
From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Is Waldorf early childhood education preparing our children for their future? This question keeps knocking at the door as we evaluate the past 100 years and prepare for the next. Recent and upcoming issues of *Gateways* are exploring the essentials for healthy incarnation in the first years, to prepare children for the practical, intellectual, and societal tasks ahead—for the whole of life. Among these essentials we can list:

- Guarding unhurried time to grow and mature so etheric growth forces can finish their work on the physical body
- Honoring the first seven years as a unique time in the human biography, when foundations for future capacities and skills are laid
- Surrounding the child with rich sensory experiences that lay the foundations for literacy and other cognitive activities while also protecting the senses from too much stimulation and exposure
- Attentively observing the child's physical growth, behavior, and interests to read developmental progress
- Allowing abundant time for imitation and play, while observing what the children say and do as messages indicating where they are on their incarnational path.

Readers will see all of these considered in a full and rich collection of articles in this issue of *Gateways*. Here is a preview of what you will find as you explore conceptual, pedagogical, and practical discussions reflecting on the essentials in Waldorf early childhood education.

The opening article is written by Michelle Gullage, who has experience as both a Waldorf early childhood and lower grades teacher. She looks at the question of literacy development from both sides. She has returned to working in early childhood as a deliberate choice. Her article tells why.

This is followed by an articulate detailing of how the Waldorf early years curriculum supports literacy development. Laura Cabral gives a clear outline of what we want to offer the children. She states: "The age-appropriate experiential curriculum is created to build pre-literacy skills by fostering the development

of the four foundational senses, the will forces, and imagination." It is upon these elements that future reading skills are founded.

Laurie Clark shares how children's drawings show a fascinating progression of steps in their development. The fruit of Laurie's long study devoted to children's drawings brings us some surprising and exciting new insight into how drawings help us "read" a child's steps of maturation.

"I'm bored!" is commonly seen as a call for "give me something new to do!" Ruth Ker offers a deep look at what this phrase indicates in moving toward school readiness. She explains that this is a sign of readying, not readiness.

Parents are nervous and anxious about their children being "behind" in keeping up with the rest of the world. Rie Seo shares a thoughtfully researched presentation the early childhood teachers at the Waldorf School of Garden City, NY presented to parents. Mainstream sources confirm that the foundational senses must be consolidated to build a strong neurological base for future cognitive tasks. The Pyramid of Learning shows this graphically. This presentation can be a valuable adult education resource for our schools.

Going back to our essentials, we can ask, what about play? How does that prepare children for their future? An excerpt from Sharifa Oppenheimer's work gives a secure answer to that question.

The literacy curriculum from Apple Blossom preschool gives us an outline of how literacy is developed through the rich exposure children have to oral speech. The story telling, circle imaginations, puppetry, rhymes and verses are powerful building blocks toward literacy. Thank you to Allison Reznik for sharing this piece.

Eurythmy also supports literacy, as explained by long-time eurythmist, Alice Stamm. The connection of speech sounding with gesture is powerful. Alice's explanation makes us feel fortunate to have eurythmy in the early childhood classes.

Jerlyn Burke helps to celebrate the contribution and value of nursery rhymes in her short article. Fun

sounds, amusing images, rhythm, and playful speech all come together in these rhymes. These little ditties awaken the ear to sound discrimination and invite interested listening.

Aimee de Ney sees the importance and power of helping children become friends and allies with the natural world. Learning names of plants and animals builds relationship between human beings and all of the natural world. Knowing names and using them respectfully open the door to friendship with the “beings of the Lands,” a gift Aimee strives to give to children.

Janene Ping’s article on building literacy in non-academic ways rounds out this opening section. How we speak clearly, emphasizing the rhythm of the word with its distinct sounds educates phonemic awareness, letter discrimination, and word segmenting. All of these are necessary precursors to academic literacy. Children deserve time to be immersed in these experiences.

For the Classroom has new material to bring fresh sounds, and imagination this school year. Debora Petschek shares a story to bring Martin Luther King, Jr. and his legacy appropriately to young children. This imagination of the shepherd and his sheep is truthful and sweet without being either too explicit or sentimental.

Three circles are here as well. Saara Fahey presents a circle to bridge Dia de Los Muertos to Lantern time with images of the butterfly in its transformation. Beautiful pictures show how she represents this on her seasonal table.

Sarah Mortenson Gauss presents a tomten story, which has grown out of her love with Scandinavia and its folk lore. The circle movements include some American Sign Language (ASL) Sarah included for a hearing impaired child in her class. This circle is delightfully fun and active.

A winter Valentine circle brings something new with the “rumbly, bumbly bellies” of the King and Queen of Hearts. Tasty language and amusing

happenings mark this circle. Thank you, Laura Esposito, for contributing this.

Looking to the classroom in a different way, Cordula Hetland shares her love for making “the little ones” and enlivening them with the class children. If you have not tried these or want to freshen up relationship with the Littles, this article is for you. The accompanying photos are beautiful.

Finally, for our personal self-development and our relation to words and communication, Stephanie Hoelscher shares “Five Good Words” to help us consider our relationship with the power of words.

Book reviews

Three new WECAN publications are featured. Please note *Speech Development in the Digital Age* for a start. This dovetails in with our reflections on the literacy question.

Mentoring and Professional Evaluation in Waldorf Early Childhood in its updated and revised edition is an essential guide book for schools, mentors, and evaluators. It can also be a helpful tool for individual teacher’s own self-evaluation. Reflection and review of our own professional, pedagogical, and personal growth and development is an essential for Waldorf educators, too.

The long awaited first volume of *Free Movement from the Very Start* is now available. This thorough consideration of understanding and supporting healthy incarnation from birth to age three is a huge work. Jane Swain’s study, research, and examples from her work as physical therapist, movement specialist, and grandmother are unequalled in other publications. The book is a treasure chest.

This issue concludes with what could have been the leading article or, as placed here, the epilogue to this lofty and vast consideration of health in body, soul, and spirit for the whole of life. We have found Heike Adamsberger’s contemplation and celebration of this special time quite moving. May you find inspiration from it too. ♦

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