Old Gnome was grumpy.

A frown was on his face.

His feet went thump, thump, thumpy.

Singing freely in mood-of-the-fifth, and walking heavily in rhythm:

Grumpity Grump, Grumpity Grump

Along the path and over the stump (jump "over")

Repeat several times around the circle.

Because it still was dark as night,

He carried a candle, blue and bright.

Singing, and walking:

See the little candle,

Burning, burning bright.

Oh, how I love

To see its light! (Repeat)

Suddenly, the misty air changed and started to turn a golden rose. The sun was beginning to rise.

Old Gnome sang (with gestures, carefully "holding" candle):

Morning has come.

Night is away.

I'll rise with the sun,

And welcome the day.

He carefully put down his candle into the snow and stretched his arms up, up to the sky; then wide, wide to the earth. He even did a few jumping jacks because he was so happy to see the sun!

"I must go and wake my dear wife so she can see this beautiful sight!"

Off he ran.

On the other side of the hill, Happy Jack had just finished his breakfast and went skipping outside looking for an adventure.

Singing and skipping:

The lovely sun is rising,
Up in the sky above.
Good morning, happy morning!
Come fill my heart with love!

Happy Jack met his foxy friend Sprite on his way up the hill. Sprite came trit-trotting along, swishing his bushy tail behind him.

Singing, while trotting and swishing:

Trit-Trit-Trot, Swish, Swish, Swish!
Trit-Trit-Trot, Swish, Swish, Swish!

Just then, Jack saw a candle, blue and bright, shining in the snow.
“I wonder how this came to be here? Let’s have some fun!”

Jack, be nimble!
Jack, be quick!
Jack, jump over
The candlestick!

Repeat, with Sprite, taking several turns, jumping back and forth.

Before they continued on their way, each closed their eyes and made a wish, then blew the candle, blue and bright, out.

The last of the colors still streamed across the sky when Old Gnome and his dear wife came to the meadow. They stood and watched for a long time, breathing in all that beautiful, shining light.

Silent “Halleluiaah” eurythmy-like gestures

After a big, happy breath, Old Gnome’s dear wife turned to him, and said:

“Thank you, dear Old Gnome, for bringing me to the meadow this fine morning to see the sun rise. I love you so!”
“I love you, too, my dear! Let’s go home and have pancakes for breakfast!”

And they skipped off together, singing:

Skidamaring-a-dink-a-dink, Skidamarink-a-doo!
I love you!
Skidamarink-a-dink-a dink, Skidamarink-a-doo!
I love you!
I love you in the morning, and in the afternoon!
I love you in the evening, underneath the moon!
Oh, Skidamarink-a-dink-a dink, Skidamarink-a-doo!
I love you! ♦

Diane Van Dommelen has been involved in Waldorf education since 1992. She began teaching at the Anchorage Waldorf School in 1994. She has also loved teaching handwork, mentoring, and homeschooling in the Waldorf tradition. Since 2017, she has been the grateful teacher of the Pussywillow Pre-school, her Waldorf-inspired home program in Anchorage, AK.

Shelter from the Rain Circle

Adapted from a Russian Folktale by Holly Koteen-Soulé

Editor's Note: *Images of shelter, safety, and generosity among small, vulnerable creatures bring reassurance and pictures of protection. This circle, with delightful rhymes, can be company to the familiar tale of "The Mitten."*

There was an ant caught in the rain.
"Where can I hide?" he wondered in vain.
He saw a mushroom peeking out,
Crawled beneath and looked about.

Song:

Rain on the green grass and
Rain on the tree
Rain on the roof top,
But not, not on me.

(Spoken) Thank you friend!

A dripping butterfly fell down,
Wings so wet, she'd almost drowned.
"My wings are wet, I cannot fly."
"Come in," said the ant, "Here you can dry."

Repeat song

A mouse ran up all drenched to the bone,
"Please let me in, I'm far from home."
They huddled together, made room for the mouse,
While the rain still fell on their mushroom house.

