

Gateways

A Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America

Fall/Winter 2005, Issue 49

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From the Editor

Stephen Spitalny

Dear Readers,

In recent months there have been various powerful expressions of nature's strength. Many people's lives and livelihoods have been affected. What a poignant reminder that we live on the earth, a large and living body that is not always predictable. These events can be a reminder to be thankful for the life that we are given from the being that is our home. The Advent season is a special time to reawaken our gratitude for the earth itself who gives us also the very substance of which we are made.

These disastrous events can also be a time to reawaken to community. I experienced the most active neighborhood and local community life in my town of Santa Cruz in the weeks following the large earthquake in 1989. Disasters can be a time of neighbors helping neighbors and truly meeting each other. They can also be a time to remember that we are members of a larger community. WECAN members and readers of this Newsletter all are part of a large and loosely knit community of carers for the young child. Perhaps we could consider if and how we could reach out and help some friends in far away places doing the same work.

These recent disasters also can awaken a question of the role of WECAN in the world. What arises first for me is that WECAN is a vehicle that connects me (and all of you) to others doing the work of Waldorf early childhood caring and teaching. It allows me, through *Gateways* and various other shorter newsletters and mailings, to be aware of what is going on in the community of Waldorf/Steiner early childhood education, both new developments and challenges (and disasters) others may be facing. WECAN also helps me to deepen my own work with the children, both through publications (books and *Gateways*), conferences and workshops. And I am grateful for WECAN and enthusiastic about the gifts it brings. I read the books WECAN publishes and am astounded that someone finds the time for the writing and the depths of knowledge and experience from which to express. I hear about new approaches to Steiner's ideals and practical suggestions and

wonder, "How did they think of that?" I am refreshed and renewed in my work through my connection to WECAN. And out of that enthusiasm and gratitude, I ask you, the reader, to consider your connection to WECAN. Do you receive nourishment for your work from WECAN? Is your thinking enlivened by ideas coming to you through WECAN publications? Is work of WECAN inspiring for you?

If the answer is "yes" to these questions, I ask you to consider becoming a member of WECAN if you are not yet, and suggesting to your friends, colleagues and parents of the children in your groups to consider supporting WECAN and themselves by joining and helping WECAN to thrive and continue its work into the future.

This issue of *Gateways* is packed full of content. Of course, we include some brief reports on storm-related disasters. We have reports from two recent conferences on the work with the young child that we would all have liked to attend I'm sure. We have book reviews, and some practical activities that you can use in your early childhood work. Cynthia Aldinger has offered a response to a question posed last issue, and perhaps we can see the beginning of a venue for conversation on questions related to our work with the children. Please send along your question or reflections—it needn't be a long article—and, through *Gateways*, we can share them with others.

This issue also includes two articles on therapeutic work and a fascinating article on the beginnings of the Waldorf kindergarten movement that helps to give a context for the work we do today. Thanks to *Kindling*, our sister journal from England. We have a mutual article-sharing relationship and, over recent years, have both enjoyed and included each other's articles, this issue being no exception. We are also making space to honor Margret Meyerkort who recently turned eighty. Margret has had a large influence on many in our movement, and I am personally hugely grateful for the inspiration I have received from her. Margret has always kept the social, the community aspect of life, at the forefront of her thinking and that is inspiring:

So the work of the teacher of children under the age of seven can assume the additional function of offering a social center. It will then be surrounded by a wider community, an active periphery which in turn provides for the growing child some intimations of human understanding and social relationships in which he will later find himself as an adult.

When we look at human development during the first seven years and are receptive to the preponderance of the life of the will at this

age, we recognize the awesome fact that it is our adult attentiveness which to a large extent shapes the growing woman and man. We can feel sustained by Rudolf Steiner's exhortation to practice, practice, practice. In contemplating the nature of the will, some will want to work inwardly to strengthen and widen our creative faculties and at the same time to help form a wider social community, a community which helps us sustain the life of the kindergarten.

From *The Challenge of the Will*, written by Margret Meyerkort with Rudi Lissau.

Early Childhood Teaching and the Etheric

Cynthia Aldinger

While working in my yard today, I was mulling over Margo Running's question in the last Gateways. Her query has to do with a perception of exhaustion of which many early childhood teachers/caregivers speak of, particularly if they work more than four hours with young children. I realized that the different ages and stages of life affect the energy levels of some individuals. In my thirties and forties, I was very energized by my work with young children, and I also loved the work of founding a school, being the faculty chair, the college chair, and everything in between at one time or another. At the same time, I was raising two sons and tending to a marriage. Yes, I believe I was energized by the forces of living in the present with the young children. In fact, I remember those times when I would steal away to my kindergarten room in the afternoons to re-energize before having to attend yet another meeting or deal with colleagues or parents who requested time with me. It was as if the room itself was filled with the health-giving forces I needed. But I also remember that it took a great deal of sheer will to tend to my household, to cook and clean, to be active in my community.

The relationship of the etheric to our work with children is a huge subject and I would like

to share just a very few thoughts for now. A helpful tool Rudolf Steiner spoke to teachers about is called The Pedagogical Law. It is meant to help us understand the forces from which we draw in order to best serve the ages of children in our care or tutelage. The premise behind this law is that there are four bodies of activity from which we are able to function throughout life, the physical, etheric, astral and ego bodies.

