

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 86, Spring 2024

Contents

3 From the Editor

5 Invitation for Submissions

Focus—The Healing Gifts of Waldorf Education

6 Agitation and Anxiety and a Disturbed Sense of Life

~ Steve Spitalny

11 Practical Work as Healer

~ Heike Adamsberger

14 The Healing Art of Puppetry

~ Nancy Blanning

17 Every Pair of Hands

~ Anne Birney and Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton

22 A Finger Puppet Family

~ Maddigan Stavenger

23 Story As Healing Medicine: The Journey of Tunuri and the Blue Deer

~ Caitlin McGinn-Nice

25 Reimagining the Practical in Caregiver-and-Child Work

~ Anjum Mir

In Memoriam

27 Marjorie Thatcher

29 Elisabeth Moore-Haas

30 Susan Starr

For the Classroom

31 Willow's Invisible Bucket

~ Melody Birdsong-Shubert

33 A Candle in the Night

~ Chinyelu Kunz

35 Aponi the Caterpillar

~ Karen Fjestad

36 Grandmother Milkweed and Simon Snail

~ Andy Ward

38 Round and Round It Goes

~ Kathryn Meyer

39 Little Green Grass Circle

~ Casey Powers

41 Will o' the Wisps

~ Wilma Ellersiek

42 The Blacksmith's Shop

~ Tess McNatt

42 Moses Supposes His Toes are Roses ...

~ Stephanie Hoelscher

Publication News

43 Recommended Reading

Gateways is published in spring and fall by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America

285 Hungry Hollow Road
Spring Valley, NY 10977
(845) 352-1690 / Fax (845) 352-1695

info@waldorfearlychildhood.org

www.waldorfearlychildhood.org

Annual individual membership, which includes subscription, is \$50.

Back issues are available for purchase from WECAN, and as free downloads from the Online Waldorf Library at

www.waldorflibrary.org.

Editor *Nancy Blanning*

Editorial Advisor *Susan Howard*

Administrator *Melissa Lyons*

Publications Coordinator *Donna Miele*

Copy Editing *Lory Widmer Hess*

Layout *Jennifer Siegrist/Calliope Creative*

Deadlines for Issue 87, Fall 2024:

Articles: July 15, 2024

Advertising: July 15, 2024

About the Cover Artist:

Sandy Kerns, a graduate of the Juniper Tree puppetry training, loves working with families through early childhood puppet theater and storytelling programs on her 10 acre farm, Winter's Grace, in Alaska. Families engaged in the program, Miniature Horses StoryTale Courses, share stories, puppetry, felting, crafts, music and games with miniature horses on the farm. Sandy can be reached at sandy@astoryshop.online

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





Detail from the beautiful set for the puppet play *"Sukey and the Mermaid"*

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Focus—The Healing Gifts of Waldorf Education

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Be well.

—Nancy Blanning

INVITATION FOR SUBMISSIONS

for Gateways

ISSUE 87
FALL 2024

IMITATION *How do we understand the value of imitation in our time?*

Waldorf early childhood education is guided by the principle that young children learn through imitation. Rudolf Steiner says,

*"Two 'magic' words indicate how children enter into relationship with their environment. These words are **imitation** and **example**. The Greek philosopher Aristotle called human beings the most imitative of creatures. For no age in life is this truer than for the first stage of childhood, before the change of teeth. Children imitate what happens in their physical environment, and in this process of imitation their physical organs are cast in the forms that thus become permanent. 'Physical environment' must, however, be understood in the widest sense imaginable. It includes not just what happens around children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment—everything that can be perceived by their senses. . . This includes all moral or immoral actions, all wise or foolish actions that children see."*

(The Education of the Child, Anthroposophic Press, 1996, p. 18).

Teachers report that increasingly, children do not readily imitate in circle time. Nor do we see imitation of daily, practical life activities, as was common as in the past.

- What does this mean for our times?
- What do we understand imitation to be?
- How do we offer engaging examples of outer activity for imitation?
- Is this still important?
- How do we offer examples for inner imitation in the soul realm?
- What have we done that has awakened children's imitation, which we can share as inspiration with colleagues?

Gateways invites submissions that consider these questions for the Fall 2024 issue. Please share your thoughtful considerations, further questions, and successful examples that have stimulated children's imitative capacities.

PLEASE SEND SUBMISSIONS TO gatewayscollection@gmail.com BY AUGUST 1, 2024

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



Focus—The Healing Gifts of Waldorf Education

Agitation and Anxiety and a Disturbed Sense of Life

~ Stephen Spitalny

Over the past several years, many early childhood educators have observed increased signs of agitation and anxiety in young children. These observations include difficulty in settling, discomfort with silence (as exhibited by punctuating quiet moments with loud vocal sounds), breathlessness, a heightened sense of alert, constant scanning for danger, inability to come to rest, and uncontrollable silliness rather than participation in group activities. Through articulating my thoughts, I want to share some ideas and perspectives. I do not expect the reader to agree with all of what follows. I do, however, hope to inspire the reader to explore these ideas and discover other approaches and solutions. As Cynthia Aldinger once said, “There is no one and only way.”

Many tried and true methods no longer work to bring order and form and structure and calm.

To me, all of this is symptomatic of an unhealthy *life sense*, or disturbances to *interoception*. “Interoception” is the name modern science has given to what Rudolf Steiner called the life sense, and I use the terms interchangeably.

What would happen if your interoception experience was unreliable, unclear, or confusing?

What if you were unable to feel what was happening in your body? What if you noticed feelings originating in your body but had no idea what the feelings meant? What if, on a daily basis, your internal sensations were so overwhelming that your body felt an unsafe place to reside?

One of the functions of the sense of life is to give a basic feeling of wellbeing. Without that sense of wellbeing, the individual is constantly in a heightened state of preparedness for threat, anticipating an unsafe situation. Humans have basic needs, and primary among those are being safe and feeling connected to other humans. All of the above “symptoms” point to children not being at ease in their body or in the world, due either to inadequate development or to a

disturbance in the development of the life sense. They respond with nervous or aggressive behaviors that speak of bodily unease and fear. A healthy life sense can distinguish between major or minor irritations, and raises the tolerance level for upsetting experiences, fostering calm and stability even amidst challenges. The life sense can only do its job when a sense of wellbeing is raying into the soul.

Steiner identified the life sense as one of the “lower,” or body-based, senses, as it delivers information about aspects of the physical body. Later research has added to our understanding of what modern science calls “interoception.” The pathways are the spinal cord and vagus nerve, which send signals to the brain and deliver messages to peripheral organs (heart, kidneys, lungs, liver, digestive system). There is a very close connection between interoception and the activity of the autonomic nervous system (the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems). Interoception includes the processes by which an organism senses, interprets, integrates, and regulates signals from within itself. Research shows that our sensitivity to interoceptive signals can determine our capacity to self-regulate our emotions, and this affects our tendency toward anxiety.

There are three separate aspects of interoception to understand:

1. Continuous information is provided to the brain about the state of the various organs. Some of the sensations transmitted include hunger, fatigue, illness, need to use the toilet, pain, and heartbeat.
2. In response to the received information about the organs, signals arise to release various chemicals (hormones) to create balance, harmony and wellbeing. For instance, our brains might detect high glucose levels in the liver, and then release hormones that trigger metabolism, below the level of conscious awareness. A vast number of these silent, non-conscious communication processes are going on within us all the time.

3. When the organs are in balance and functioning in harmony, a feeling of wellbeing permeates the whole organism and is the basis for a basic experience of body-soul completeness.

After birth into a physical body, a first step on the path to experience of self is connecting with sensation through the life sense. Interoception can provide a feeling of security and shelter, of belonging in one's own body. It helps us form an image of our own self below the threshold of consciousness.

With young children, when there is disturbance or overstimulation, or a threatening situation that takes away the feeling of safety, then consciousness is switched to an alert or wakeful state. This is opposite to what the young child needs, which is to be drifting in a dream-like consciousness, not yet fully awake to the experience of self-consciousness.

The ability to detect interoceptive signals is influenced by stress and by adverse life experiences. Adversity and trauma reduce emotional awareness, decreasing our willingness to tolerate, take interest in, or pay attention to the signals of our own body. People who have experienced significant stress, chronic pain, or trauma stop listening to or trusting bodily cues, making it difficult for them to predict their own emotional responses and to regulate them.

It must be noted that our time is a stressful one, and over the past few years the stress levels have been magnified.

Sleep

Healthy sleep is something that doesn't come easily to people in our time. In general, people don't get enough sleep, or their sleep is disturbed and interrupted. There seems to be an epidemic of sleep disruption, both among children and adults. Sleep provides an essential time of rejuvenation and renewal for the human organism, so this disturbance is significant.

According to Steiner, during waking life, the astral body which is the bearer of our soul life exerts a destructive influence on the etheric body. During sleep, the ego and the astral body separate from the etheric body and the physical body. This allows the etheric body to be rejuvenated by the forces received from the cosmos during sleep.

In an early stage of nightly sleep, the soul experiences drifting in the cosmos as if adrift at sea. A later stage is that the soul feels permeated by the divine, nurtured in the arms of the godhead. These

experiences must be carried into waking life to be able to metabolize substance through the digestion of food, otherwise there will be disorder in the entire organism. Additionally, our ability to think intelligently rests on what is received during sleep. (See Rudolf Steiner's lectures "The Experiences of Sleep and their Spiritual Background" and "The Soul's Experiences in Sleep.")

In many young children we may observe a constant scanning of the surroundings as if they are expecting something to go awry at any moment, a constant scanning for threats. This is a sign of a disturbed sense of life, suggesting that the children feel unsafe and uncomfortable in their own body. Lacking a basic sense of wellbeing, the nervous system is led by what can be called the "reptile brain," the basal ganglia. Survival and self-protection become the primary focus.

If you are in tune with your bodily signals out of a basic sense of wellbeing, you will be able to form nuanced interpretations of your feelings about a situation, and this in turn supports an ability to make choices about the best ways to respond. To make those wiser choices, the higher systems of the brain, such as the limbic system and the pre-frontal cortex, must be active. People carrying a heavy load of anxiety, in contrast, may misinterpret their interoceptive signals, which can lead them to perceive everything as a crisis and magnify their sense of panic.

When a person's life sense is not broadcasting the message of wellbeing, then the nervous system is placed on high alert. The sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system is activated and attempts to restore balance. This creates a cycle of sensing something is off, releasing hormones (such as cortisol) that heighten bodily readiness for danger, and then feeling more and more a lack of wellbeing.

Why is the sense of life in children disrupted?

Recent years have led to a tremendous heightening of stress and anxiety in adults, as well as extended periods of isolation where in-person connection and support were not possible. Children were isolated from peers and spent more time at home. During this time, people of all ages were engaged with technology more than before. During this time, the technology itself rapidly advanced to make personal devices more efficient, powerful, and relied-upon for more and more uses. Even when at home together, adults were more and more distracted by their own electronic devices and less emotionally present for their children. Children

were allowed more screen time than ever before, and this screen time became a habit that did not go away when in-person social time and school recommenced.

Technology can distract us from noticing important signals from the brain. At the same time, it can itself become a source of distress. People scroll on the computer for hours, not paying attention to how tired they are, or how unhappy it makes them feel. Google searches, emailing, checking social media, and news media bombard us with external sensory signals. With an overstimulated nervous system, it's harder to notice how we're feeling. Negative sensations, like anxiety and tension, only get worse. One very significant reason the children are anxious and agitated is the heightened anxiety in the children's surroundings, meaning in adult caregivers and parents.

Over the last several years, adults have been more worried about an increasing number of things: politics, social media, scary viruses, and the polarization of opinions about all of these. There is less trust in what is read in the "news." Fear is used in advertising and media to motivate us in one direction or another. Parents seem less calm and centered, and are more distracted.

With adults distracted, agitated, and anxious, it is no wonder that everyone's sense of life is out of whack, and children don't have the capacity to remedy it themselves. They need adults to find the way for them.

Some tools and solutions

In one of his earliest lecture cycles for teachers, *Foundations of Human Experience* (also known as *Study of Man*), Steiner said to teach the children to breathe in the widest possible sense. This is perhaps even more important today than 100 years ago. As teachers, we need to help the children become adept at breathing between chaos and form, between expansion and contraction, between noise and quiet, between sleep and waking, periphery and center, and between the activities of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems, among many other polarities. One of the tools we have long used is rhythm. Rhythm is an alternation between polarities, a breathing between this and that.

The autonomic nervous system is involved in interception. It is made up of pathways of neurons that control various organ systems inside the body, using many diverse chemicals and signals to maintain balance and bodily harmony. It branches into the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. The sympathetic component is responsible for the "fight or

flight" response to danger, while the parasympathetic component helps us to "rest and digest."

One aspect of breathing is the physical activity of respiration itself. With each inhale, the sympathetic system is activated, with each exhale, the parasympathetic system. Awareness of this can guide us to solutions for the anxiety and agitation the children are experiencing. Are there ways to guide the children away from a tendency to holding their breath to experiencing long exhales, without making such breathwork conscious for the children?

Adults can bring this knowledge to our own heightened states of stress or tension, and immediately reduce our own stress by breathing in several cycles of extended exhales after shorter inhales. This truly is a magical practice for neurological reset.

With young children whose organs have not yet achieved their own rhythms, providing a solid external rhythm is an essential support. So we have rhythms for sleeping and waking, eating and not eating, playing and putting away toys, and on and on. These are all part of learning to breathe. Creating a routine for the unfolding of the day is an incredible support for the developing organs, for relaxing into the flow of life, and for reducing stress.

With children who seem to avoid stillness, how can we bring them an experience of quiet and calmness? This is when a sense of wellbeing can penetrate into them. One method is for the adults who are caring for these agitated children to have an unhurried mood, steeped in patience and reverence for each child's unique path of development. The children may be unsettled because of a lack of attention, which is a basic human need. How often are the children with an adult who is truly present, devices put away, and thereby able to offer full attention? Without the needed presence of another human being, the children are unsettled.

Unhurried inner participation, full presence, allowing no interruptions, no phone answering, taking a moment of silence to truly think before speaking: these are all worth practicing ourselves and offering as a suggestion to parents. Maybe a start for parents could be to practice this for at least 30 minutes with their child every day.