A sparrow flew down to the forest floor,
Feathers soaked and wings so sore.
"I need to rest 'til the rain has stopped."
"I'm battered from head to top."

Repeat song

A rabbit hopped by and cried,
"Is there a place for me to hide?"
"The quick-footed fox is chasing me."
They brought him in, his shelter to be.

The rabbit hidden, the old fox sighed,
"Have you seen a rabbit nearby?"
"You silly fox," said the friends all four,
"We've hardly room for us any more!"

Then the clouds went away
And the sun shone bright.
Each little creature came
Out into the light.

Rabbit hopped into the glen.
Sparrow flew to her nest again.
Mouse ran off and did not stop.
Butterfly lit on a flower top.

The little ant wondered as he crawled away,
Why there was so much room to stay.
A nearby Frog croaked, "You know,"
"When it rains, mushrooms grow."

What the frog said was surely true,
And something else was also true:
In that mushroom house, ant knew
Hearts were growing bigger, too! ♦

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 Schools in Seattle. She is a member of the Pedagogical Section Council and a WECAN board member.

Please, Can We Play Games?

~ Ruth Ker

While there are many games that have a healing influence on the young child because of their content, the very act of playing these games, the exchange of joyful interactions, is also healing in itself. Pretty much any game that a teacher loves and brings with joy and goodwill will have pedagogically healing qualities for the individual child and the group. Social games are an opportunity to be in meaningful relationship with children. Something magical happens in an early childhood program when the educator, who has the interest and discipleship of the children, dons the cloak of playful lightheartedness during group times. Playing games with the children during these times can provide closeness and safety, demonstrate socially-appropriate ways of being, strengthen a sense of justice and provide examples of self-regulation. And, perhaps most important, these games help children to build relationship with one another as well as reconnect to their own sense of “rightful activity.” Playing games in a safe environment can also help remedy stress-oriented behaviors like shutting down, numbing out, the inability to share and the fear of losing control. The caregiver can support the child to begin to trust that the “way of the game” is consistent, predictable and can be known in this environment where “the educator” holds the space for a safe place to practice.

Engaging in meaningful play through games can also contribute to the child’s capacity to self-regulate, to practice opportunities to sometimes be in control, and to trust that interacting with others in playful ways can be safe and fulfilling. For children who are having difficulty playing with others, these games can be strongly motivational to help them be more flexible and spontaneous, relax their containment and/or fear of interacting and make new strides in their willingness to enter free play.

We know that young children tend to explore and relate to their world through play. However, childhood trauma can cause children to numb out, shut down, and develop adaptive behaviour that separates them from others. When children engage in group games that are carefully led by a trusted adult exhibiting joyful, playful energy, a kindred resonance can begin to happen. An unspoken language begins to develop

between the adult and the playing children in the group. This can be a valuable asset while the child is building the courage and stamina to enter the everyday play with others. Skills can be built in this safe harbor—a place where trust, interest, joy, justice and the possibility of discipleship develop within a container of healthy examples.

Although these suggestions are by no means a complete list, here are some of my favourite healing games to play. Games referred to can be found in the book *Please, Can We Play Games? Joyful Interactions with Young Children* (WECAN, 2018).

- (1) In games about animals, introducing ways an animal can self-soothe can provide a way for the children to calm themselves down and therefore set a calmer tone for the group game. Perhaps a pony is nervous about getting new shoes. “Let’s stroke the pony gently. He likes to be softly touched on his legs and his belly. My pony likes to be rubbed right here. Where does your pony want to be touched?” A little later, the children can stroke each other gently.