The pedagogical law tells us that when the child is developing and strengthening his/her physical body, we teachers/caregivers/parents are ideally working with them through the strength of our own etheric forces. The adult's etheric is, in a sense, educating the child's physical body. When the child is developing and strengthening his/her etheric body, the adult is teaching/tending through astral/soul forces. When the budding youth is developing and strengthening his/her astral/soul body, we are teaching/tending through the strength of our ego forces. To help early childhood children become physically healthy, we need to be life-filled enough (etherically strong) to provide them with the outer activities and nourishment that will provide that health.

The primary work of young children is the development of their physical bodies. Their own

etheric forces are there to help support this development, particularly the development of their internal organs, in those early years. When these etheric forces are freed from the intense tending of building the child's physical, they are then rightfully placed in the service of more formal learning and memory work. Each individual is dealing with his or her own etheric strengths or weaknesses when it comes to memory, forming or breaking habits, developing rhythmical living, and other upbuilding activities.

According to the pedagogical law, we caregivers/teachers are called upon to be healthy in our etheric forces in order to provide the physical needs of these little ones. I don't think it necessarily means that the children draw out or use up or deplete our etheric forces. Only we can do that according to how we choose to live or according to health or illnesses with which we may be dealing. Rudolf Steiner does indicate that the child is very bound up with the mother's etheric forces in those early years, but his indications for early childhood teachers seem to be more in the realm of the pedagogical law.

In our last *Gateways*, Margo Running posed a question about the potential mythology of early childhood educators being exhausted due to the children somehow using our etheric forces. I view it a bit differently. We are often tired when we are early childhood teachers. Rather than to think that the children are using our etheric forces, could we consider what we are doing to upbuild our etheric forces from which we are meant to be working. When we have reserve strength in any area of our lives, we are less likely to feel overwhelmed or exhausted. So, what types of activities can build etheric reserves? A few suggestions include: nutrition, sleep, nourishing activities, artistic activity, nature, bringing consciousness to changing a personal habit, music and humor. What fills your cup? What do you do for fun?

Of course, there can be other reasons why we are tired. We can spend a lot of energy on overthinking, on worrying about situations, on trying to please everyone, on adjusting to changes. When we first start with a new group of children or move into a new space, we are also

adjusting and helping the children adjust to becoming a cohesive social group.

These things make it all the more important that we tend to our own etheric (and physical) well-being. And this can be done in homeopathic doses. We don't have to disappear, drop out, or disengage in order to protect ourselves. Can we consider how we meet each moment as it comes? If we must attend yet one more meeting, can we have some delicious, nutritious food there? Can we tell a few jokes? Sing? Walk in nature to the meeting instead of driving? Can we be aware of the needs of our colleagues who are there with us, helping to insure that their own children are receiving the care they need while they are at the meeting, making sure that the meetings are hygienic, making sure that, yes, they are not required to attend too many meetings every single week. Perhaps realistic agendas with more mandated groups to carry particular types of agenda items could help.

Margo also brought the question of Christ consciousness living in the etheric and that, in our studies of Rudolf Steiner, we understand that young children live in this Christ consciousness (particularly in the first three years). If this is so, she ponders, how can we be exhausted? Why would working with these children and working out of the etheric not instead be an elixir?

It is a very worthy question and one that we can mostly only ponder and each of us begin to find our own answers. Now, in my fifties, I have more energy than when I was in my forties or thirties. I process things differently. I care differently. I can let go of things more easily and move on. As colleagues, it can be helpful to remember that we are not all in the same life phase. Try to remember what mattered to you when you were in your twenties, thirties, or forties. What was it like to be with children all morning or all day and then again with your own family the rest of the day and night? What was it like to want a new car and a new home, to be in a troubled personal relationship or to be pining for a relationship? What was it like to ponder almost every experience as if it were filled with mystery and meaning?

We tend to meet life very differently in each of the various soul phases. This can impact how well we can take up our own personal care, how well we can fill up our etheric cups in order to be fuller people for each other and for the little ones and their parents.

Mostly, we do our best. And when we don't do our best, somewhere deep inside of us we know it—and that can be the most draining of all. We have each answered the call to this most sacred work of service to human development, working with young children and their families. Let's support each other as we

find our own relationship to that Christ consciousness that strengthens us regardless of our religious faith and practice. Let's support each other as we discover ways to homeopathically bring heaven into our daily lives. And may they give you strength of which you are in need.

Cynthia Aldinger is the founder and director of LifeWays North America.

RESEARCH

Learning Difficulties in the Early Years

Ewout Van-Manen

The magical process of child development takes a long time. This is rightly so because, as human beings, we need a solid foundation to prepare and develop the faculties that will make each one of us unique and able to play a constructive role in society. Unfortunately, in contrast, the gestation period is too short and we are born as delicate and helpless little beings.

On a physical level, we have to be born almost nine months premature as our brains and heads are so large that it would be impossible to leave the bun in the oven until it was fully baked. So babies are delicate creatures that are really not ready to face life. This is why parenting is the greatest task that is asked of us as human beings.