There is a natural sequence of rhythms articulated by dancer Gabrielle Roth that can easily be incorporated into the work with young children. She described these "5Rhythms" as *flowing*, *staccato*, *chaos*, *lyrical* and *stillness*. One could also describe them as states of

being. Imagine a gentle rain starts to fall. It increases in tempo as the winds pick up. It becomes a raging storm with howling winds. The winds slow and the rain lets up. The sun shines again and everything is still and peaceful. In circle time, one can find opportunities to take the children on a 5Rhythms journey, with a finger game or with whole-body movement set to song or rhyme. Start slowly, increase the pace. Increase even more until the words are so fast the fingers or body cannot keep up. And then decrease the tempo until there can even be a moment of silence and stillness at the end. This is one way to enter into chaos, into the world of agitation, and then to lead the children out into stillness.

As example, here is a finger game combining subtle breathwork with the 5Rhythms. Thank you, Bonnie Maffie, for this song and finger movements. Of course, the game should be conveyed by imitation. There is no instructing nor correcting the children even if they aren't using the same fingers.

*Come, little birdies, peck my corn,
Peck, peck, peck, peck, peck.
Peck, peck, peck, peck, peck, peck.
Chew, chew, chew.*

The first time through, using both hands, the forefingers and thumbs form two pecking beaks, pecking at each rhythmic pulse. Chew, chew, chew is accompanied by forefinger and thumb touching while making small circles together. Repeat a second time, a little bit faster, with the middle finger and thumb active as the pecking beaks. Pause after the second time through and take an exaggerated deep breath with a long exhale. The third time through is as fast as possible, maybe even faster than possible. The fourth time is quite slow and the words are mouthed and silent. Then:

Fly away, fly away, come back home today.

Hands make a "bird" flying. Slowly the arms stretch out as the "bird" flies upward, and on coming back home hands land in lap forming a "nest." The group is ready for what is next.

In my kindergarten we follow up with a circle-time ending verse (origin unknown).

*The gift of light we thankfully take
[Hands are in a nest form on lap]
But it shall not be alone for our sake.*

*The more we give light
[Stretch arms/hands out to neighbors
on either side, palms up]*

The one to the other

It shines and it spreads, it glows still further,

Until every spark by friends set aflame,

*Until every heart with joy to proclaim
[Cross hands over heart]*

In the depths of our souls

A shining sun glows.

And then we have created a quiet space that I let linger for a few seconds or more.

The autonomic nervous system is intimately connected to breathing, as well as to the polarity of heightened anxiety and relaxation. One of my intentions is to find ways to support shutting off the sympathetic system through examples of long exhales integrated into daily activities such as circle time or food blessings.

A basic pedagogical practice is to meet what is present in the children and offer what is needed. This is serving both the present and the future, serving children by being a true servant of sacred things. We have to be selfless and true. We can heal the child's life sense by applying the inner capacities of adults' developed life sense, which manifests as active tolerance for chaos and disruptions. If an adult does not have the ability to go into that chaotic state and transform it, then nothing works.

Egoism says "I have prepared this and you must go along with it." The selflessness that is needed says "What do you need and how can I serve you?" Enter into the chaos, don't resist it. Meet the children where they are and bring them where you want them to be. Even something as simple as inserting longer and longer silent pauses into songs or verses can help develop a listening quality in the children, and a capacity to allow stillness and quiet.

Learning can only occur when an individual's will is engaged. If you want the children to develop form, then you have to find ways to encourage the children to take hold of the form from within themselves, through the activity of their own will. Of course, teachers can impose their own will on the children; teachers can impose form. "Let's make a circle....Oh, I notice a hole in our basket. Step back and fill the hole.....Stand closer to her...Reach out your arms and make sure they aren't bumping anybody...." Or one can simply do circle

time activities and patiently wait until a circle arises from the children. This is the way to take the children from where they are to becoming a group with form.

Another remedy for the children of today is for adults to fully engage their own will in activity. When telling a story or doing a circle, live into the inner pictures of what the words are speaking. Create vivid mental images while telling a story, picture strongly yourself as tree or woodcutter or bear while doing circle time. Many traditional movement practices, such as Qigong, as well as the new art of eurythmy, can enhance our adult consciousness toward becoming more present in our own movement.

When sewing or woodworking, sweeping or doing dishes, be fully present in the activity. Engaging our adult will forces can in itself bring a calming presence to a group of children, and to ourselves. Our interest and attentiveness can then offer fuller receptivity to the child.

As with so much of our work with young children, the most important pedagogical tool is the teacher. We need to find reserves of peacefulness and patience, depths of true reverence, and the capacity for responding to each present moment. There are many practices to develop and enhance these qualities. Steiner's Six Basic Exercises work deeply on the soul faculties of thinking, feeling and willing. Some other practices worth mentioning in this context are Steiner's Main Exercise, and Else Gottgens' Vertical Column of Light.

We must be the example for the children of peacefulness and love and true presence. This is



Photo courtesy of Heike Adamsberger

the only cure. The children are watching! If we are experiencing agitation and anxiety, we must do the inner work to overcome those. It starts with awareness of our inner state, with mindfulness of what our feelings are saying and what our sense of life is telling us about our own bodily state.

To close these ruminations, I offer an English translation of a verse by Rudolf Steiner in which we may experience that peace and inner quiet can only come through utilizing our own strength and striving for that peace and quiet. These words reveal that an

engaged strength of will is inner peace and stillness.
They are one and the same. ♦

*I bear quiet within me
I bear in myself
Forces that strengthen me.
I wish to imbue myself
With the warmth of these forces,
I wish to permeate myself
With the strength of my will.
And I wish to feel
How peace flows
Through all my being,
If I strengthen myself,
To find in myself
Stillness as a force,
Stillness as a force,
Through the power of my striving.*

Translated by Walter Alexander

References:

The lecture by Rudolf Steiner, "The Experiences of Sleep and their Spiritual Background" was given on 9 October 1922, as Lecture 1 of the cycle *Spiritual Relationships in the Human Organism*, GA 218. "The Soul's Experiences in Sleep," given on 10 September 1922, is Lecture 5 of the cycle *Philosophy, Cosmology & Religion*, GA 215.

Stephen Spitalny is a kindergarten teacher at the Santa Cruz Waldorf School, where he has been involved since the 1980s as parent, teacher, and board member. He is a former member of the WECAN board as well as a former editor of Gateways. Steve teaches adult education courses on Waldorf early childhood philosophy throughout the US and Asia. He has a passion for building community and inclusivity in our schools.

Practical Work as Healer

~ Heike Adamsberger

Our Waldorf early childhood education practices embrace holistic development, fostering creativity through arts, nature-based activities, and imaginative play. We aim to nurture children's emotional well-being, social skills, and love for learning, which all contribute to the child's overall health and development.

In all this, rhythm plays a crucial role. Daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms provide children with a sense of predictability and security. Consistent routines, such as circle time, storytelling, and outdoor activities, help create a harmonious environment, supporting emotional stability, a sense of purpose, and a deeper connection to the natural rhythm of life.

As I fondly remember many years with my kindergarten class, my memories are full of rhythm. There were seasonal festivals and celebrations, the rhythm of activities each day, and the rhythms specific

to the day of the week. For example, there was the snack that we cooked each day (the children often referred to the days as "rice day," "soup day," and "bread day" long before waking up to the concept of Monday, Tuesday, and so on). On Millet Day, the children knew we would have a beeswax story; on Porridge Day, we would paint. On the last day of the week, everyone would join in cleaning our room thoroughly. There was a sense of calm, purpose, and pride in the air. Everyone was involved and took great care, which fostered, in turn, a sense of reverence for the environment.

Practical activities in the early years involve hands-on experiences like baking, gardening, and simple crafts. These activities enhance fine motor skills, promote coordination, and instill a sense of accomplishment. In our class, everyone washed their dishes every day. It seemed a rather mundane task, but

I made a conscious commitment to it, even though it meant a lot of work for the teachers in setting up and tidying the activity afterward. It also meant less outdoor playtime for the children, in exchange for waiting patiently in line with their bowl and spoon for their turn to wash, rinse and dry their dish.

I always felt that in our modern world, when children are being rushed from activity to activity and are used to instant gratification all around them, this was a gift: the gift of using one's "muscle" to wait patiently and be part of a group, settling into an unrushed activity. Grandparents and parents were always amazed when they visited our class on

birthdays and witnessed 15 children, aged four-and-a-half to six-and-a-half, lining up, waiting patiently, and washing their dishes even better than many adult spouses, as I was frequently assured.

Engaging in practical tasks helps children connect with the tangible world around them, fostering a balanced development of both physical and cognitive abilities. To me, the best practical activities were always the ones that directly related to the "life" of the classroom. Sometimes that meant making long paper garlands for Valentine's Day (by carefully folding and ripping with two fingers and then connecting loops), or making leaf garlands for our harvest celebration with

leaves found on our long hikes or in the yard. The children always rejoiced in preparing our much-loved classroom for a celebration. Keeping things simple and allowing plenty of time were vital. Other times, it was planting the seed "babies" and bulbs in anticipation of spring arriving. Once a week, two children would wash our napkins, using two buckets and a wooden washboard, and hang them up to dry afterward, carefully pinching the wooden clothespins.

I was always joyfully surprised at how often the children would downright beg for a turn this week and how seriously they took their work. After all these years, I still think it is one of the few palpable ways to truly build confidence and self-esteem: by cultivating purposeful activity, fostering the feeling that you belong, you contribute to our community, and what you do matters. Even though the message is carried quietly and implicitly, it is powerful. And now, looking

Photo courtesy of Heike Adamsberger



back, I can say with certainty what my instincts knew then: these mundane and seemingly simple activities are indeed healing activities, as they allow the children to live with purpose and give them a feeling of competence—something they will carry within themselves for the rest of their lives.

Indeed, we easily overlook such activities. When we think of therapeutic activities, don't we think of puppetry, zoo exercises, storytelling, and other teacher-led activities, not the things that we allow children to do for themselves and each other? Yet these are just as impactful, if not more so. I encourage any teacher of young children to have the courage to slow down, make space for the everyday practical tasks and life-oriented activities, and observe the children!

Watching the children in my care engaging in these activities, being carried by the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rhythms of "our land," has left me only

more grateful and devoted to Waldorf education, as I have witnessed first-hand the health-giving and harmonizing qualities of this educational approach that is as relevant now as it was 100 years ago. ♦

*Born and raised in Germany, **Heike Adamsberger** spent her formative years with her Austrian grandparents near the Baltic Sea and in the southern German forests. The last 30 years of her life have been devoted to educating and nourishing young children. She has longstanding experience as a Waldorf kindergarten teacher and serves as the WECAN representative in Southern California.*

The Healing Art of Puppetry: Supporting the Child's Path Toward Wholeness

~ Nancy Blanning

In the summer of 2023 a group of puppet enthusiasts, educators, and artists working within the Waldorf cultural stream gathered in Niwot, Colorado at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The essential focus of this gathering was to share the inspiration and delight of the moving art of the puppet. Hosted by the World Association of Puppetry and Storytelling Arts (WAPASA), the days that unfolded were rich and inspiring. A fledgling organization born during the isolated times of the pandemic, WAPASA's mission is to support and unite a growing community of storytellers and puppeteers who have experienced the profound nourishment that children (and adults!) receive from the living pictures of these art forms. Rudolf Steiner, who had taken up puppetry in fairytale theater during the First World War, reflected that such artistic engagement had potential to heal the ills of civilization. Educator, author, and therapist Nancy Blanning explores Steiner's indication in post-pandemic life in the following article,

edited from her keynote address at the conference this past summer. For more information about the associative arts of puppetry and storytelling visit www.puppetryandstorytelling.org

—Janene Ping

Everyone attending this conference shares two things. We are interested in—dedicated to, even passionate about—the art of puppetry. The other commonality is that we are all educators, whether we are puppeteer-educators out in the world, or teacher-puppeteers in a classroom, who care deeply about the future of our children. The world is emerging from the extraordinary experience of the pandemic, and we are now seeing its consequences. No one has come through the pandemic without being changed to some degree. We see anxiety, uncertainty, and shaken trust toward the future. Many children are disoriented, dis-regulated, socially awkward, and inexperienced. This

is true for adults too. To feel whole and confident again, the world is calling for healing.

What does “healing” mean? The phrase “to heal” comes into English from Anglo-Saxon, derived from a Greek origin. Webster’s Dictionary says it means “to make sound, healthy again.” We can rephrase that to say, “to make whole again.” The word “whole” comes from the same origin, meaning “healthy, hale; not diseased or injured; not broken, damaged, defective.” It means “entire, complete.”

Healing is mentioned in a verse given by Rudolf Steiner to young doctors in March 1924.

*In olden times
There lived in the souls of initiates
Powerfully the thought
That by nature
Every person is ill [or incomplete]
And education was seen
As a healing process
Which gave the child, as [the child] matured,
The health to be a true human being.*

We can say “A true human being” also means “a whole, complete human being.”

There are many ways to support this healing, this coming to wholeness. Puppetry is one of these ways. Puppetry is healing in that it offers children a pathway toward developing their wholeness. We know this from how we feel ourselves when we have seen lovely, engaging puppetry. Our breathing changes and we feel calmed by the sensory experiences of what we see in the color and movement of the puppets. The words of the story reassure us that, in the midst of challenge, there is a way forward. We are encouraged by the balancing resolution the end of the tale brings. We have experienced how our inner state and sense of well-being is nourished. We experience this, but how can we understand and substantiate that this is true for the rest of the world?

When we look at puppetry from the perspective of child development, we can assert that puppetry is a subtle but powerful, sensitive, intuitive, artistic, non-intrusive healing gift for all, children and adults alike. A brief look at child development will give context to understand how this can be true. In Lecture 3 of *The Child’s Changing Consciousness*, Rudolf Steiner described young children as totally open to all sensory experiences with their whole body and being.

“Up until the change of teeth, the child is one big sense organ. This is what makes children receptive to everything that comes from their surroundings. But it also causes them to recreate inwardly everything that is going on in their environment ... The child takes in what is thus coming from the environment with a specific, characteristic form of inner experience.”

Children inwardly recreate everything they see, hear, touch, taste, and smell around them. They also inwardly recreate experiences of movement and balance. They take in impressions through gesture and speech. They collect all these experiences together to make meaning of what is happening before them and reflect this out through *imitation*. Young children imitate physically all the time; everything that comes to them is reflected back out through movement, vocalizing, and speech. As the child grows older, the outer imitation lessens as the ability to inwardly synthesize our sensory experiences into whole pictures and concepts grows. The inner sensory stimulation still occurs but becomes an inner resonating that does not necessarily show externally. But no matter what our age, this inner resonating continues through our whole lives.