Pitter, patter polt
Shoe a little colt
Here a nail, there a nail
Pitter, patter polt

- (2) Games that emphasize taking turns, so that everyone is included, and giving others a chance, like “Here’s a Pretty Branch so Gay” or “Oats, Peas, Beans and Barley Grow.”
- (3) We can play our way into impulse control: “I’m pretty sure the animals come right back to the barn when the farmer calls them...” leads into “We Have Some Little Ponies.” Or we may say “The birds want to come back to the nest, I’m sure they don’t fly up into the castle,” along with playing “My Pigeon House.”
- (4) Sensory Games can be tremendously helpful in de-sensitizing sensory issues, especially if repeated over time, and if the child is given the freedom to enter at their own pace. Much is gained by these children when the activity is slowed down and they can sense into it as it is administered to

others. Helpful games include “The Sandwich,” “All Around the Sandwich Shop,” “Rockabye Baby,” and “Caterpillar Roll,” and one of my favourites, “Little Brown Bulb.”

These are just a few of the healing games that I have had the pleasure to play with the children in my care. My relationship with children and their relationships with each other transforms in the alchemy of these joyful interactions. Including games in our early childhood programming is definitely one way we can create healing environments in our classrooms. ♦

Ruth Ker is now retired as an early childhood educator of over forty years service, and now serves as the Early Childhood Program Director of West Coast Institute, is a WECAN board member and membership coordinator for the WECAN Teacher Education Committee. She edited the WECAN books *You’re Not the Boss of Me*, *From Kindergarten into the Grades*, and *Please, Can we Play Games?*

What Scoot Does in Wintertime

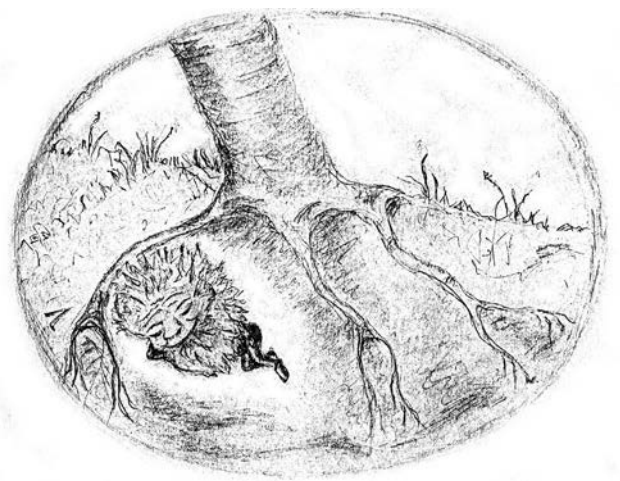
Rhythmic-musical hand gesture game by Wilma Ellersiek

— Adapted by Lynn St. Pierre

In our challenging times, as Waldorf early childhood educators we help affirm the children’s incarnational process and their amazing growth, while electing to bring rich experiences for the four foundational senses, described by Rudolf Steiner as the senses of touch, balance, self-movement and well-being.. Healing gestures of wholeness and harmony are still alive and accessible in our world and in our times. The inspired work of Wilma Ellersiek draws deeply from this wellspring of rich experiences and wholesome harmony. Wilma’s work offers medicine in the forms of speech, song, gesture, movement and touch, that speaks to the consciousness of the young child. Meanwhile, it gifts us educators with loving, joyful and gentle ways to interact with the children in our care while bringing health and well-being. Then, there is the possibility of discovering an open secret—we invite and mediate the etheric or life forces all around us while receiving the benefit of being replenished by them too!

—Lynn St. Pierre

There is a story I must tell,
Listen, listen to it well,
When we journey in the wood
we will no longer visit Scoot!
For it is empty, under his root.
Scoot has slipped into the ground,
not alone, he can be found
among the onions and tubers all,
and the roots both big and small.
He cares for the roots and he makes them strong
down below the whole winter long.