Slowly, the child incarnates and meets the world through the twelve senses. Each child is an individual and will have strengths and weaknesses that may have arisen as a result of karmic and/or hereditary laws or as a result of environmental influences during pregnancy or early childhood. In many children, these individual strengths and weaknesses—and also varying speeds of incarnation and development—don't seem to matter too much. With reasonably good parenting and teaching, they still pass the normal milestones at similar

times to others. With some children, however, there are subtle little differences that can already be spotted in early childhood. These may grow into problems that can cause obstacles to learning and development. This in turn can cause their self-esteem to be effected and could also affect their behavior as well as the behavior of others to them.

In many of these children, these sorts of differences are almost invisible, especially at the pre-literacy and pre-numeracy stage. These problems are usually related to the senses and most frequently to the postural system. The postural system consists of the sense of self-movement and the sense of balance.

Movement

Movement is the essence of life: "From the very beginning of life there is movement. Just a few days after conception, inside a tiny ocean, an acrobat starts to perform. Beginning with gentle rocking movements in response to the ocean's tide, small primitive movements gather in strength until spontaneous movements and reflex responses gradually unfold. These early movements will eventually become part of the dance of development, the stages of which have been choreographed over the course of many

millennia through the evolution of human kind. These tiny movements are the human being's first outward expression of their experience of the world. . ."¹

In the first year of life, the little child will acquire thousands of new movement patterns and movement skills. Initially, babies' movements are uncontrolled, but the more they move, the better control becomes. At first, the development of coordination of eye, hand and ear takes place when the baby is lying on her back and follows the parent's movement in the room. The baby will start to turn its head in the direction of sounds. The little hand may reach out for objects such as a mobile or other toy. Sight, hand and ear are stimulated to be active by what is happening around the tiny child. Lying on the floor, the baby should have the experience of rolling over on to the tummy, exercising the sense of balance and activating the muscular system. These movements all help to establish the "body map:" spatial orientation. This will also lead to creeping and crawling and prepare for the momentous moment when standing upright is possible and full movement exploration commences.

Balance

In a lecture entitled "Supersensible Processes in the Activities of the Human Senses,"² Rudolf Steiner explains how the senses of life, self-movement, and balance are sustained by supersensible members of the human being bestowed to us by the spiritual world. He describes how Spirit Man, the spiritual member of the human being which will develop in the far future, interpenetrates the sense of life. Life-Spirit works in the sense of self-movement. Spirit-Self, which it is the task of the human being to develop at this time, sustains the sense of balance; thus, these three senses are at the same time spiritual organs of perception.

The sense of balance, centered in our inner ear, senses the relationship between the earth's gravity and our own body. It is directly related especially to the senses of hearing, sight, (self-) movement and touch. If it functions in a healthy way, we also feel calm and secure.

If we upset our balance, for example by walking along a tight-rope, or by drinking alcohol, having a middle ear infection, etc., we are less secure and less free. It will be harder to do anything else other than concentrate on balancing. This feeling of security and calm helps us to feel our Self as a spiritual being and experience our Self in relationship to the world.

With the attainment of balance, the child's head lifts up into the light. The antithesis between gravity and levity is achieved and imagined in the (new) upright posture. Although this is obviously connected with the ego, an experience of balance (and movement) already exists in the womb as the embryo feels every movement the mother makes in the cushioned environment of the womb³. The newborn baby does not yet experience the senses separately as sound, movement, vision, touch, etc. All fuse together as a single experience of feeling. Physically, it takes until the age of seven to eight years for the balance mechanism, the cerebellum and the corpus callosum to be myelinated,⁴ and it is during these years, the playgroup and kindergarten years, that vestibular stimulation/ balance is the natural ingredient in every normal child's play. Just observe a three- to six-year-old child walking down the street, constantly hopping, skipping and twirling. With great joy, they are learning to control and develop balance. The most advanced level of balance, however, is to stay still!

The little child learns to (self-)balance as the first major accomplishment only he/she can bring about for his/herself. This milestone gives the body the means by which the child can say "I." This great achievement of free, individual balance is the foundation of the relationship with the world and with others.

So, balance is achieved as part of the incarnation process, on the one hand, but the ego needs the physical organs of balance, the vestibular system to be functioning properly, just as a person would not be able to think as a person if he did not have a brain. Nor would a brain be able to be used for thinking without an ego! Via balance, the Ego attempts to orient itself in the world harmoniously.

Balance enables us to have a relationship to the world outside and the inner world. If we stand on the edge of a precipice we feel dizzy and may even feel a strong pull over the edge. We are filling the space with our presence and temporarily creating an imbalance resulting in nausea, dizziness and disorientation. Our sense of balance is then temporarily out of synch with our other senses. Consider how a child would be if his sense of balance were always just a little bit out of synch with his other senses: he would be disoriented.

Being slightly off balance may not cause too much of a problem in the earliest years. Human beings have the most marvelous faculty of compensation and often the child's own parents do not realize the amount of compensating and avoidance that is going on.