One confirmed physical example is that when one person speaks, the larynxes of everyone within hearing distance imitate the speaker’s voice in sympathetic resonance, matching the movements producing the tones. We do not consciously feel our larynx responding, but there is inner activity going on all the time. Adults watching an athletic event may find themselves subtly moving in imitation of the athlete. We shift posture, twisting and turning both inwardly and outwardly. Subtle imitating is going on within each of us throughout our lives.

From the beginning of earthly life, children intend to become a true human being. They want to grow a physical body to house the spiritual “greater-I” that they have known before birth. They trust that what they absorb through their senses will help them unfold this promise. Puppetry supports this intention. It can help to heal, to fill up what is incomplete. Puppetry in all its aspects nourishes the senses, nourishes the soul, and affirms the spirit existence in each one of us. Puppetry can model what it is like to be a truly upright human being of noble purpose. And in our post-pandemic times, puppetry reaches to heal and



Photo courtesy of Heike Adamsberger

restore healthy growth toward wholeness.

The use of color in puppetry is one of the most varied and rich aspects of this art. Colors not only inform the eye but also speak to the soul without words or explanation. Colors can be earthy and grounding, airy and radiating, energetic and expansive, and quiet and introspective, as well as calming, comforting, and reassuring. Color choice is intentional to match the character and virtues the puppet is representing. The plant colors often used in our puppetry feed the soul as described above. The careful use of color is also an antidote to the excessively bright, unnatural fluorescent colors that confront our eyes in popular clothing, footwear, and advertising. Seeing subtle tones relaxes the eye and often helps to regulate our breathing.

The visual impression of silk marionettes is particularly healing. The light as it shimmers on the colored silk bathes the eyes in a healing encounter. The viewer does not have to guard against a sharp, jarring image. Considering all of this, it is justified to say that puppetry can be considered as a type of color therapy in a subtle way. Use of different skin tones with the puppets, representing all races, offers an opportunity to offer healing to social life. Every color and tone of humanity can be represented and honored as they intermingle and work together.

Puppetry offers healing sounds. Quiet music to introduce the play often begins with simple singing, single-note lyre or glockenspiel music. The simplicity of these melodies or pentatonic-sequences is gentle to the ear. Hearing is given a healing respite from loud, artificially produced sounds. A drum or other rhythm instrument may be just the right accompaniment to other tales. Consistent rhythm and repetition of a predictable sound is reassuring.

Live, human speech is another sound gift with a puppet play. As described above, the larynx of each listener resonates with the words of the speaker. When the speech is carefully, lovingly articulated with warmth, hearing has a chance to recover from the strains of daily sensory input. Well-articulated consonants help form and tone the body. Clearly paced speech—rather than rapid-fire talking that runs all the words together—helps the listener to experience the importance of each word as a distinct entity contributing to meaning. Warmth of tone and interesting dynamics—not dramatics—invite listening. Puppetry makes full use of all these speech and voice qualities.

Then there is the story itself. Each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The story progresses with recognition that events in life take time. The individual's destiny unfolds through related encounter. Adversarial forces bring challenges that require creativity, and sometimes bravery to surmount—and dedication to reach resolution. Such clear relationship between action and consequence is under-acknowledged in our fast-paced, instantly gratifying technological world. It is strengthening and healing for viewers to be taken on an imaginative journey through time and witness the effort, patience and perseverance it takes to complete a task.

Characters in the stories artistically represent capacities and virtues known in the spiritual world that will foster becoming a full, whole human being on the earth. For example, stereotypes aside, if we imagine the purest idea of a king or queen, we can think of nobility, guardianship, generosity, and wise rulership. The innocent and inexperienced child sets off on a journey. They may experience adversity but are resourceful. They do not turn back but keep going until the prize is won and resolution achieved. The characters' attitudes and dedication to their tasks in working for the good are copied inwardly and do their work in the soul realm.

Everything about puppetry engages movement. The marionettes and table-top puppets move through the agency of human beings. The puppets are moved with intention and attention to posture and gesture. The marionettes move in the three planes of space—forward-and-back, up-and-down, side-to-side—just as the upright human being does. This modeling of posture is also imitated inwardly and reinforces the striving to be upright physically and soulfully. Puppets can move in lively and energetic ways or slowly as the story requires. The quick, sprightly movement brings delight and humor. The slower movements of the silk marionettes allow the children to dwell a bit in the movement, seeing how the limbs gesture and bend. The slower pace can be taken in deeply and can create a slower inner pace of activity to counterbalance the haste of the outside world. Regularity and rhythm in the movements can heal and nourish the foundational senses of self-movement and balance. Puppets present both outer movement and an inner soul mood of beauty and purposefulness to imitate.

To this point, we have considered that puppetry offers nourishment and a healing gesture that moves toward completeness in body and soul. Puppetry provides us with spiritual pictures as well. In the first year or so of life, a child gains uprightness and begins to walk. In the early stages of walking, children's arms are slightly elevated to the side with elbows bent. It looks as though invisible strings are attached to their wrists, so the arms are like little wings. The legs take steps bending from the knees. This looks as though the bending leg is being pulled up by an invisible string as the child advances. We can think that the little child is like a marionette, and the puppeteers above are in the angelic realm. When children see marionettes guided by benevolent grownups, this can remind us that our lives have unseen spiritual helpers who are guiding our steps of destiny in life.

The table-top puppets are moved and guided by visible human hands. The puppets are treated with respect, care, and gentleness. We see only the hand of the puppeteer, but this offers the picture of a companion who assists and accompanies each human being in earthly life. This image calls up the old story of Tobias, a youth who had to go on a difficult journey to obtain

healing medicine for his ailing father. A benevolent companion offers to accompany him, offering advice but not interference. This companion turns out to be the Archangel Raphael, whose domain is healing. What a reassuring image this is. There are always human helpers to companion us in our earthly journeys.

Puppetry offers healing gifts in all of these subtle ways. The power of this medium lies in its subtlety. The artistic simplicity, color, speech and tone, and movement are offered purely. As conference presenter Brian Hull stated, puppets are pure; they are what they are and are not pretending to be anything else. Whatever the puppets offer flows inward through the senses to form, to balance, to complete what we have come to earth to do. We take things in through our senses and are moved inwardly. The colors, forms, movements of the puppets come to live within us. These impressions work quietly and softly with no intrusion or expectation. Puppetry leaves the human being free to accept its gifts as it offers healing balm.

This closing verse* by Adam Bittleston sums up in seven lines our wishes for the child—and our hope to give what they need to step out well on their destiny path. ♦

In Thought for a Child

*In your breath the light of the sun
In your bread the salt of earth
In your ears true words of love
Sustain your growing, changing life
That your spirit's will may work
That your soul be warmed by joy
That your body's world be built.*

*Note: Pronouns have been modernized from "thy" to "your."

Nancy Blanning serves as editor of Gateways and is Co-Director with Leslie Burchell-Fox of the Early Childhood teacher training (WECTE) at Sunbridge Institute, NY. Her special interest is in supporting young children's healthy physical, emotional, and social integration through joyful and purposeful movement. She sees that this impulse can be supported in everything we share with the children in our Waldorf programs, including puppetry.

Every Pair of Hands

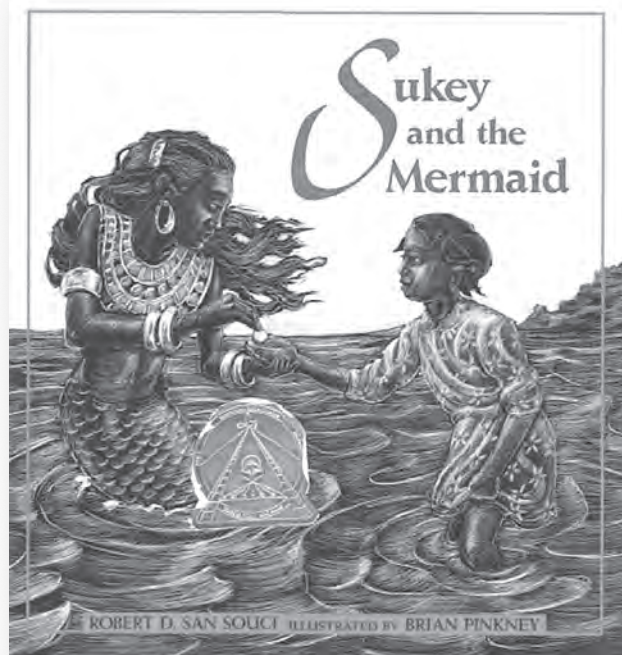
~ Anne Birney and Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton

It was such a joy to attend the East Coast WECAN conference in February 2023, surrounded by friends and colleagues. One of the most moving aspects of the conference for me was the puppet play “Harriet and the Stars.” The artistry, storytelling, and techniques used by the talented puppeteers were incredible, and the natural movement of the puppets truly brought the characters to life on the stage. My colleagues and I love puppetry, and when the play ended we all had the same questions: “How did they make the arms and hands?” “How did they make the puppets move so naturally?” We were excited and wanted to learn more.

After hearing the keynote by Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton and Lynn Turner, two of the puppeteers, I felt encouraged by their warmth to approach Leslie when I saw her walking across the Green Meadow campus. We talked for a few moments, and she answered my questions and offered to follow up with me. I also found a brief opportunity to see the puppets at the end of the weekend, and Lynn was so kind as to answer my questions, letting me hold one of the puppets and take some pictures to inspire me in bringing beautiful puppets like theirs to our school.

A few weeks after the conference I found Leslie’s email and reached out to her. I was nervous at first. Reaching out to conference presenters and those I look up to in the Waldorf community almost feels like talking to a celebrity, but Leslie was friendly and welcoming. She immediately opened up a line of communication to answer my questions, and through a series of conversations and Zoom calls made me and my colleagues a generous offer. She had found a new story that inspired her, and wondered if we would like to join her in making puppets for it. That was how our long-distance journey to bring “Sukey and the Mermaid” to life began.

Sukey and the Mermaid, by Robert D. San Souci, is the story of a little girl living on the Sea Islands in South Carolina. She lives with her mother and stepfather, Mister Jones, a “bossy, do-nothing man” who makes her work every morning starting at dawn. One day when Mister Jones isn’t looking, Sukey runs to the beach and sings a little song which calls up Mama Jo, a beautiful, brown-skinned mermaid, from the sea. Time and again Sukey returns to the beach, and one



day travels with Mama Jo to her magical underwater kingdom. Over time she begins to miss her family and returns to the human world. She finds that time has passed and that she is a grown woman. Sukey soon plans to marry, but the night before the wedding Mister Jones kills Sukey’s fiancé and tries to steal her dowry, a treasure gifted to her by Mama Jo. Mama Jo comes to Sukey a final time and gives her a pearl to heal her beloved, then brings a storm that swallows Mister Jones. He is gone, once and for all. Sukey, her husband, and her mother live happily ever after, though she never sees Mama Jo again.

In the afterword of *Sukey and the Mermaid* the author describes his process of discovering and researching this story. San Souci found a brief folktale about a Black mermaid in a book called *Folk-Lore of the Sea Islands, South Carolina*, which was published in 1923. Though they are few, he found other authenticated African-American folktales about mermaids. He traced the root of the Sea Islands story and uncovered a similar story in Caribbean folklore. This led him to a tale of a young girl’s encounter with a female water-spirit that came from West Africa. Using

these pieces he wrote *Sukey and the Mermaid*, the basis of our puppet play.

When Leslie brought this story to us I was inspired right away. I grew up in the 1990s and *The Little Mermaid* was my favorite Disney movie growing up. When I heard about the new live-action remake I couldn't wait for it to come out. However, soon after it was announced, there was racist backlash against the movie and its star, Halle Bailey. The trailer got millions of dislikes on YouTube and internet trolls decried the casting of a Black actress in this role, commenting online under the hashtag #notmyariel. I got a copy of *Sukey and the Mermaid* from the library, and after reading the story and admiring the beautiful scratchboard illustrations by Brian Pinkney, I thought that the time could not be better to expose the children at our school, most of whom are white, to a story about a "beautiful brown-skinned mermaid."

I teach a mixed-age kindergarten class at the Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor, and we have worked hard to build a rich tradition of puppetry in our Early Childhood program. When I arrived at the school eight years ago I was new to making puppets, but with the support of experienced colleagues, I have helped create and perform many puppet shows, along with making marionettes, standing puppets, and rod puppets. We have adapted stories from books and fairy tales and written some of our own. But in our work with Leslie she brought a deeper relationship with the story and people we are portraying in this tale.

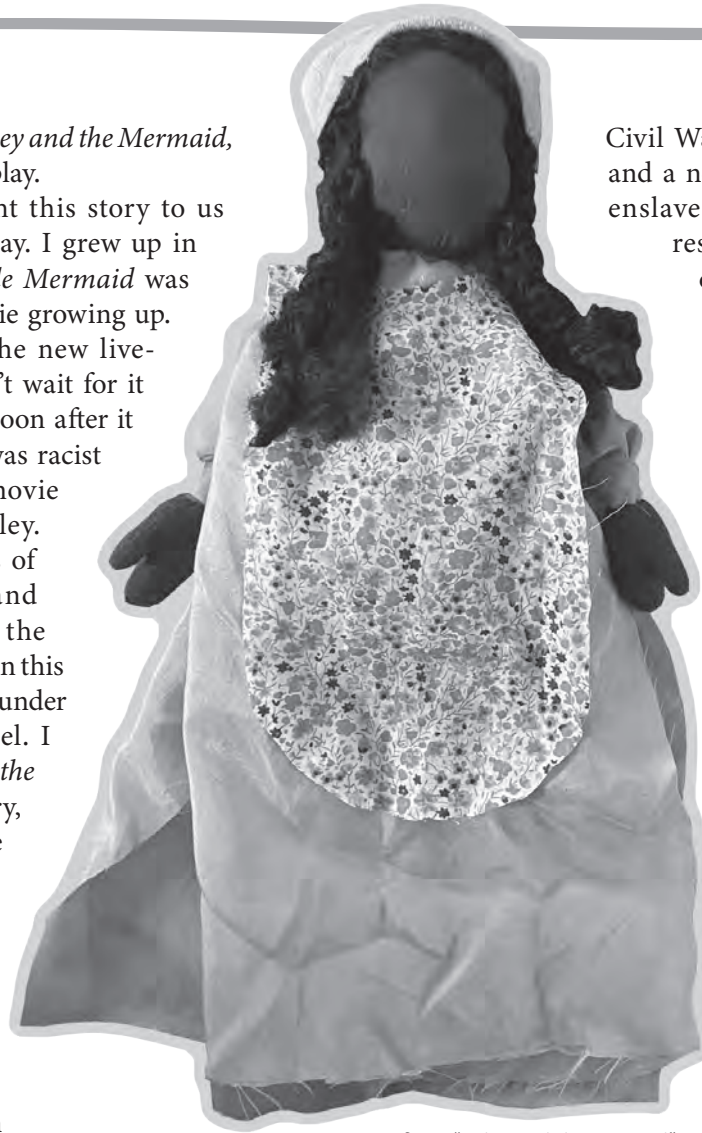
Leslie taught us about her process of researching a story and learning the history and biography of the people she will portray. *Sukey and the Mermaid* is set in the Sea Islands of South Carolina, and while the exact time frame isn't specified we imagined it to take place in the late 1800s, shortly after the end of the

Civil War, amidst Reconstruction and a new "freedom" for formerly enslaved people. We began our research by simply looking online at images of the Sea Islands and the people there. We continued by delving deeper into these sites and reading a number of books on the Gullah, as the people in this area came to be known, and their culture. The Gullah people were enslaved and brought to the United States from many West African countries. Over time they developed a common language so that people who came from different countries and regions could communicate. By blending languages from over twenty West African languages as well as English, the Gullah language was formed, and is still spoken

by some inhabitants of the

region today. Due to their relative isolation, the Gullah preserved much of their culture, more so than other groups of formerly enslaved people in the United States.