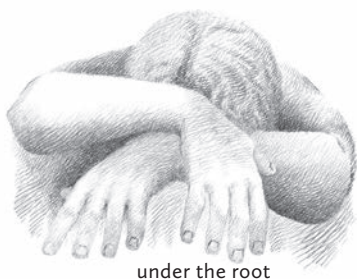


Drawing by Wilma Ellersiek

*Adapted from the forthcoming WECAN publication **Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves: Hand Gesture and Movement Games for Young Children.***

Text

1. There is a story I must tell,
2. Listen, listen to it well
3. When we journey in the wood
4. we will no longer visit Scoot!
5. For it is empty, under his root.
6. Scoot has slipped
7. into the ground,
8. not alone, he can be found,
9. among the onions
10. and tubers all,
11. and the roots both big and small.
12. He cares for the roots
T I M R P
13. and he makes them strong
T I M R P
14. down below
15. the whole winter long.



Gestures

1. Sitting on a stool or on knees on the floor, invite the children to gather and nod at the word "must."
2. At the word "listen," place hands at ears.
3. At the word "wood" lift arms and hands with fingers spread as trees. Rise to upright kneeling stance.
4. Lay both hands flat on the thighs and shake head once back and forth on "will no longer." At the word, "Scoot," show a pointed hat (see picture) on your head. Move back to sitting on knees.
5. At "empty," show empty hands, right and left, at each side of thighs. Then, at "root," lay forehead on crossed forearms, letting hands hang down.
6. At "Scoot," show a pointed hat on your head once more and gently bend forward, far enough that the point of the hat arrives at your knees.
7. Straighten yourself back up at "ground," and indicate the earth's surface with arms resting on the ground. You can push on the ground.
8. Shake head "no" and point downward with both hands.
9. Now make two fists resting side by side on thighs to represent "onions."
10. For "tubers," lay fists close to each other on knees with thumbs pointed up to form a fat tuber.
11. For the "big roots," cross forearms and rest on knees while letting the hands hang over the knees, with fingers lightly spread. For the "small roots," uncross forearms and lay them on thighs with wrists directly on knees, while each hand hangs down separately.
12. Let the left hand remain hanging and enclose each finger of the left hand with the fingertips of the right hand, slowly caressing downward as if cleaning the little roots, one after the other beginning with the thumb. (T=thumb, I=index finger, M=middle finger, R=ring finger, P=pinky).
13. Make the same gesture as in 12, but switch hands.
14. Now, holding the hands flat, side-by-side with palms down, move them slowly downward until you touch your knees with your finger "roots," indicating the earth's surface.
15. Move hands horizontally, apart and together. This gesture is a gentle, protecting stroke like covering with a blanket.

Book Review

Raising Sound Sleepers

by Adam Blanning (Floris, 2023)

Reviewed by Heather Church

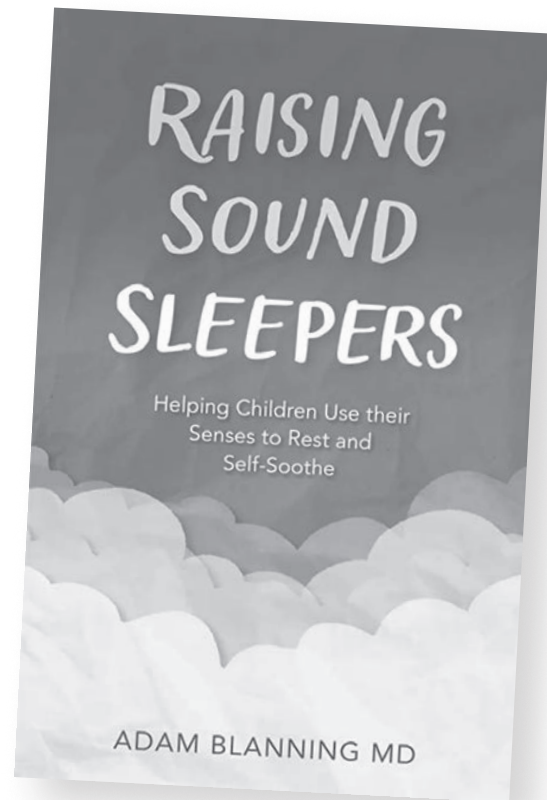
I love this book; I wish I had discovered it before becoming a parent. It is thoughtfully written and presented in a way that is highly accessible to parents, caregivers, therapists, and educators. This is a book that deserves a spot on your nightstand!