It may manifest a little later, when the child is balancing (or avoiding to!) on a log in the kindergarten garden, or when the eyes need to move across a black board or page to decipher some obscure shapes called letters in Grade 1 or 2 or the even more dramatically complex activity of the hand on a piece of paper trying to make those strange shapes. The physiological activity requires enormous balance to hold these things together and not become literally seasick or dizzy⁵.

Imagine if this feeling were present every time you wanted to read, write or maybe even draw. This experience could even be much more subtle so that you didn't actually know what it was, or even that others didn't feel the same. Maybe you just knew that you feel awful when you're at school, maybe more so in some lessons than in others. Perhaps even break time makes you feel awful if the disruption of balance extends to the whole body and not just to fine motor skills. Your disorientation and balance problems may even cause others to laugh at you in gym lessons in the Lower School or in the playground.

Henning Kohler speaks about the connection between self-esteem and the sense of balance⁶, he writes: "Every difficulty experienced by a child in the incarnation process has its effect on the sense of balance...Restless-nervous, anxious-timid, and depressed-moody children all share damaged self-esteem, each in his own

characteristic way. The first feels unappreciated; the second, left to his own devices; the third rejected and misunderstood. All are ways expressive of a lack of inner balance. . .It must, therefore be our finest striving to help them by giving them every reason to feel that they can connect to our tolerant appreciation, our interested participation, our complete and empathetic understanding. A sense of self-esteem has a feeling of being lifted into light and shone through is identical with experiencing freedom in the use of hands and arms. Here, too, all children who suffer weak orientation in the area of bodily senses are vulnerable. . .When a lack of development of the sense of balance is the major problem..., the problem usually lies in a defect of the central nervous system. From the anthroposophical viewpoint, this would be looked upon as a partial impermeability of the bodily instrument whose function it is to serve the higher members of our makeup. The pedagogical therapy in such a case would include all four of the lower senses in therapeutic developmental exercises."⁷

The Other Senses

Of course the development of the other senses is equally important and the two other lower senses – the sense of touch and the sense of life (in addition to movement and balance) need care and can be observed for signs that something is not quite right. In our Waldorf kindergartens, the sense of touch gets appropriate stimulation, but does it at home? Or did it when the child was at a playgroup elsewhere? Many of the objects a child gets in touch with nowadays are smooth and unpleasant (plastic) so that she cannot get differentiated touch experiences. Have the children been cuddled and stroked enough? The lower senses are the basis for development in the middle and upper senses, and if they are not stimulated enough then this can effect future development. On the other hand, the middle and upper senses are frequently over stimulated. The sense of hearing, for example, needs the opportunity to develop gently, yet we live in a world full of noise, more noise than ever before. Mothers take tiny babies shopping in the supermarket where they are

bombarded with sounds from the tills, and the hustle and bustle of stressed shoppers rallying their trolleys down the aisles. The eyes are exposed to bright light and fast moving objects and lights with hardly ever the chance to gently focus on something.

How Can We Help—What Can We Do?

It would certainly appear that many children manage to develop reasonably well despite their environment. Most Waldorf early childhood teachers would, I hope, advise parents to avoid supermarkets and shopping malls with tiny babies, if at all possible, in order to protect their senses. Although we have to accept that if parents have no one they can leave their children with, this may only be an ideal.

I feel strongly that it is our responsibility as educators and care givers to do all we can to

1. find out if there are any signs of a learning difficulty and

2. prevent the learning difficulty—or at least help the child to develop so that the learning difficulty has the least possible affect on the child's life.

Prevention of Learning Problems and Signs of Developmental Delay

At the beginning of this article, I referred to the fact that after birth, the gestation period continues. Little babies need to be allowed to develop gently and more or less at their own pace. Dyspraxia and dyslexia frequently run in families so if we know that parents, uncles or brothers and sisters have these sorts of difficulties it is worth taking extra care of the children's senses and general development. My own children have a lot of dyslexia in their family and, partly as an experiment, my wife and I took extra care of their senses and of their "handedness." We were very careful not to expose our children to too much noise but instead only to human speech and gentle music.⁸ In her fascinating book, *Reflexes, Learning and Behavior: A Window Into the Child's Mind*,⁹ Sally Goddard says, "During the first three years of life, the child must learn to use his ears to "tune in" to the specific frequencies of his own language, in much the same way that a radio is adjusted to

select specific stations. . .Lack of auditory stimulation, or even a constant cacophony of background noise in early life can discourage early "listening" and the child may learn to shut out and ignore sound from an early age. .

.Hearing too much or "auditory hypersensitivity" can be just as much of a problem as hearing deficit. The inability to filter or occlude miscellaneous sound, suggests poorly developed listening skills, and can have profound effect upon later learning, language, communication and behavior. In the last twenty-five years research has turned to focus upon the problems of "listening," as opposed to problems of hearing. Tomatis, in France, and Christian Volf, in Denmark, quite independently of each other were pioneers of this approach."

We also made sure that our children always had time to look at things—without hurrying and with time to focus. Even as the children were carried down the stairs as babies, if we could see that their eyes tried to focus on the pictures on the wall, we would stop and let them look—building up a slow, unhurried relationship to the two-dimensional.