We learned about the tradition of making beautifully woven sweetgrass coil baskets that continues in this region to this day. We learned that rice and indigo were some of the many crops that would have been grown at the time in this area. We researched what livelihoods were common, and how the community grew and thrived. We looked at pictures of hairstyles of the time, and discovered what clothing would have been worn and what materials it would have been made from. We saw what peoples' homes would have looked like, as well as the natural world surrounding them. We learned about some Gullah spiritual beliefs, stories, music and traditional medicines. This deep dive has brought about a connection to this story and these characters that I



A puppet from "Sukey and the Mermaid"

have never had before with a puppet play or tale that I have brought to the children in my classroom.

In making these puppets, another area that we found important to discuss was skin color. Over the past several years we have prioritized making puppets and dolls with a variety of skin tones to have in our classrooms. The topic of representation is one that is important to our faculty and one that we have discussed in depth in the past. But for this play it felt especially important to think carefully about the shades of brown we used and how we portrayed each character. Who would have dark coffee colored skin? Which character's skin would be a lighter caramel color? What color hair would they have? In a story like this one where we were portraying an innocent little girl, a majestic mermaid, and an "evil" stepfather we wanted to make these choices carefully and with intention.

Another aspect of the process that has been different and special is how our group from Michigan has worked with Leslie, who lives in Maryland. It has been quite a journey to create this puppet play in such a different way, collaborating long-distance with a colleague we have barely met in person. Though many of us began to dread Zoom in the depths of the pandemic, it has become a useful tool for making opportunities that otherwise would be impossible, possible. Leslie has become a friend and collaborator, generously sharing her time and resources as we traded puppetry materials back and forth by mail, talked on the phone, and worked together via email and Zoom calls with the full group of puppeteers here in Ann Arbor. This has been a unique experience for us, but one that could be replicated by other schools. Working in this way could be an opportunity to share our skills in different areas with colleagues who are far away but share the same goals.

At the time of writing this article our work is still not done. Several of the puppets are complete, but we are still busy adding layers to their clothing and perfecting their hair and accessories. We are getting ready to join Leslie in working on the story, and blocking it in a way that is practical for performing it on stage for kindergarten age children. She is teaching us about the best use of "fairy tale language" and the ideal performance times for different age groups. We will cut and change parts, while staying true to the story as it was written. We are building new stages, and when they are complete we will string the marionettes,

work on building the scenery, and then begin the work of practicing. This will lead to tweaking and redrafting the story, probably several times, to make it work in a practical way for a performance. This project has been and will continue to be a labor of love and I can't wait to see it come to life. ♦

—Anne Birney

The arts of puppetry and storytelling can bring the most beautiful results that will bear fruits of imagination for years and decades to come. Storytelling is a healing art that soothes the hearts of us all, both young and old. As we return to sharing tales and stories through puppetry in our classrooms and our school communities, we can begin to showcase hope, courage, and love, highlighting cultural tales of the world. This artistic endeavor offers insights into how we all can begin to be *of the world* in times that have become so isolating and divided. We can expand our work together through authentic interest and relationship, a fundamental aspect of Waldorf education. This happens through collaboration, when we reach out to one another in creativity and inspiration.

At the WECAN Conference in February 2023, the WIDEN Arts puppetry troupe shared "Harriet and the Stars," a story I created. The beauty and imaginations of the story came out of a full collaborative spirit, as we created the marionettes and envisioned how the story would unfold with reverence, rhythm, and repetition to meet kindergarten-aged children. The music, multiple drafts of story blocking, and most of all trust from many colleagues of our troupe brought the story to life. As we progressed from written words on paper to creating a full puppetry version, a true fairytale of beauty amongst historical hardship could unfold. And with work from many pairs of hands belonging to people who believed in the heart of my story, we were all able to create this offering together.

During the conference, Anne Birney reached out, wanting to explore not only the depth of the performance but the artistry behind the short performance that she knew had taken so many months to create. Anne reached out to me again by email in the early spring and our collaboration with Anne and her colleagues at the Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor began.

I had become enamored with another story by Robert D. San Souci, "The Talking Eggs," that was to

be performed by the Early Childhood puppetry troupe at the Waldorf Baltimore School. During my site visit, I was invited to sit in on a rehearsal and was instantly inspired by the artistry of their troupe and their showcasing of the tale with such magical puppetry. Looking for a new puppetry offering to share, I found San Souci's book *Sukey and the Mermaid*.

This particular story needed to be told when I read about so much pushback on the idea of a "black" mermaid in Walt Disney's upcoming release of *The Little Mermaid*. I was disheartened by so much negativity, vitriolic disgust, and hatred. Could this tale be as endearing to young children today, as it had been for many adults who had been children at the time of Disney's earlier cartoon version? There was actual alarm that a woman of color would become the selected actress for this traditional story. I researched all that I could on black mermaids and folklore, and I discovered mermaids in just about every culture, gender, and ethnicity. I also went to the version by Hans Christian Andersen to try to explain such a reaction. What I found time and time again was beauty and hope, with room for us all to hold love within our hearts, in both Andersen's original story and in other mermaid tales.

As adults teaching young children, we may become too engrossed in *what it is* we are bringing as individuals to our work, not realizing how important collaboration is to our process. However, when we

want to build schools, communities, and collectiveness with fellow educators, far better results will come when varied insights and collective perspectives can be given. Collaborative artistic work, arising out of many lived experiences and sources of inspiration, will build our work and deepen what we hold as pictures that are not limiting. A collaborative energy or healing spirit that seeks to support all that young children need will emerge when we move out of familiar bubbles, researching folklore that meets the needs and addresses the questions of our times.

Through our collective research on this specific tale and the Gullah people of South Carolina, a new story is being born. Through trusting the process as we discuss comfortable and uncomfortable questions, we are building a new vision to offer. We are all honoring this tale in the visuals we are creating. Beautiful, varied shades in the skin tones of the marionettes, their clothing, and a sense of the Georgia Sea Coast will be showcased. And there is an evil stepfather in this fairy tale, an archetype both old and new. Our commitment to this work and story has inspired us all, and we look forward to the ongoing creation and eventual sharing of this tale.

Most of all, I am so grateful to have become friends with new colleagues. When this article is published, the performance of our collaborative creation at the 2024 WECAN Conference will be behind us. We will have brought collective insights into our workshop



Set for the puppet play "Sukey and the Mermaid"

offering, through which we hope to inspire others towards a unique collaborative process. Stories are healing, and sharing cultural tales will deepen this journey as deep as the sea. Through this amazing art we hope to inspire all to trust in the process that moves us through an imaginative transformation to show forth the fruits of love. Thank you, Anne, and all who shared in this amazing journey! ♦

—Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton

Anne Birney has been an early childhood teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor for the last nine years. She has a B.S. in Education from the University of Oregon and graduated from the Waldorf Institute of Southeastern Michigan. Anne has been working with children for over twenty years and is still surprised and delighted by the humor and joy that they bring to the classroom each day.

Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton is an WECAN I.D.E.A coordinator, WECAN Research Group member, and co-founder of WIDEN Arts. She shares her experience as Waldorf parent/child and nursery teacher and expertise with DEIB issues as core and guest faculty for Sound Circle, Sophia's Hearth and other WECAN approved training institutes. She serves as mentor to new lead teachers and assistants as well. Leslie authored and presented the "Harriet and the Stars" puppet play at the 2023 WECAN Conference, where she was also a keynote speaker alongside her colleagues. She additionally presents workshops on DEIB, inclusive storytelling, and puppetry.

A Finger Puppet Family: Puppet Friends to Direct, Soothe, and Encourage

~ Maddigan Stavenger

A cast of characters with their own stories and purposes can come out into the classroom at times when their interaction with the children will be more effective than the teacher's direction. A child in need of tender, imaginative support is one possible situation. Another is if the class needs direction as a group. These characters would act as soothing, inspiring, encouraging guides, assisting the teacher with these challenges. Each of the characters carries a different mood and purpose that the teacher develops over time. The characters appear only occasionally, to allow their magic and effect among the children to be meaningful.

When teachers feel they could use the support of another loving presence, it is a good opportunity to bring a puppet friend that speaks to the children's needs into the room. As a child, I had dolls and animals

that were hugely comforting to me. In times of distress, my toys, which were imbued with life, would speak to me, and console me. This was hugely effective in soothing me.

One puppet friend is Mighty Ant, a keen observer. They help to keep the classroom tidy and notice when things are out of place. They are very caring and helpful, but they know what their job is.

They are black and small and made of hard felted wool. They come out to help when there are things in the classroom that need to be put away during the end of tidy up time. They emerge from the teacher's apron pocket as she looks around the room for toys that need attention. They might also assist a child who needs to focus on cleanup time rather than continuing to play or talk with friends. Mighty Ant might crawl

from teacher's apron with a humming tune to get the children's attention and say aloud in a voice specific to them "I am small, and I am mighty. Now we work together to tidy." Or, "Hmmmmm, these fine children have worked together to tidy their nest but have forgotten this block. Who is strong and able to help me carry this back to its place?"

Cleanup transition can take some time. Some children are already sitting on the rug for the next thing, and some are still working or playing with one another. Usually there are a few things left behind that Mighty Ant can assist with. The ant crawls out and helps the child and then the child crawls the ant back to the teacher so they can return to their favorite apron pocket. The ant can ride in the child's hand or perch on their shoulder to continue the engagement. Mighty Ant may also come to assist if a child needs help dressing for outside time. Mighty Ant may crawl up the leg of a child who needs to put their leg into their rain pants, or crawl to a glove or hat that needs to be put on. Mighty Ant says encouraging things, and may even sing a short song about how to help with dressing before crawling back to the teacher.

The assisting teacher may also carry an ant in her pocket, and the two ants may come out at the same time as helpful siblings.

Another puppet friend, Silver Snail, is gentle and slow and firm. They ride on the heavy smooth palm-shaped river stone. They whisper in a slow, low and calming voice. Silver Snail comes out to help when a child needs to slow and ground themselves. After asking the child to lay belly down on the ground, they slowly crawl on their rock (so there is pressure) from the child's toes up to the head. They hum while they do this and can do it as many times as necessary until the child is ready to move on. They can also appear in order to sit with a child who might need a quiet moment away from the group. They stay in the teacher's hands and crawl gently across the child on their heavy stone, humming a tune.

These helper creatures will not be play toys for the children to use. They will appear when called upon and then go back into the apron pocket after they have assisted. This will allow the puppets to preserve their magic for the desired use and allow the children to wonder about them after they have gone or before they appear. More puppet characters can join these two good friends as will suit the needs of each individual class.

At the beginning of the year, as the teacher is getting to know the group and their needs, the teacher can present two stories before the puppets ever emerge. One story will be of a courageous and vigilant ant who works to help the community in times of need. The story will speak about Mighty Ant's experience with overcoming difficult things. The community will appreciate and honor the help that the ant provides. The virtues of Silver Snail can also be introduced through a story picturing what they contribute. Bringing these stories at the beginning of the school year will set a precedent for the togetherness and love that we would want to see embodied throughout the year in the group.

Once the stories have been told verbally a few times, the characters will appear in a puppet play in their helping roles. From then on, the puppets will be regular classroom helpers and friends to the children. ♦

Maddigan Stavenger is an assisting teacher at the Philadelphia Waldorf school and will graduate from Sunbridge Early Childhood training this coming summer. From being a Waldorf student in her early years, she went on to study liberal arts with a focus on Early Childhood Education. Maddigan is passionate about sustainable living and bringing her care for the environment to children. She is excitedly looking forward to bringing characters and stories like these to children to encourage building healthy, joyful relationships with their peers, themselves, and the world.

Story as Healing Medicine: The Journey of Tunuri and the Blue Deer

~ Caitlin McGinn-Nice

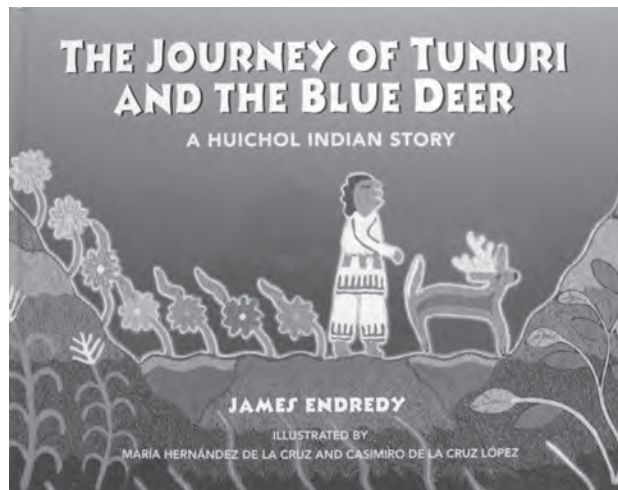
The Journey of Tunuri and The Blue Deer: A Huichol Indian Story, James Endredy's interpretation of an indigenous tale, is a lovely story I discovered in our classroom. As part of our rest time curriculum, we offer books with beautiful illustrations and imagery to our rising first graders when they begin to feel a bit restless. I was at first struck by the vibrant colors, and wonderful, textural imagery. After reading the story, I was ever more taken by this exquisite folktale from Mexico about the experience of a young boy named Tunuri.