I vividly recall the challenges my partner and I faced regarding our children's sleep. We navigated the Parental Bedtime Despair (PBD) waves, experiencing both successes and failures. No other resources or books resonated with us regarding sleep the way Dr. Blanning's so eloquently does. This book remains relevant to me as an adult with adult children; although I am no longer a growing child, sleep occasionally evades me. Understanding the journey of the inner sensory pathway serves as a valuable reminder to pay attention to disruptions in my sense of well-being.

The book delves into a series of developmental milestones crucial for achieving rest. These milestones establish a foundation for resilience in the face of external stressors. Strengthening the steps along the inner pathway of self-soothing and regulation occurs through healthy sensory experiences and comprehension of key developmental transitions during childhood. "By actively assisting children in learning the subsequent stages of self-soothing and inward sensing, we can not only break free from persistent sleep patterns but also impart a greater sense of security to a child's daytime social interactions."

At the book's outset, Dr. Blanning presents the Sensory Pathway in humans step by step, including an explanation of the twelve senses. After giving the overview of the twelve senses, the book focuses on the six inwardly directed senses: taste, smell, touch, balance, movement, and well-being. He reminds us that it takes years for a child to acclimate to the world.

The subsequent chapters explore self-soothing patterns, starting with infants and progressing



through various ages and stages of child development. Following each chapter, Dr. Blanning provides highlights and "Questions to Consider," offering concrete guidance and prompts for reflection on daily interactions with children. These chapters systematically traverse natural developmental phases, offering practical support to meet children where they are with empathy and insight.

The depiction is grounded in observation and reality, acknowledging that guiding a child toward independence is challenging, often marked by frustration. Dr. Blanning dubs this Parental Bedtime Despair (PBD), capturing parents' sentiment when confronted with shifting circumstances. Chapter 3 provides examples of several manifestations of PBD and strategies for addressing them.

We learn that rhythm and routine cultivate inner balance in children, while predictability aids them in anticipating what comes next, contributing to successful outcomes. Independence, rhythm, and boundaries provide support when bedtime challenges arise and throughout the day. Dr. Blanning not only equips us with techniques to navigate these testing moments but also unveils the underlying dynamics between parents and children during different developmental phases. Nurturing well-being across all ages and challenges is central; it “not only enhances rest and self-soothing but also bolsters resilience.”

The book’s final chapters concentrate on rebuilding when disruptions occur in earlier life stages. Therapeutic approaches are offered for addressing transitions that hinder a child’s connection to their senses, especially the sense of well-being. Presenting the progression of self-soothing furnishes a roadmap for helping children to take the next step while also outlining activities for engaging in subsequent sensory development.

Chapter 10 presents the numerous developmental milestones and transitions children experience, along with the accompanying anxiety. These stages signify natural progressions of independent growth and cognitive development. This chapter is designed to assist you in navigating these inherent cycles and rhythms of sensory development in your children, developing an understanding that a child evolves in time and over time.

This book extends an invitation and opportunity to recognize how learning about inner sensory pathways empowers growing children to self-soothe, rest, and connect with their sense of well-being, fostering greater resilience in life.

“See the goodness and potential in your child.

Have faith in the unfolding journey.

Embrace love as you navigate the uncertain steps.”

—Adam Blanning, MD

Note: in the spring Dr. Blanning offered WECAN a Parent Evening called “Helping Children Settle into Deeper Sleep.” This year WECAN Parent Evenings will continue (see the events page on waldorfearlychildhood.org). Dr. Blanning will offer two talks this year:

- October 25th “What Nourishes the Development of a Child’s Sensing Capacity for the World, and What Disrupts It?”
- January 17th “Parenting in an Anxious World” together with Nancy Blanning