Some years ago, I heard a lecture by Dr. Angelo Cioci at the Alliance for Childhood Conference which was held in Brussels¹⁰. Dr. Cioci specializes in pediatric medicine and psychology and lectures in pediatric neuropsychology. His research showed that if you can help a child to be totally right-handed¹¹, this could help to prevent dyslexia. He implied that the foundation for handedness should be laid by the time the child is three. Although I had not heard this before, I decided it was worth a try, and as parents, my wife and I have always been very conscious of ensuring our children use their right hands, right ears, right eyes and right feet in preference to their left. Now at ages five and seven there are certainly no signs of dyslexia (yet!). But time will tell! A lot can be done if parents can be made aware of these sorts of things. *No child can be harmed by being treated as a dyslexic but many can be helped!*

Following an awareness and gentle treatment of the senses, a lot can be done by observing the children's movement development to note any developmental delays. It is widely accepted that

the development of controlled movement has a part to play in the development of thinking and understanding. Children need to experience movement in order to learn about themselves, their relationship to the environment and the interaction of the two.¹²

Crawling (Creeping)

Crawling is an important part of movement development, and, if a child has missed out this developmental stage, it is well-worth observing them carefully to see whether any learning difficulties develop.

Some children move by shuffling on their bum or rolling over and over, but learning to crawl has other benefits. Crawlers use a prone kneeling position which strengthens the muscles around the shoulders and hips. They are often a bit wobbly and need to make adjustments to their position. This helps body awareness and the developing sense of balance. Then, as one arm is raised to stretch out, balance has to be held in three points, and more adjustments have to be made. The extended arm investigates direction and distanced, and these are important learning experiences for understanding positions in space.

The actual crawling action itself is a complex sequence of movements where the arms and legs move in opposition. These movements seem to help other kinds of sequential activities such as ordering which is important for counting and number work and understanding the logic of "beginning, middle and end" in story telling. A vast amount of learning has been acquired by children who have learned to crawl!

Identifying Movement Difficulties

If we think about the children in our care, as parents or teachers, we can ask ourselves, do they perhaps:

- * Move in an ungainly, uncoordinated way?
- * Appear reluctant to try new activities?
- * Crash into things?
- * Get tired and irritable easily?
- * Not hear when asked to do something?
- * Begin a job and then forget what comes next?
- * Have no sense of time and urgency (older children)

- * Find it difficult to concentrate?
- * Have difficulty speaking clearly?
- * Find it difficult to track a moving object?

And do they find it difficult, even impossible to:

- * Manage fiddly things like buttons?
- * Let someone near them for a hug?
- * Join in games—especially if there are "rules"?
- * Make two hands work together?
- * Stand still and wait?

Some children have several of these symptoms, others just a few.

If a child is frequently tetchy and irritable, it is worth considering why this is so. Is it because they realize other people are tired of them dropping things? Or is it because they have to concentrate so hard to work out what to do next, or because no one will let them play? Asking ourselves this kind of question helps us to empathize with these kinds of children because they do not intend to cause the upsets that arise during work or play. Parents of children with a specific learning difficulty also frequently report that their child:

- * Has never crawled.
- * Reached their motor milestones late.
- * Found it difficult to interact with their peer group.
- * Does not have the same interest as the other children.
- * Is often left out, never being chosen.
- * Finds it difficult to use two hands together.
- * Cannot cross the midline, changes hand instead.

Speech

Closely related to movement is speech. There is no space to go into speech development here, but I would refer you to the article: "Speech Development and Its Encouragement in the First Years of Life" in *The Dignity of the Young Child*¹³. This article also gives a good picture of speech development which is helpful for us as a guide. It is important to realize that a child with delayed speech development, and/or problems with speech may also have a hearing problem and is, in any

case, very likely to have a specific learning difficulty.

Observing and Recording

Establishing what is wrong and why is not easy in the kindergarten setting. There are lots of children milling about and playing, and the teacher has a lot to do already. However, observations, and recording those observations are the first steps in deciding how to meet the needs of the child. The Foundation Stage Profile may already help but other, broader observations and records will be needed. It is important to note the children's coping and not-coping strategies and their avoidance and compensation techniques. It is important to observe the children in different situations and maybe even in the home. Parents can certainly contribute to the picture (can the child get dressed without too much difficulty, putting their clothes in the right order, or do they get into all sorts of tangles?). It is also important to observe a lack of consistency as children with difficulties can have very clear good days and bad days.

It is also helpful to record any observations or insights that arise from the teacher's meditative work. These records will then feed into the child discussion that can take place in a staff meeting, or a meeting with the SENCO.

This is when it is helpful to draw up an I.E.P.¹⁴ The I.E.P. can then be developed with the parents to ensure that the approach to the child is consistent and that the work is not undermined at home by too much TV, too little sleep, or too many fizzy drinks, etc.

Social and Behavior Problems

The I.E.P. can also help in planning strategies not only to help overcome learning problems, as may be manifest in the child's movement, but also for social or behavior difficulties. When a child's behavior moves beyond the "naughty" into the realm of problem or aggression, it is important to try to find out what the cause may be as this can frequently also have its roots in the senses, reflex system or other movement problem.