The illustrations, by María Hernández De La Cruz and Casimiro De La Cruz López, are photographs of traditional Huichol yarn drawings, an artistic process that includes “drawing” on pieces of wood with beeswax and yarn. The story takes place in Wirikuta, an area in the state of St. Potosi, in central Mexico, where the indigenous Huichol people live in the mountains. Their traditions and way of life are deeply tied to the nature and spiritual forces that surround them. The most sacred elemental spirits in the Huichol tradition are the sun, earth, water, air, and fire.

The story follows Tunuri on a journey through the woods after he is separated from his family of villagers. The boy encounters a blue deer who promises to help him find his family. Tunuri follows a trail of blossoming flowers left by the blue deer, until he reaches each of the sacred elemental spirits: sun, earth, water, air, and fire. Each element offers solace to the uncertain child, reassuring him that he is safe and loved by the nature around him, just as he is cherished and cared for by his human family.

I think this story is important to bring to children because it speaks to the humanity of a journey, with all of its doubt, fear, surprise, connection, disconnection, inspiration, and beauty. All children can relate to Tunuri's experience of being separated from his family as a result of his own curiosity and adventurous spirit.

There is a powerful healing element to the story of *Tunuri and the Blue Deer*. The therapeutic power of stories was a theme throughout our summer



intensive work that really spoke to me—so much so that I changed direction with my final project, and began writing my own healing stories and circles. At the WECAN conference in 2017, Susan Perrow talked about our approach to creating therapeutic stories for children as one “that offers a picture, an imagination, that leads toward balance and wholeness...through a therapeutic story we find a metaphor to describe a journey that will lead toward reestablishing equilibrium” (Perrow, 2017). I believe that through the incarnation process for children *and* adults throughout our lives, we can all find ourselves lost. Having trust in the world around us, be it through nature, spirit, or other human beings, is what helps us find our way forward and our balance once again.

Most important to me is how this story speaks to the experience of being lost and found, a universally human experience that will happen time and time again throughout our lives on this earth. What also strikes me as beautiful and universal about the story of Tunuri is the idea that you are actually never lost or alone. Personifying the figures of Father Sun, Mother Earth, Sister Water, Brother Wind, and Grandfather Fire gifts the reader with the faith that Tunuri will continue his solitary journey with the guidance and protection of these sacred elements.

The Journey of Tunuri and the Blue Deer unites body, soul, and spirit through its beautiful picture language. The story reiterates the idea that children can be reached through language and imagery that are connected to nature, plants, and animals, through metaphor rather than literalism. In an article in an earlier issue of *Gateways*, "Speak Pictorially," Rie Seo wrote about the importance of finding the words and images that speak to children, language and pictures that bridge the gap between the spiritual realm and our earthly existence. In the book *The Creative Word*, this idea of soul resonance is discussed with great weight. Author Daniel Udo de Haes writes about the unification of heaven and earth for children, and how the stories we tell can act as a gate between the spiritual and the earthly: "Firstly, it is not the mother or grandmother, or even the teacher, who brings the first stories; this task is performed by none other than Mother Earth. For as we have seen, it is this greatest mother of all who tells us, in tales that may be read only by the dreamy soul of the child, that the source of all that surrounds us lies in the spiritual world" (p. 25).

I remembered the beautiful tale of *Tunuri and the Blue Deer* when I read these words, because so much of the wonderment in the story belongs to the soul/spirit connectedness that Tunuri has with the natural elements of the earth. Tunuri felt so thankful for Mother Earth's kindness. He stretched out on the ground to embrace her. "You are so beautiful and kind. I am glad you are my mother!" (p.21). Tunuri's body is metaphorically held by the earth; he experiences gratitude in his soul and well-being of spirit. Tunuri's whole being is felt throughout his encounters with the sacred elements through using imaginative picture language.

Lastly, I want to emphasize, as Stephen Spitalny does in another *Gateways* article, "Reimagining Story," that as teachers, it is so important to bring

stories outside of our own experience, in addition to the traditional Eurocentric tales of the past. "I think it is essential that a teacher offer stories that meet the diversity of the world around us. People from everywhere are everywhere." I believe there is a comforting and soul-affirming awareness we can offer children by offering them stories about diverse experiences. We are all different, we are all the same. As the story of *Tunuri and the Blue Deer* tells us, we are all held by the same earth, sun, wind, water, and fire, and all will help us find our way when we are lost. ♦

References:

- Endredy, James. *The Journey of Tunuri and The Blue Deer: A Huichol Indian Story* (Bear Cub Books, 2003)
- Perrow, Susan. Address at WECAN February Conference, 2017.
- Seo, Rei. "Speak Pictorially" in *Gateways* Issue 75, 2018.
- Udo de Haes, Daniel. *The Creative Word* (Spring Valley, NY, WECAN, 2014).
- Spitalny, Stephen. "Reimagining Story" in *Gateways* Issue 80, 2021.

Caitlin McGinn-Nice will graduate from the WECTE program at Sunbridge Institute in July. She is a Waldorf parent, as well as a support teacher at the Acorn Waldorf School in Accord, NY. Come September, she will be a lead teacher in the Saplings nursery at Acorn Waldorf School. Caitlin is honored to be a part of the Waldorf community, and grateful for the opportunity to nurture a foundation of love and kindness that will hold our little ones throughout their lives.

Reimagining the Practical in Caregiver-and-Child Work

~ Anjum Mir

"I am the rest between two notes which are somehow always in discord."

— Rainer Maria Rilke

At a time when life is tangled and full, our birth-to-three offerings can be the very pause that our families need during their busy days. We can shape simple spaces for children, their parents, and those who care for them—spaces clear of the clutter that gets in the way of truly seeing the young child and facilitating open-hearted observation.

We need only notice the hands of a toddler to know how to hold space that encourages development. Their hands dance—not the perfunctory movement of a practiced routine, nor the deliberately free dance of a grown adult, but moving instinctively, with a purpose that the child discovers only as it unfolds. I can remember many such dances in the classroom, in the play yard, in the woods, on the shores of the Pacific, where little ones with curling, flying fingers gathered blocks and balls, leaves and dirt, and sand and water. Filling bowls, baskets, and buckets to carry and then dump out only to start again. So much fledgling play is filling and emptying. Out of natural wisdom, infants and toddlers know that to have sustained activity and growth, they must start a task repeatedly. They have to empty the vessel to keep filling it. It is through observing the children that we can know best how to nurture them and how to shape space for their self-teaching nature.

For adults, emptying is often an act of letting go. To make true space for children in our birth-to-three programs, we need to release the trickled-down expectations of kindergarten and nursery and rebuild our programs, from the ground up, upon the unique needs of this age group. We will have to rethink our offerings and rhythms—letting go of complex snacks, circles, stories, crafts, music, and instead moving forward with a renewed commitment: It is not about the experience that we form for the child but about the space we hold for the child to experience and form themselves. Said differently: we don't form the experience, we hold the space so they can form their own experience.

The value for children under three is not in doing our planned activities but in enabling them to initiate and engage in their own. Knowing this, the activity that matters most is free play time—the rest of the rhythm should be there to support this. This means that a caregiver-and-child class rhythm may consist only of play time, especially when the children are under the age of two. It is hard to let go of the activities that have become a part of the Waldorf early childhood identity, particularly when they appeal to parents and inspire them to enroll. But to meet the children and the families of today, we have to renew our practices and even remove those that are not serving the children, or worse, pushing them into movement and skills for which they are not physically, socially, or emotionally primed.

Of course, the beautiful rhythmic activities that we know and love can continue to have a place in our program when we observe readiness in the child's own doing. Snack comes as an option when children can make their way to it, and progresses as children develop the movement, interest, and focus to participate. Similarly, circles and stories can arise out of the growing relationships in a group, mirroring what the child can already do by way of movement and imitation. Participation should always be self-initiated, and activities should breathe slowly and be simple and short. Attentiveness and will are not developed through length and complexity, but rather through consistent, self-originated, and achieved successes that build a child's initiative, interest, and commitment. Too much too soon only creates developmental stress, and that diminishes healthy will. Through on-going research into this developmental stage and the wisdom of pedagogues like Emmi Pikler, we know with certainty that the doers in birth-to-three environments should be the children, while the rest of us have the gift and responsibility of being observers and stewards of their autonomy during these years.

Physical space matters as well. While infants and toddlers might be small in body, their capacity to take in the environment is vast, even more than that of the older child, because it is unfiltered. Sensory overwhelm can distract from children's instinctive knowledge of what they need and how they need to move for their healthy development. This wisdom can be supported by spaces that have infant- and toddler-focused equipment and play objects that meet the child's development-specific need for free gross- and fine-motor exploration. This need is not supported by spaces furnished with inherited kindergarten furniture and toys meant for children of an entirely different size and developmental stage.

A healthy environment also has ample and inviting space for movement. Too much equipment and too many toys and bodies are restrictive. A child cannot move with freedom in a space that is overfilled with adult bodies that are there to meet an enrollment quota. Choosing class sizes that facilitate healthy movement in the appointed space, while providing children and adults with nourishing social opportunities, can be a part of the care we provide. A developmentally conscious space with the optimal number of participants can be a source of warmth, safety, and comfort, and can enable children to explore and adults to give them space to do so.

In this past fall's Birth-to-Three conference, focused on the importance of self-initiated play, there was ample discourse about play's importance, its developmental progression, ways to encourage it, and ways to bring it to the consciousness of parents and educators. Exploring the work of Emmi Pikler as a pedagogical companion to Steiner's indications, we were further sensitized to the distinctiveness of the birth-to-three child. To continue building our consciousness for this work, we must keep asking important questions that guide us, and recognize that names and details matter and can help shape our work. What do we call our caregiver-and-child settings and those who hold them? Are they classes or playgroups? Are we teachers or holders of space? Are we leaders or facilitators? How do we organize the settings—by age or movement? How do we know what to bring and when? What is our responsibility towards the adults and towards the relationships they have with their children? What do we have to learn or refine in our practice to open spaces that serve the children and adults today?

Sometimes the curated beauty and outward practices of our education get in the way of what is needed. Just as we are learning to peel away the layers of our curriculum to discover the essential kernels of our pedagogy for inclusivity, we have to draw out the essential ethos of our early childhood education so that it is the values and spirit of our teaching and the character and qualities of those who stand before the children, not our traditional practices, that distinguish our Waldorf caregiver-and-child settings from all others. Our work is imbued with something that is rare in the world of education: the recognition that a child is not just a physical, social, and emotional being, but first and foremost a spiritual being. We nurture this through warmth, truth, and beauty in our words and actions, holding the constant and deep awareness that our work is to help children grow into their bodies so that they can use them for spiritual expression.

If we have courage to meet the children and parents who are coming towards us, the caregiver-and-child experience can have new meaning. It can be a small, restful interlude, emptied and full of presence, where the children are doing their work and the parents and caregivers are invited to observe them, respect them, and let their wise nature take its course. It can be a place where children fill and empty their developing vessel over and over again with their own substance, until it is formed enough to receive what the world has to offer. ♦

"If you will stay close to nature, to its simplicity, to the small things hardly noticeable, those things can unexpectedly become great and immeasurable."

— Rainer Maria Rilke

Anjum Mir is a longtime Waldorf educator and birth-to-three advocate. She has facilitated Waldorf caregiver/child groups for 20 years and served as a school pedagogical administrator in Southern California. She has previously written for Gateways describing her family's experience as a Muslim family in a Waldorf school (see Issue 82, Spring 2022, "Reflections on Diversity"). Anjum was also one of the six keynote speakers at the 2023 WECAN East Coast conference. She currently serves on the WECAN board and is a member of the Birth-to-Three working group.

In Memoriam

Marjorie Thatcher

May 15, 1940 - September 17, 2023

Marjorie Thatcher, a passionate advocate for young children and their parents, stands with the first teachers to consolidate Waldorf Early Childhood work in North America. A long-time teacher in Vancouver, British Columbia, Marjorie played a key role in the founding of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association (now WECAN), and of the West Coast Institute for teacher training. Marjorie also began one of the first Parent-Child programs in North America, and was a pioneer in the Birth to Three movement and the development of day care for young children.



Marjorie was born in New Zealand. She and her older twin were the oldest of four siblings. Her youngest brother had Down Syndrome, and his formative presence in her life influenced many of her future choices.

Marjorie spent her childhood in a wholesome rural environment, with orchards and horse-drawn cart rides, sandy hills, windy cliffs, rough-wavy-ocean swims, picnics at the beach and boating. Raised in a happy home where music had a significant place, Marjorie was and remained an avid reader. Even as a child, she had an impulse toward caring for her siblings, and particularly her youngest brother.

It was because of her aunt that Marjorie first met anthroposophy. Her aunt had studied extensively in Dornach, and then, inspired by the needs of her nephew, founded the first anthroposophical therapeutic home for children with special needs in New Zealand. In this therapeutic place, Dr. Maria Glas, a medical doctor who had known Rudolf Steiner,

inspired Marjorie further on this path.

Consequently, Marjorie studied nursing and later became a midwife. After completing her training, she came to British Columbia, Canada where she met her future husband, Philip Thatcher. A year after they were married, the young couple set off to see the world together with stops in New Zealand, Southeast Asia, Iran, Jordanian Jerusalem, Israel, and England; they also visited the Goetheanum in Switzerland. They returned to Canada for the birth of their children, and lived in Prince George, British Columbia for five years before moving to Vancouver.

Marjorie had a well-developed strength of will. Joan Almon said in the early years of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association (now WECAN), an organization Marjorie helped found, "We talk about the importance of doing certain things and Marjorie just does it!"

Marjorie cultivated strong rhythms around family life. Her home in North Vancouver had a big space set

up where many neighborhood children would come to play; she also held a Sunday School program in Philip's parish.

In 1976, Marjorie was invited by Dorothy Olsen to join her as a member of the early childhood faculty at the Vancouver Waldorf School (VWS). A year later the Thatcher family moved to England so that both parents could take part in anthroposophical studies at Emerson College. Marjorie took the education course, did practicum work at Michael Hall School, and also learned from Margret Meyerkort. Then she and Philip returned to Canada, taking an active role in the Vancouver Waldorf School's early years. Marjorie played a significant role first as one of the early kindergarten teachers, and later the preschool teacher.