It is a fact that more boys than girls have learning difficulties. It is also a fact that boys are

more aggressive in their behavior as research carried out in America on children aged four to eleven by Offord, et al (1991) shows.

With most children, this behavior is a symptom rather than a cause. It behooves us to find out the cause(s) before we can design our approach or treatment. The cause could be a learning difficulty. In fact, the victim of any aggression may also have a learning difficulty.

Behavior	Boys	Girls
Mean to others:	21.8 %	9.6 %
Physically attacks people	18.1 %	4.4 %
Gets in many fights	30.9 %	9.8 %
Destroys own things	10.7 %	2.1 %
Destroys others' things	10.6 %	4.4 %
Threatens to hurt people	13.1 %	4.0 %

Offord et al. 1991

Behaviors swing between the positive and the negative:

Altruism <-----> Aggression

Just as with other developmental milestones it is helpful to remind ourselves of "social" milestones as this will help us to spot any child who is out of synch.

It has been found that even with every effort to remove stereotypes, early years children will still mainly play with children of their own sex. Research has also confirmed that girls' and boys' behavior is quite distinct as a rule. In a study, Maccoby¹⁵ (1990) found that in social interaction girls used an "enabling" style which was characterized by friends supporting each other and making suggestions, whereas boys generally used a "constricting" style. Boys' conversations tended to be boasting and contradicting and using other forms of "self-display." Girls would ask, "Can I have a turn?" Boys would demand, "Give me that!" If this is generally true, then it could explain why boys and girls often don't play together, and why some of the less confident boys may prefer to play alone.

So to summarize:

1. An understanding of all aspects of child development is vital.
2. It is helpful to have an understanding of the kind of difficulties we may find in our early years

settings. If you do not have a Special Needs Education Coordinator (SENCO) or colleague with experience in this field look up dyslexia, dyspraxia and Asperger's syndrome on the internet. You will find a great deal of information

3. Observation and recording of the children's developmental milestones and behavior is vital—this includes observing what the child avoids doing. Without proper observation, a remedial activity may be inappropriate. A good example is where a teacher deals with a restless child without realizing the child has eczema on her tummy and is itchy.

4. Draw up an I.E.P. and keep up regular reviews.

5. Ensure that the parents are informed, involved and active.

6. Ensure that you are familiar with the Special Needs Code of Practice. (a government document that schools adhere to)

7. Ensure that you have a good Special Educational Needs policy. I will be pleased to email you a copy of ours for your interest upon request (evm@michaelhall.co.uk).

8. Therapy programs with a direct connection to working with the lower senses, primitive reflexes and movement in general are the main tools for helping children with difficulties in the early years. Eurythmy therapy is probably most effective at this time.

Footnotes

¹ Sally Goddard Blythe: *The Well Balanced Child*, Hawthorne Press.

² Berlin, October 25, 1909: *Wisdom of Soul, and of the Spirit; Anthroposophy, Psychosophy, Pneumatosophy.*

³ Visit: <http://www.visembryo.com/baby/index.html> to study embryonic development.

⁴ Myelination: The formation of the myelin sheath around a nerve fiber. Also known as myelination.

⁵ Dr. Harold Levinson, *Discovery of Cerebellar-Vestibular Syndrome and Therapies: A Solution to the Riddle—Dyslexia.*

⁶ *Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children*, AWSNA.

⁷ *Therapeutic Developmental Exercises* by Dieter Schulz. See also the work of INPP and Sally Goddard: www.inpp.co.uk

⁸ There is no space to go into detail about the importance of music here, please see: *The Well Balanced Child*, Hawthorne Press

⁹ Fern Ridge Press.

¹⁰ October 2000.

¹¹ To be totally right-sided means that a child's preferred hand, foot, ear and eye would all be the one on the right.

¹² French and Lee (1994) cited in Digue, A. and Kettles, G (1976) *Developmental Dyspraxia: An Overview.*

¹³ Medical Section at the Goethenum and International Waldorf Kindergarten Association

¹⁴ Individual Education Plan

¹⁵ E.E. Maccoby, *Social Development: Psychological Growth and the Parent-Child Relationship*

Age: Social Development

6 months: Interest in other children begins: Poking, pulling hair; investigating them as objects. Toys are still more interesting, though.

14 months: Children play side by side, occasionally cooperating and interacting.

18 months: Playmate preference begins. Comfortable in each others company but still play mainly alone.

2–3 years: Beginning to play with each other and the beginning of altruism or pro-social play.

4 years: Group play begins.

Ewout Van-Manen received a Waldorf education in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and attended Emerson College in Sussex to do the Waldorf Education Course, specializing in special needs. Following that, he worked in a Steiner Special School for children with behavior and learning difficulties as both a house parent and a class-teacher. Upon completion of Grade 8, he worked as a class teacher and special needs teacher at Michael Hall. His focus is now on remedial work and he founded the SWDA (Steiner Waldorf Dyslexia Association).

TABLE 1 Milestones of Motor Development Ages 2 - 6			
Age	Locomotor skills	Non-locomotor skills	Manipulative skills
18-24 mths	Runs (20 mths), walks well (24 mths);climbs stairs with both feet on each step.	Pushes and pulls boxes or wheeled toys; unscrews lid on a jar.	Shows clear hand preference; stacks 4 to 6 blocks; turns pages one at a time, picks things up without overbalancing
2-3 years	Runs easily; climbs up and down furniture unaided.	Hauls and shoves big toys around obstacles	Picks up small objects; throws small ball forward while standing
3-4 years	Walks upstairs one foot per step; skips on both feet; walks on tiptoe	Pedals, steers a tricycle; walks in any direction pulling a big toy	Catches a large ball between out-stretched arms; cuts paper with scissors; holds pencil between thumb and first two fingers.
4-5 years	Walks up and down stairs one foot per step; stands, runs and walks well on tiptoe		Strikes ball with bat; kicks, catches ball; threads beads but not needle; grasps pencil
5-6 years	Skips on alternative feet; walks a thin line; slides, swings		Plays ball games quite well; threads needle and sews stitches
Connolly and Dalglish (1989) <i>Milestones of Preschool Motor Development</i>			

Table 2 Age-related Development of Movement			
Age	Locomotor patterns	Non-locomotor patterns	Manipulative skills
1 mth.		Can lift head from lying on front	Can retain object placed in hand
3-4 mths.		Stepping reflex pattern	Plays with hands as first toy
5 mths.	Rolls over from back	Holds head, shoulders erect when sitting	Stretches out to grasp objects
6-8 mths.		Sitting unsupported, pulling up to stand	Reaches accurately, grasps, lets go
9 mths.	Crawling, climbing upstairs	Supports cup/bottle. Copes with finger food	Transfers objects from one hand to another.
10 mths.	Walks around furniture	Bends to pick up object and stands again with one hand support.	Makes toys work!
1 year	Walks usteadily with feet apart, arms outstretched	Will start games such as peek-a-boo.	Plays with building bricks and other toys. Pulls off socks, shoes.
2 yrs.	Walks well, learning to run. Climbs on toys, furniture.	Dismantles everything. Enjoys simple wooden lift out puzzles	Builds towers, pours water from one jug to another.
2-3 yrs.	Can ride tricycle. Climbs up/down stairs, both feet on each step, can tiptoe	Enjoys jigsaws, painting, gluing.	Can lift heavier objects with some control. Puts on and takes clothes off.
3-4 yrs.	Learning to hop, balance.	Can catch large ball. Can release objects more easily now.	Can draw circle. Buttons coat/sweater.
5 yrs.	Can walk, run, skip and hop, even cycle and swim	Enjoys "bunny jumps" and balancing activities	Can form letters and write own name, hits ball with bat, can tie shoes (5+)

Therapeutic Puppetry-The Hysteric, Thin-Skinned Child

Suzanne Down

When we decide to incarnate and leave the heavenly worlds, we journey through the Zodiac and gather qualities there that will affect our physical constitution one of those being the condition of our skin, our sheath that holds us in our human form. There are two general types of skin: thin skin and thick skin. All of us are to some degree one or the other. I would like to explore the fundamentals of the thin-skinned condition and how that affects our journey on earth, and share some therapeutic thoughts on how puppetry can help this condition.

The “hysteric” tendency is the picture of the thin-skinned condition, a state of expansion. In a mild condition, it comes out only when our will is called upon. In the realm of the kindergarten morning, this could arise in some children when it is time to come to circle. It can show itself again when someone is asked a question in class that needs to be answered. The nervousness brought out in stage fright and public speaking is a “hysteric” response to our will being asked to do something, and the focus being placed on us. In a more extreme state, hysterics are always too expanded and feel raw and exposed to the world.

In this condition, the physical body is literally too “thin-skinned.” You can physically see this when you look at the skin covering the body. The skin of the organs will also be too thin. The etheric, soul and spirit flows out of this porous condition of the body into the experience of yellow! This condition leads a person to an inability to fulfill what is asked of them. They need to get control of their will.

In puppetry, one can begin to help with an exercise using poems, songs or scenes in stories that speed up, slow down, speed up, and slow down for self control and engagement of the will. This is an indication from Rudolf Steiner brought to my therapeutic puppet training by Adola McWilliam, co-founder of the Ita Wegman Association and Glenora Farm Camphill Community.

To engage the will of the hysteric, thin-skinned child, have him watch you do this change of speed, and once it is clearly established, let him do this with you. For example, a little pony table puppet can go into a

big meadow and start to run and gallop, clippity cloppity, clippity cloppity, then he goes up the steep hill and will slow down to a trot, then a walk, clip, clop, clip, clop. When he goes down the hill he can speed up again, and so on until it is time to go ever so slowly back to the barn to rest because the little pony is so tired. The change of speed is controlled, so no frantic running, a controlled gallop with a rhythm would be good. With an early childhood group, everyone can have a little pony table puppet or finger puppet that goes out to play.