Marjorie was dedicated to providing opportunities for children to experience real human activity and the arts, as appropriate for the early years. To this she brought her love of gardening, cooking and baking—honey-salt bread—grinding grain by hand, sewing, storytelling, and simple songs sung in her lovely soprano voice, sometimes accompanied with a kinderharp.

In addition to her many years of service at the Vancouver Waldorf School and on the first board of directors of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association, Marjorie was also the co-founder with Dorothy Olsen of the West Coast Institute for Studies in Anthroposophy (WCI) in 1996.

Marjorie spearheaded many early childhood conferences in the Pacific Northwest to inspire teachers, many of whom lacked a formal training, in their work with children. She inspired and supported many students and was always available for conversations—often deep ones—about anthroposophy, education, and questions regarding an individual child's needs. Marjorie's nursing background came to the forefront on many occasions when students arrived at the training feeling ill. Family was very important to Marjorie, and she kept in touch with her own family in New Zealand through letters and visits.

Marjorie also supported her husband, Philip, as he became a Waldorf high school teacher, a pioneer of the Vancouver Waldorf High School program, and



for seven years the general secretary for the Canadian Anthroposophical Society.

In her last years at VWS, she spearheaded one other big project: the construction of an early childhood building designed by Bert Chase, an anthroposophical architect. It is a beautiful, purpose-built place, surrounded by gardens. All the classrooms have windows to bring in natural light and it is ensouled with the prevailing feeling that “this is a good place for young children.” Upstairs, there is a room that is called the Marjorie Thatcher Meeting Room.

Marjorie was a woman of initiative, and her contributions will live on for a long time. ♦

—Compiled by Ruth Ker and Kim Hunter

Elisabeth Moore-Haas

February 7, 1943 – October 14, 2023

Elisabeth Moore-Haas, enthusiastic, devoted Swiss early childhood educator and teacher trainer, passed from the earthly realm into the spiritual world on October 14, 2023. She is remembered here in North America for her work in the 1980s and 90s, when she travelled to teacher training institutes, visited kindergartens, and lectured at conferences. The power of stories, storytelling, and the wisdom of fairy tales were among her deep interests, which she shared as keynote speaker at one WECAN February conference. In 1989 she presented at the first major international WECAN conference along with other Waldorf Early Childhood master educators from Europe. She worked intensively with the “Mood of the Fifth” in music and circle games. The “Star Money” circle game she shared has been played in many North American kindergartens and early childhood programs ever since. Nancy Foster especially remembers Elisabeth bringing the impulse of this music to North American programs.

Colleagues observe that she was particularly dedicated to work through imitation. She saw the teacher as the role model whose example would create a warm, free space in which children could educate themselves through active imitation and free play. She carried this impulse for imitation forward in the early 1990s. She fulfilled the dream of becoming both a pedagogical eurythmist and a therapeutic eurythmist, skills she shared in many kindergartens and schools. Many children imitated their ways to health through her guidance.

Elisabeth had answered a call from Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen, director of the teacher training seminar in Stuttgart, to open a program in Switzerland as another part of her work. This began in 1977, and Elisabeth carried the program for over 30 years. The motto of this training center in Bern was “All education is self-education, and we, as teachers and educators, are actually only the environment of the self-educating child.” She also carried the richness of her knowledge to Japan, New Zealand, and Australia, as well as to many European countries, such as Poland, Croatia, and Slovenia.



Group photo from the 1989 Early Childhood Conference in Wilton, New Hampshire. Names marked with an asterisk* indicate those who have crossed the threshold. Back row: Johanna Veronica Picht*, Monique Grund, Janet Kellman, Susan Howard, Freya Jaffke*, Marjorie Thatcher*. Third row: Elisabeth Moore-Haas*, Joan Almon*. Second row: Charlotte Dukich, Werner Glas*, Helmut von Kügelgen*, Bronja Zahlingen*, Margret Meyerkort*, Ann Pratt*, Patricia Livingston*. Front row: Alice Stamm, Nancy Foster, Carolyn Hodnett*

Elisabeth’s sister, Marguerite Haas, offered these words: “When we look at Elisabeth’s life, we are almost overwhelmed by what a person can achieve, accomplish, and experience in just one lifetime. This strength and intensity was not always easy for others to bear. But her strength of will, her powers of memory, and her moral courage will remain admirable memories for us all. Her work lives on and radiates through all trained kindergarten teachers—around the world! What live on in those who knew her are her great powers of the heart, her ability to love.”

Elisabeth is remembered by American colleagues as “unforgettable . . . with those wonderful Swiss apple cheeks” that appeared when she smiled—which was often. ♦

These recollections were drawn from contributions by Susan Howard, Nancy Foster, Ann Stahl, Marguerite Haas, Jacqueline Walter-Baumgartner, and Claudia Simčič.

Susan Starr

March 20, 1950 – March 20, 2023

Susan Starr, beloved daughter, sister, teacher, mentor, and friend, crossed the threshold on her 73rd birthday, March 20, 2023, in La Mesa, CA.

Susan's memorial service filled the auditorium of the Waldorf School of San Diego with school friends, fellow teachers, students, and their parents, as well as Anthroposophical Society members and her extended family, to share memories of her many loving and thoughtful deeds.

After graduating from Southwestern University in Chula Vista, CA with a major in Humanities in 1972, she spent seven years living in British Columbia, Canada, where she discovered anthroposophy and the Christian Community. She was attending Simon Fraser University as a Kinesiology Major when she became interested in early childhood education and eurythmy and decided to pursue eurythmy training. She later completed the Waldorf kindergarten training, and in 1985 was a pioneering faculty member of the Early Childhood Program at the Princeton, New Jersey Waldorf School, where she stayed until 2002.

Susan eventually returned to San Diego and taught for a year at the Sanderling Waldorf School before moving to the Waldorf School of San Diego, where she was the lead teacher in the Rosemary kindergarten until 2014.

She went on to mentor Waldorf kindergarten teachers and families all over the US and in China. She was known by everyone for her incredible talent and generosity in puppetry arts. She shared puppet making and puppet shows every chance she got. During the pandemic lockdown, she drove to students' homes and performed puppet plays in the family driveway.



Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Develle

Susan learned sailing from her father and loved to take friends out for a sail on the San Diego Bay. She was a talented singer and lyre player, playing lyre in her apartment courtyard for neighbors who were on lockdown. She gained permission from her landlord to plant beautiful flower gardens all around her apartment complex. Every year she walked to raise money for the Anthroposophical Prison Outreach.

Susan was a wonderfully gifted and generous-hearted friend. She is dearly loved and greatly missed ♦.

—Compiled by Nancy Blanning

For the Classroom

Willow's Invisible Bucket: A CARE Mission Statement and Story

~ Melody Birdsong-Shubert

Melody Birdsong-Shubert, class teacher for Hidden Hollow at River Valley Waldorf School, developed a CARE mission statement and a story that pictorially communicates the building of class culture to the Hidden Hollow students. The mission statement is shared with families in their Welcome Letter and referenced throughout the school year. The story that follows is told in the first days of school and also when welcoming newly enrolled students at other points of the year.

CARE Mission Statement

Hidden Hollow kindergarten is a CARE building community. We welcome all and include all.

We CARE for ourselves, we CARE for others and we CARE for the environment.

We show interest in our similarities and differences.

We are unique, beautiful, and worthy of CARE!

Compassion: We "tune in" and help make it better.

Affirm: We accept and support ourselves and others.

Respect: We consider all people and environments to be deserving of CARE.

Encourage: We inspire hope!

Willow's Invisible Bucket

by Melody Birdsong-Shubert

Inspired by *Fill a Bucket: A Guide to Daily Happiness for Young Children*

by Carol McCloud and Katherine Martin

High above in the great blue sky, Henrietta Hawk's wings were spread wide as she circled the clouds and floated on the fresh waves of the breeze. Down below were the high grasses of the meadow dancing as they leaned to hear the soft murmurs inside the small and old house.

And, inside the small and old house it was a happy day, for a special gift had just arrived: a wee little one. And, just like you, this wee little one received a gift, too: a name so special...Willow.

Everyone was so happy to see Willow, and hold Willow and offer lots of love with a tender hold in warm arms and a gentle kiss to one pudgy cheek and then to the other. *But, there was one part of Willow they could not see.* Willow's invisible bucket. And with every gentle kiss, tender hold, a loving smile that crinkled the sides of eyes, and tickles to toes, Willow's invisible bucket filled to an overflow of shimmering treasure that blanketed Willow with joy and content.

And as the days and months passed by, Willow's cries for warmth, a full belly, and a good night sleep were met. And, the giggles, the tickles, and the love filled the floating bucket and the buckets of all those who cared for Willow, *for everyone has a bucket, you know.*

And as some years passed, Willow learned the magic of these buckets that not-a-one could see. One could only feel the magic. Upon waking each morning, Willow gently hugged the family puppy, Whimpical, petted her soft, curly, shiny black fur, and scooped breakfast into her bowl before sitting down to the breakfast Dad had prepared for Poppy and Willow. And, oh, if the sound of the magic buckets could be heard as they filled from these acts of love and kindness! But Willow felt it. And, Dad, Poppy, and Whimpical felt it, too.

They sat together enjoying the golden pancakes topped with a melted square of butter and swirls of bronzy maple syrup and canned slices of summer's last juicy peaches.

Poppy was the first to speak. "Thank you for a delicious breakfast once again. I sure will miss it when you are out helping the Flanigans with the tree that fell onto their barn in the big storm. I'm so glad you are able to help them and I'm sure they are, too!"

Willow stopped chewing and the sweet buttery goodness was now unnoticed. Willow had forgotten that Dad would be helping with the big mulberry tree that had been uprooted in the big storm. Poppy's dinners were right tasty, but his breakfast dishes *were not so*.

Willow fretted about Dad's absence the whole way to school; and, by the time they arrived, was in a terribly awful pickle of a mood. Mr. Malik, one of the kindergarten teachers, noticed this mood did not match Willow's generally chipper self. He offered an extra warm smile and love from the deepest swells of his heart as Willow's fingers lightly brushed the water surface to receive the fairy's scent as it slowly rippled across the water bowl and rose for a gift of calm. And, oh, if the sound of the magic buckets could be heard as they filled from these acts of love and kindness! But Willow felt it. And Mr. Malik felt it, too.

As the morning continued, Willow felt more and more punchy, and so sat to the table to draw a most favorite Dad breakfast: waffles as round as a crater-y full moon with a mound of fresh sliced strawberries, a dollop of whipped cream and a dash of cinna-meg. Cinna-meg was what Poppy called Dad's shaker mix of cinnamon and nutmeg. This all made Willow smile as the red crayon swept across the caramel-colored waffle to shape the largest mound of strawberries.

"You must really like strawberries!" Imani joyfully proclaimed as she sat beside Willow.

Willow hunched a shoulder and arm around the drawing, and with very scrunched-up brows, eyes and nose, said "That's not what this means!"

And, oh, if the sound of the magic buckets could be heard as some of the joyous treasure emptied to the ground from the hurt Willow was feeling and the harsh words spoken! But Willow felt it. And Imani and Mr. Malik felt it, too. Oh, how Willow needed to have the floating buckets abound with shimmering treasure, to blanket them with joy and content.

Imani knew that her friend was sad about something and so she began to refill their buckets. She drew a brightly colored rainbow with a field of flowers below. And resting peacefully in the bed of flowers lay Imani and Willow looking up at the beautiful rainbow. Willow told Imani all about Dad's special breakfasts and the Flanigans' mulberry tree, and the two went to the play kitchen to serve up Cinna-meg and Strawberry Waffles to all the customers who came to their restaurant.



Photo courtesy of Heike Adamsberger

And what a surprise the next morning when Poppy, who had received word from Mr. Malik about Willow's wonky morning, proclaimed it to be an Upside-Down Day and served up one of his right tasty dinners for breakfast and they had Dad's delicious breakfast for dinner. And, oh, if the sound of the magic buckets could be heard as they filled from these acts of love and kindness! But Willow felt it. And Dad, Poppy and even Whimpical felt it, too. ♦

Melody Birdsong-Shubert is part of the River Valley Waldorf School community in PA, which sits upon the unceded land of Lenni Lenape people. She combines an anti-bias and anti-racist (ABAR) practice with Waldorf education to serve early childhood groups within the ages of three to seven years old. Melody fosters an environment where compassion and being an affirming and contributing community member are continually developed. She is eager to deepen her understanding of therapeutic movement in relation to one's capacity to thrive.

A Candle in the Night

~ Chinyelu Kunz

Long, long ago in a faraway land there were two sisters and three brothers who lived with their mother and father at the edge of a forest. A dirt pathway went deep into the forest, all the way to the other side where there were other houses and children to visit and play with. Chickens pecked in the red earth and a goat roamed the backyard eating grass and leaves. And there was Suzi, a furry little brown dog who loved to run and play chase with the children in the ankle high grass. They loved Suzi and she loved them. Every day, big sister and little sister with their two little brothers played under the blue skies and bright sunshine. The littlest brother, who was still a baby, sat on a blanket in the grass and watched them, laughing and giggling, waiting for the day when he could join in too. When they were tired and hot from running and playing, big sister picked up baby brother and carried him on her hip to the shade of the mango tree where they all rested. Sometimes, to cool down, they went for walks in the forest to where the crystal-clear stream flowed through. They always stopped to see the little bright blue fish swimming and darting in the cool water. They often talked about catching a few fish and taking them home to put in their little fishbowl, but they never did. They loved watching them swim freely in the stream.

One day, as they were playing outside, dark clouds slowly moved across the sky, blocking the sun's shining rays. The winds began to blow, but in a strange way, for it had never blown that way before. Mother appeared at the back door calling the children to come in and from the look on her face, they knew they had to listen so she wouldn't have to call them again. By now, the winds were swirling around them, and thundering sounds could be heard overhead, but they couldn't see where it was coming from. Big sister's arms swooped down as she picked up baby brother. When they reached the back door, Mother pulled them in close and gave them a big hug. In her arms, they felt safe and loved.

The thundering grew louder and louder. Mother quickly shut the door and closed the curtains. She guided them under the stone staircase which felt like a cave, and they all huddled together. "This is a safe

place to be until the storm passes," she said. Mother found a candle which she safely lit, and everyone stared into the candle light. Deep sighs and breathing could be heard as she said this verse:

*Candle light
Candle bright
Make me brave day and night*

*Keep me safe when I play
Keep me safe night and day*

*I am kind, good and true
I will be a helper too.*

*Candle light
Candle bright
Make me brave day and night*

As the candle flame danced about, the children began to giggle and laugh as they played charades with their hands in the glow of the candlelight. They laughed at the funny shapes on the wall of their "cave."

Then Mother extinguished the candle and announced that the storm had passed and they could leave the shelter of the "cave." She called everyone to the kitchen table for tea and bread with butter and honey. As they ate, Mother said, "Dear children, I want to tell you that there will be many more storms. There will even be surprise storms. To be safe, just like today I want you to run to our safe 'cave' whenever you hear thundering in the sky and dark clouds appear. Then wait there for me to bring the candle."

Many more storms came just as Mother said, more than they could count. Storm after storm after storm came and with each one the children knew just what to do. Big sister scooped up baby brother and called her younger sister and brothers to follow her into the house. Together they ran to their safe "cave." Then Mother would bring the candle, light it, and they would say the verse.

*Candle light
Candle bright
Make me brave day and night*

*Keep me safe when I play
Keep me safe night and day*

*I am kind, good and true
I will be a helper too.*

*Candle light
Candle bright
Make me brave day and night*



Illustration by
Jo Valens
from *Tell Me
Another Story*
(WECAN, 2019)

One night, when it was dark and the air was still, big sister picked up baby brother, called her sister and brothers to her bed to celebrate her birthday. Because of the storms, she couldn't have a birthday party with friends. Once they were all sitting comfortably on her bed, with a spot for Suzi too, she said, "We must all pray for the storms to stop." They all held hands and prayed, then they said the verse that Mother had taught them.

*Candle light
Candle bright
Make me brave day and night*

*Keep me safe when I play
Keep me safe night and day*

*I am kind, good and true
I will be a helper too.*

*Candle light
Candle bright
Make me brave day and night*

When Mother found all her children huddled together on big sister's bed she smiled. "It's time for bed," she softly said. Carrying the lit candle, their only source of light, she led them to a big, soft cozy bed she had made for them to share in the "cave," just in case a storm came in the night. They snuggled together, comforted that they could sleep next to each other. She tucked each one in and gave them each a kiss goodnight. Deep sighs and deep breaths could be heard as their bodies relaxed, ready to fall asleep. Mother sat in a chair with the candlelight glowing and as they drifted to sleep, the candle's light grew brighter and brighter and brighter, which made them feel safe and cared for. ♦

Chinyelu Kunz lived most of her childhood in her birth country of Nigeria, West Africa. She attended university in the US, earning her BA and MA in architecture. After discovering Waldorf education, she taught parent-child and pre-kindergarten classes in California, Vancouver, and finally 16 years at Kimberton Waldorf School. In 2020, Chinyelu launched her website, wenurturecollective.com, with resources for parenting support and mentoring for early childhood educators.

Aponi the Caterpillar: A Therapeutic Story

~ Karen Fjestad

This little story was written when the Pope was visiting Canada to recognize the tragedies regarding Indigenous Residential Schools and the harm caused to children and their families. At that time, there had been discoveries of thousands of unmarked graves on the grounds of former Residential Schools. This is offered as a Healing Story to acknowledge this tragedy and the associated generational wounds.

There was, once upon a time, a caterpillar named Aponi. Aponi lived in the forest with her parents and brothers and sisters, as well as her aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. The forest was filled with other creatures, big ones like the moose and the bison, and smaller creatures like birds, mice, and butterflies. A lovely stream flowed through the forest and wildflowers grew all around.

Each day Aponi would munch on leaves and flowers and crawl around exploring the beautiful world around her. She was happy living in the forest surrounded by her family and the land that she loved so much.

One cloudy day, someone came into the forest. He had a shoebox and seemed to be collecting things from the forest to take with him. He plucked Aponi off a leaf and he took many caterpillars and bugs off the trees and forest floor and put them into his box. Although there were other caterpillars in the box, Aponi was frightened and felt alone. She was no longer with her family and in the place that was her home. The person would put leaves and water in the shoebox for the creatures, but it was not like the fresh water from the stream or the leaves that grew in the forest where she

had lived before. They didn't taste right. Aponi was sad. She missed the leaves that grew in her forest, the animals that lived there, and most of all she missed her family.

After a while, Aponi became very tired from living in the box, like she needed a long sleep to feel better. She became quite still, her body was heavy, and she slept and slept for a very long time.

Eventually, Aponi stirred and found that she was able to move just a little bit. As she wiggled and stretched, she realized that she had wings. She was not a caterpillar anymore, but had transformed into a butterfly. As she spread out her wings, she saw that they had the colours of the forest on them. Brown from the bears and bison, green from the trees, and blue and purple from the wildflowers and berries. The wings were beautiful.

She stretched out her new wings and flew back to the forest that she had missed so much. She flew high above her family and gently watched over them.

Aponi's family, who missed her so much, looked towards the sky and saw her flying with her most precious wings. ♦

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

Grandmother Milkweed and Simon Snail

~ Andy Ward

Here is a brief nature story written after an inspiring weekend workshop at the Nature Institute in Harlemlville, NY. The story arose out of several hours spent observing a big milkweed patch on both a sunny and rainy day to support and strengthen the children's trust in life. Rudolf Steiner's observation about butterflies being flying flowers blended into the story. From there, the story grew into a puppet play. This story is an example of how Mother Nature encourages us in many ways through many voices.

*On a sunny day in mid-summer,
the milkweed patch is in full bloom.
And on the growing point
bursting spheres of buds
open to invite all
to join the festivities.
Summer breezes
bear the heavenly fragrance
of milkweed flowers,
calling to the flying ones
of the upper story.
Drunken bumblebees,
flitting butterflies,
and other floating members
of the Merry Buzzing Airborne Band
feast on the sweet nectar.
Oh, Happy Day!
Grandmother Milkweed has returned
from her long winter nap.*

The next day was cool and rainy in the milkweed patch. Grandmother Milkweed enjoyed the quiet, as raindrops splashed onto her broad green leaves and streamed down her thick stems into the ground. She sighed happily. Most of the winged crowd were taking a day of rest in this weather—the butterflies couldn't navigate so well in the rain, the bumblebees were much too furry and wet to fly about, and even the beetles were slipping on the rainy leaves.

"But, oh, who is tickling me?" she asked. "Why, it's little Simon Snail. He must be very happy to be out on this rainy day." And Grandmother Milkweed was right!

*Slowly, slowly,
oh so slow.
Slowly, slowly*

*he will go.
Silvery trail
behind him, so.*

Yes, Simon Snail was very happy indeed. He was a silent little fellow and liked to take his time, without all the rushing about of the ants, beetles, and the fluttering and buzzing of the airy crowd. It was so still and peaceful today. He loved the peace and quiet of Grandmother's roots, but he wondered about those who lived high above in the air and light.

"Good morning, Simon," said Grandmother.

"Good morning, Grandmother Milkweed," Simon replied to her greeting. "I have been wondering—can flowers fly? I want to see the flowers that were flying about yesterday when the sun was shining. But where are they today?"

"Well, dear boy," she said, "they are resting today, but if you come back tomorrow when the sun is shining again, you will see them. And you can ask them all your questions yourself."

The next day Simon started out very early in the morning.

*Slowly, slowly,
oh so slow.
Slowly, slowly,
he will go.
Silvery trail
behind him, so.*

The milkweed patch was shady and cool down below, but up above the sun was shining, and Simon could



see the flying flowers. So many colors! He climbed and he climbed, farther than he had ever climbed before, leaving his silvery trail behind.

High above, Grandmother Milkweed's flowers bloomed, and their lovely scent filled the air. Simon had never smelled such a sweet fragrance. He licked the drops on the broad, green leaves and even the raindrops tasted sweet. At last, he was up in the world of light.

The furry bumblebees bumbled about, drinking nectar from the flowers, when suddenly, a dainty creature with huge orange wings fluttered down near Simon. She held onto the flower with her front legs, and said, "Well, Good morning! Who are you?"

"I am Simon Snail. Are you a flower?"

"Why no, I'm a butterfly. The People call me Monarch."

"That's a beautiful name," said Simon. "Like a Queen! What are you doing?"

"I am drinking sweet nectar from the milkweed flowers. Would you like to taste some?"

"Yes!" said Simon.

"Then here you go! Catch!" And she shook her wings. All the tiny pink flowers shivered, and a burst of nectar-drops landed all around Simon. He had never tasted anything so sweet and delicious!



Illustration by Jo Valens from *Tell Me Another Story* (WECAN, 2019)

"Thank you so much," he called, as the Monarch fluttered off to the next flower.

"Come visit me again, little friend," she called.

*Slowly, slowly.
oh so slow.
Slowly, slowly,
he will go.
Silvery trail
behind him, so.*

Simon began the long trip back down Grandmother Milkweed's strong stem. He was much refreshed from the nectar, and full of wonder after his visit with the butterfly. At last, Simon was home, down in the cool, wet soil. "It's dark and quiet down here. I'm glad to be home!" He paused and looked around. "But what an adventure. I am going to tell all my friends about the flying flowers and the Monarch Queen, who shared sweet nectar with me. And I will visit her again. I wonder what stories she has to tell!"

And Grandmother Milkweed smiled and smiled. Such a fine day for all her children. ♦

Andree (Andy) Ward led kindergarten, nursery, and parent-child classes at Hawthorne Valley School starting in 1982. Now retired from those roles, she continues as mentor to Waldorf early childhood teachers and site visit evaluator to Waldorf member programs on behalf of WECAN. She is Director of the Early Childhood Specialization for teacher training at the Alkion Center of Hawthorne Valley Association in Harlemville, NY.

Round and Round It Goes

A Simple Circle Game for Children Under Three

~ Kathryn Meyer

Circle time takes on a whole different shape with the toddler age group...literally and figuratively. Our “circles” look more like blobs or clusters and our “time” extends throughout the day. We sing through transitions, we sing and share verses as we three adults work with twelve children, dressing in all of our glorious outdoor gear and then undressing again. We sing to connect, we sing to calm. Our day is one big transition...or as I like to think of it, one big circle time.

In my Chipmunks class, I wait a good three months into the school year before I attempt to form something that looks like a traditional circle time. When I do, it's on our circular rug and only then do I sing, “Let's form a circle like the circle 'round the sun, let's form a circle to include everyone.” At this mid-point in the year, the children are ready to find their place in the circle. They are ready to take a pause from the social outbreath and they are ready to hear what's in store for today's gathering time. They are ready to participate as they can.

We have a simple circle game that the children anticipate with great delight. Aside from the joy of rolling the ball back to the teacher, it offers the children an opportunity to practice waiting, sharing, patience with one another, and self-regulation.

The first three lines are sung to the tune of “This is the way we wash our clothes,” while the teacher rolls the ball in front of her/himself:

*Round and round and round it goes,
round it goes, round it goes,
round and round and round it goes...*

Last line spoken:

Where it stops, no one knows.

At this point, the teacher rolls the ball to a child in the circle. Once the ball is rolled, the teacher holds out her own hands as a gesture of receiving the ball back.

Teacher repeats the song/verse and then rolls the ball to another child. The game continues in this manner, changing from singing to a spoken verse to move the circle game along at a faster pace as the children's attention begins to wane.

When all the children have had their turn or the game has run its course, the teacher hands one child the ball to hold and this leads into the following verse (adapted from “Finger-Plays” by Emilie Poulssen):

*Here's a ball for [Name], big and soft and round.
Here is [Name]'s hammer, see how she can pound.
Here are [Name]'s dollies, standing in a row,
Here is [Name]'s music, clapping, clapping so.
Here's a big umbrella, to keep our [Name] dry.
Here is [Name]'s cradle, to rock him by and by.*

Form ball with cupped hands
Fist lightly pounds into open palm
Ten fingers held up, wiggling
Clap hands together
Form umbrella overhead
Form rocking cradle with arms clasping elbows

We go around the circle, making sure each child's name is called upon at least once in the game. I have found that the children delight in this simple interactive rhyme that invites them to participate, which they eagerly do. The ball then gets tucked away for another day. ♦

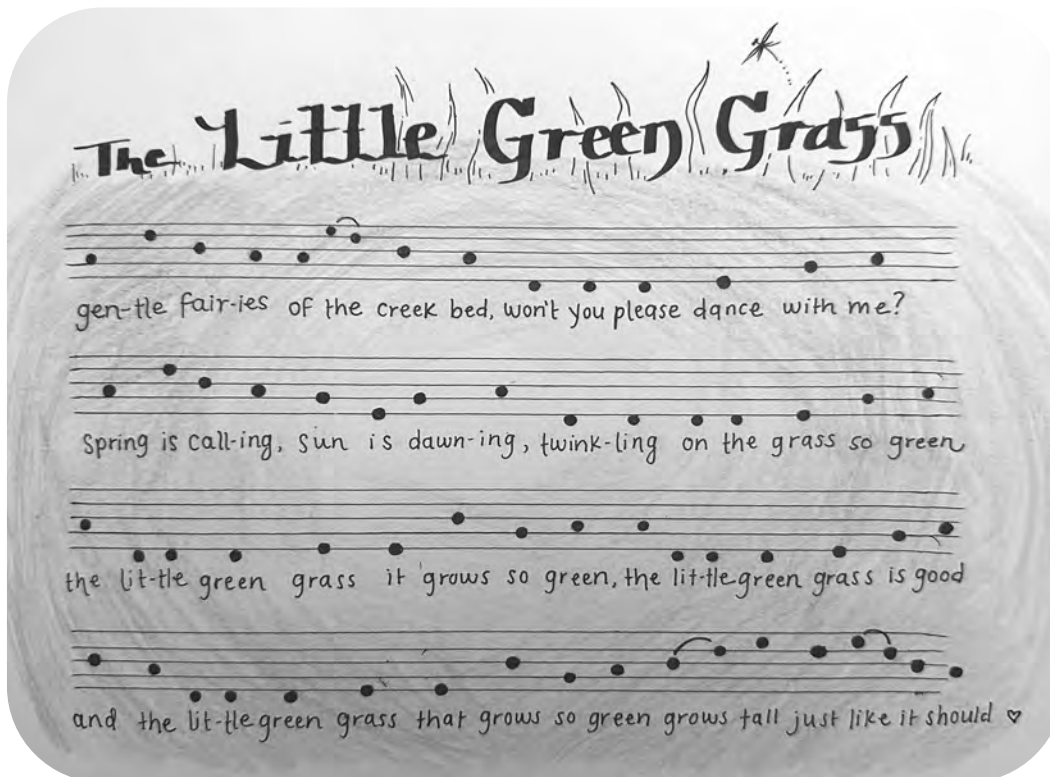
Kathryn Meyer is the class teacher for the Chipmunks (18 months to three years old) at Mountaintop Waldorf Children's Garden in Saugerties, NY, where she has been teaching for ten years. She credits Celia Riahi and her friend and mentor Wendy Weinrich for the inspiration for so much of what she does in her work with this tender age.

Little Green Grass Circle

~ Casey Powers

This is an early spring circle, accompanied by a mood-of-the-fifth song that I wrote during my teacher training at the Sound Circle Center for Arts and Anthroposophy in 2022. My inspiration for this circle came from a small area of my kindergarten yard, where there is a pond that occasionally fills with a bit of water in the winter. Local frogs feel comfortable enough to make their home there. It's where the children and I let things grow wildly, and it's a special place to honor the elemental beings and small creatures. Unlike other areas of our beautiful play yard, this is not a place to frolic and play in, but one to watch, listen, and observe. We built bridges across this small "creek bed," for the children to journey across and peer over to get a better look at the beautiful life that lives underneath.

This circle is a journey of wonder as little creatures awaken from their winter's rest, and blades of fresh green grass stir with new life surrounding the creek. The refrain, "the little green grass is good," comes from my work with my kindergartners to let the new spring grass grow, to find ourselves in relationship with nature, and to love this tender little wild space just as it is.



Refrain

To be sung holding hands, moving clockwise in a circle, after each verse. Personalizations and substitutions could be made for "creek bed": garden, seaside, river, forest, etc. The creek is personal to me and my children, but the words should be adapted by each teacher with their space in mind.

Gentle fairies of the creek bed, won't you please dance with me?

Spring is calling, sun is dawning, twinkling on the grass so green.

The little green grass it grows so green, the little green grass is good,

And the little green grass that grows so green grows tall just like it should.

Verses

Each verse can be personalized with different movement for each being in the grass. Caterpillar crawling, frog jumps, etc. Some verses can be done seated, as a finger game. There are so many possibilities!

1. *There is someone working hard in the grass by the creek!
Let us look closer and have us a peek.
I wonder who is working deep under the grass,
Caring for the roots, to push the shoots up at last?
A dear little gnome in their mossy green home says,
"May the shoots greet the sun, each and every one!"*
2. *And who is that crawling in the tall green grass?
It's a fuzzy brown caterpillar, crawling, creeping past.
Soon, soon, she'll be wrapped so snugly in her cocoon
For a little rest....but when she's free at last
She'll quietly come awake, give her wings a little shake,
And flitter and flutter so elegantly
Hither and thither through the grass so green.*
3. *And what could that be, a soft little ringing (can you hear the bell?)
Where the light is shining, a small voice is singing.
A fairy is there, though you may not see
Upon wings glistening from behind a nearby tree.
They might tap upon your shoulder, they may whisper in your ear
With the tiniest voice, the faintest whisper, "Please tread lightly here."
(Let's show them how soft our walking feet can be!)*
4. *And who is that jumping with a hop and a plop?
It's a bumpy green frog who just won't stop!
He ribbits and rustles the rising green shoots,
Until he nestles in his bed just next to their roots.
He tucks himself in, warm in the creek bed,
And as the stars shine, he rests his sweet head. ♦*



Photo by Charlotte Fischer from the German edition of *Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves*.

Casey Powers is a kindergarten teacher at the Davis Waldorf School in California. She graduated from Sound Circle Center for Arts in Anthroposophy in 2022 and has a BA in Education and Writing from The Evergreen State College. She is passionate about music, storytelling, elemental beings, and cultivating loving relationships with nature. Casey is honored to be a teacher, finds joy in her work, and learns so much from the children and families in her care.

Will o' the Wisps

A Hand Gesture Game

~ Wilma Ellersiek

For a video of Lynn St. Pierre demonstrating the game, see the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/yc66ux39>

It flimmers – it flimmers.

Holding hands next to each other, move them from below to above, twice. At the same time, lightly and quickly turn wrists in and out, making a restless movement like lapping flames.

It shimmers – it shimmers.

Hold both hands, palms forward, at nose level; the hands are on either side of, and a little forward of, the face. Lightly move all fingers, like glowing coals.

It flits – it flits.

Quickly move both hands diagonally forward, with pointer fingers extended, once to the left, once to the right.

It glits – it glits.

Hold both fists (with rolled-in fingers forward) next to each other at chest height. At “glits” pointers dart out and are pushed up toward eye level. Then roll up pointers lightly and at the second “glits” let them dart out again above head.

It blits – zits – zits – zits.

Draw “lightning” into the air with the tips of both pointers, starting high left and moving down, right, left, right, down to thighs, in the shape of a thunderbolt.

What creatures? Tisp – tisps –

Hold fists (rolled-up fingers forward) with protruding pointers quietly next to each other at chest height. Tip left pointer forward at “Tisp,” and right pointer at “Tisps.”

the Will-of-the-Wisps!

“Throw” both index fingers up into the air, twice!

They tripple – they trapple.

Quickly open both fists and wave both hands (palms down) lightly side to side at waist height.

They skip – pel – lel – lapple.

Wave both hands (palms facing) lightly side to side, a bit higher.

Now whirling – now twirling,

Arms circle outward on the high diagonal on each side of the body, like two cones.

first here – then yon,

Point to the high diagonal with both hands, once to the left and once to the right.

*and wheeee – –
they're gone!*

At “whee,” throw up hand and shake them for the long “eee,” then hide them behind your back. ♦

Excerpted from *Gnomes and Giants: Pixies and Elves: Hand Gesture and Movement Games for Young Children* (WECAN, 2023).

The Blacksmith's Shop

~ Tess McNatt

The Blacksmith's Shop (or Farrier's Shop) is a way to imaginatively address children who are running inside.

Invite the child or children who are running to come to your blacksmith's shop. The child sits in your lap and you (the blacksmith) check that the pony's shoes (the child's slippers) are on securely. Pretend to hammer nails into the soles of the slippers, rub the tops of feet with pressure, check that slippers are on securely (fasten Velcro, take them off and make a big gesture of putting them back on with care, etc.) I often make up a little song on the spot that I repeat for each "customer."

Once the blacksmith's job is complete, the pony is ready and able to walk again.

You will find that children line up for the blacksmith's shop regardless of whether they were running or not. Children often purposefully put their slippers on the wrong way so that there is a need to come to the blacksmith.

Happy hammering! ♦

Tess McNatt is a kindergarten teacher at Edinburgh Steiner School located in Edinburgh, Scotland. She is originally from Maryland, and worked there as an early childhood special education teacher before life took her to Corvallis, OR and then Edinburgh. Tess is always keen to collaborate, so don't be shy to reach out or come and visit Scotland!

Moses Supposes His Toeses are Roses . . .

Traditional rhyme submitted by Stephanie Hoelscher

When the frustrations of putting on socks, shoes, or boots escalates, the tongue-twisting language in this short poem from an anonymous poet offers levity and an intimate moment for co-regulation, which can help a child move through the challenge. The poem also offers space for gentle or playful touch, depending upon the individual child.

*Moses supposes his toeses are roses,
But Moses supposes erroneously;
For nobody's toeses are posies of roses
As Moses supposes his toeses to be.*

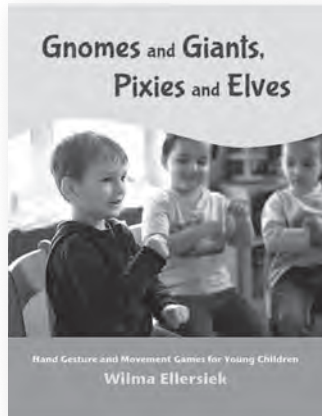
This version comes from Caroline Kennedy, ed., *A Family of Poems* (Hyperion Books for Children).

Stephanie Hoelscher lives in central Vermont with her family, dogs, and chickens. A long-time early childhood teacher in New England, she is an active member of the WECAN Research group and is a contributor to the forthcoming WECAN publication, *Becoming and Belonging*.

Publication News

The following books are strongly recommended for study in connection with the theme of this issue.

New Releases:

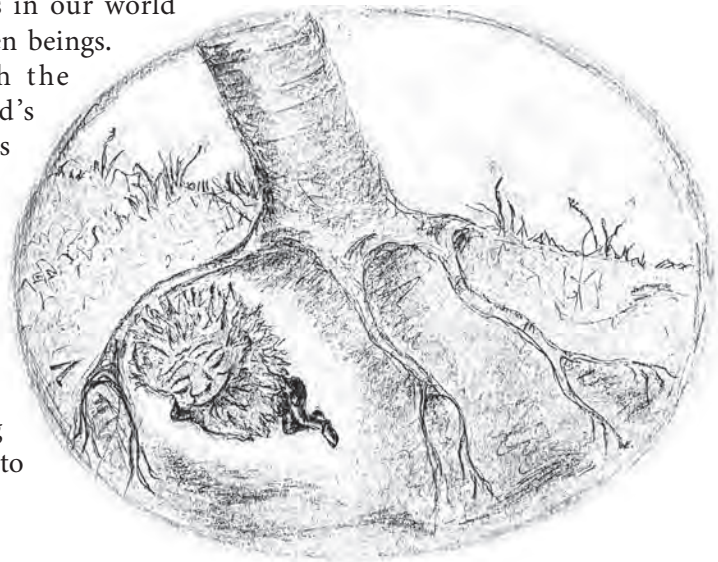


Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves: Hand Gesture and Movement Games for Young Children, concludes the series of collections of hand gesture games by Wilma Ellersiek, which have brought much joy to children and adults. Lynn St. Pierre and Somer Serpe have valiantly continued and completed the work of translation begun by Kundry Willwerth.

Lynn says: “*Gnomes and Giants, Pixies and Elves* is an entire book of elemental plays. As the children embody the elementals, they orient themselves in our world of both seen and unseen beings. The connection with the elementals, in a child’s devotional way, brings health and well-being

and honors the elementals. The play reprinted in this volume of Gateways, ‘The Will o’ the Wisps,’ offers a beautiful, engaging experience of the beings of air and fire. As the children experience this elemental play, it nourishes their balance, self-movement and well-being, fortifying their four foundational senses.”

These imaginations and their accompanying movements will bring refreshing, enlivening forces to all who encounter them.



Drawing by Wilma Ellersiek

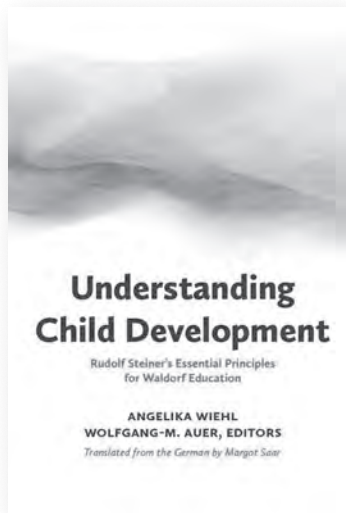
Speech Development in the Digital Age is a new edition of Rainer Patzlaff’s classic study, *Childhood Falls Silent*, revised and updated for today in an attractive format. The booklet has been translated by Margot Saar from the German version published in 2023 by the German Waldorf Kindergarten Association.

The first in a planned two-booklet series with the title of “Right to Childhood,” *Speech Development in the Digital Age* reports on the decline of speech and language development and the escalation of speech disorders over the last several decades. Patzlaff presents data and a thoughtful perspective on how we, as parents and caregivers, can downplay the influences of our digital devices and awaken our children to the treasures of the spoken word.

In her preface, Susan Howard notes that “Although the focus of the research has been on child development in Germany, it is clear in our times that these phenomena are being experienced worldwide, and we are very pleased to offer this important resource to the English-speaking Waldorf world.” Single copies are available, as well as bundles of 5 copies at a discounted price.



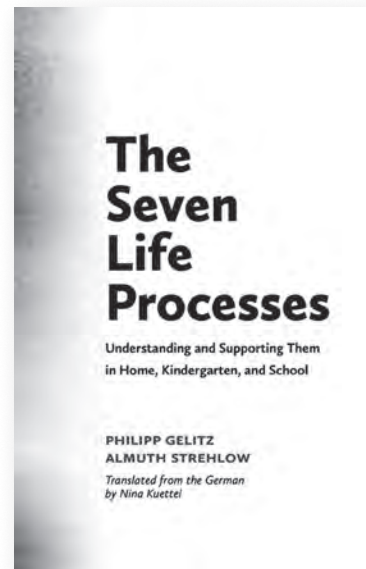
Treasures from the Backlist:



Understanding Child Development: Rudolf Steiner's Essential Principles for Waldorf Education is an important contribution to teacher development that comes from our colleagues in Europe. Edited by Angelika Wiehl and Wolfgang-M. Auer and translated from the German by Margot Saar, it

centers around a thoughtfully chosen and arranged selection of excerpts from Rudolf Steiner's works, which form a basis for meeting the needs of children out of a true, holistic understanding that supports them in the fullest way possible. Topics covered include the image of the human being in Waldorf education, child development, imitation, the sensory organization, imagination, play, rhythmic life, and the temperaments. The section concludes with sources that guide the educator in self-education, developing pedagogical intuition, and the practice of exercises for self-development.

Along with introducing the Steiner excerpts, the editors and other authors have contributed extended essays on the anthropology of childhood, imitation, sensory development, the study and practice of Waldorf education, and the future of childhood. With many years of experience as teachers and teacher trainers, they have made this a compact but very powerful resource that should be widely used and appreciated.



The Seven Life Processes — Understanding and Supporting them in Home, Kindergarten, and School has been called by Nancy Blanning “a WECAN publication classic to be returned to again and again.” Along with Rudolf Steiner's descriptions of the multiple aspects of

human experience and activity—the threefold soul forces of Thinking, Feeling, and Willing, the fourfold organization of physical, etheric, astral and I, the twelvefoldness of the senses—this book focuses on the sevenfold life processes of breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting or sorting, maintaining, growing, and reproducing or creating. As Nancy puts it, “This book organizes what can be a dizzying array of numbers into an accessible and practical framework of how the life processes weave and dance with and amongst all these other human aspects.”

The first half of the book explains how each of the life processes functions on a physiological level, and the second half tells what educators, parents, and other caregivers can do to support the healthy life and functioning of the life processes in practical, concrete ways. Nancy calls the section on “Salutogenic Teaching” in particular a “treasure chest of suggestions,” describing areas of weakness that can be supported by particular attention to one or another of the life processes.