If you create simple pony marionettes with strings the length that lets the marionettes touch the floor when you and the children are standing, something else can be worked on as well. The whole physical body of the child or children will experience these changing rhythms, and, with your clear example helping to hold them, they can practice this exercise in their own bodies. Most importantly, the puppets take the focus away from them, so their hysteria will recede. Try this in a big circle. The children will connect to the imagination of the little pony and really enjoy this. The ending leads the children and the pony to quietness, when the pony gets so tired and sleepy and goes slowly back to the barn, clip, clop, clip, clop to rest. Use wonderful consonants to help hold them in the changing speeds. **It is essential not to let them go into chaos with the gallop.** Help keep the self-control through your movements, the formation of the consonants in your speech, and the story rhythm you use.

We can see how this therapeutic playful way to add the change of speed in a little story will interest the children. Again, we want to have their will engaged in controlling the change of speed, not flinging the control away when the speed increases. When you make good use of the story rhythm and your clear imitation, these will exercises for young children will be successful.

This is an excerpt from Suzanne Down's upcoming book, Lifting the Veil, a Renewal of Puppet Theater. To receive Juniper Tree's free email newsletter that has children's story and puppetry activities and ideas through the seasons, contact: suzanne@junipertreepuppets.com.

Overview of the International Kindergarten Conference

Jan Coles

Over 1,100 Kindergarten teachers from all around the world attended this event at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. The theme of the conference was “Playing, Learning, Encountering” and reflected the concern amongst the International Steiner Waldorf kindergarten movement that children’s play is being threatened by the trend to begin formal education increasingly early with emphasis on information technology skills and academic learning.

These quotes from Rudolf Steiner set the context for the conference:

“(T)hus providing free space for the formation of human nature. This is play. That is also the way we can best occupy a child. We should not give children concepts with fixed boundaries, but rather ideas that allow thinking the free space to explore and even to err here and there. Only in this way will we discover the course of thinking that arises from an inner predisposition...” 1911; in *The Education of the Child*, p. 96-97.

“Usually, when observing the play of the young child we do so from the perspective of an adult. If this were not so we would not hear again and again the trifling exhortation that children should learn through play. The worst thing you could do is teach children through mere play, because when they grow up, they would look at life as though it were only a game. . .” 1923; in *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy*, p. 57.

“...The first step in this direction is to learn to understand the particular ways in which the child wants to be freely active in play. All the various types of stereotyped, thought up games with their inhibiting rules are alien to the young child’s nature, for they suppress what should be freely mobile within the child. Through such organised games the child’s own inner activity is

gradually being dulled down and the child feels itself within the outer activity without any inner interest. . .” 1922; in *Soul Economy and Waldorf Education*, p. 276.

Here follows a short summary of each main lectures:

The Encounter

Dr. Heinz Zimmerman

Dr. Zimmerman quoted the German philosopher Schiller, “Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being and he is only fully a human being when he plays.”

The art of education is a social art; it is the art of life. We have to find a balance within ourselves between two basic drives which are at odds with each other, the sensual versus common sense. For example, if I fall in love with a despicable person, that could be described as a compulsion of nature. On the other hand, I could feel hostility, antipathy towards a person of quality, a compulsion of a higher sense. In both cases, I feel I am being untrue to myself. How do I overcome this dilemma? I begin to play, and by practising this play, this breathing, then I am not dominated by feelings nor overcome with common sense. I become sovereign and free through play. These opposites live within all of us, neither one is good or bad. On the one hand is total sympathy with our surroundings, altruism, this is connected to the limbs. On the other hand antipathy and egotism, turning away from the other, this is connected to the head. So then if I try to develop a real interest in the other person, I can develop a liking and discover something really precious, I can learn to appreciate the other if I let go of this spontaneous antipathy and begin to play. Now we can begin to love the other person. Love is not enhanced altruism but exists in the interplay between altruism and egotism.

The Healing Power of Play
Joan Almon

Joan spoke about Rudolf Steiner's own early life. He didn't have a very playful childhood himself, even though it was full of warmth within his family. Most memorable though was his book with moving pictures, he often said that kindergartens should always have such books.

In no other types of education comes the idea of "imitation." Imitation is richness, a fundamental aspect of our work. If as teachers we do real meaningful work in front of the children, the children will become involved in their work, engaged in play.

Joan gave many examples of ways in which children use play to heal situations in which they find themselves, also how to recognise when play is moving through a process and when it has become stuck. She gave an example of two five-year-old boys who were wrapped up in setting mathematical problems for each other and had become socially separate from the rest of the group every day by tying play stands together and retreating inside. After a few days, it was as though they had forgotten how to do anything else, so she said the ropes must have a rest. The boys were relieved and gradually began to play with the rest of the group, and when the ropes reappeared a few days later, they had transformed into telephone wires linking all the "houses" together. So the teacher must develop an inner capacity for discernment. Is this child going through a natural process or stuck? The teacher must feel able to say this is not right and intervene.

Play is disappearing from children's lives. The question was asked whether in the USA there was more violence in children's play since 9/11. No, but there is less play since then! A survey was done to discover how many minutes per day the average six- to eight-year-old child was engaged in creative play, in 1997, twenty-five minutes. In 2002, this had gone down to sixteen minutes of creative play per day. Even amongst three- to six-year-olds in 1997 the average amount of time spent playing per day was only thirty-six minutes. In the United States, as many as one quarter of two-year-olds have televisions in their bedrooms!

So we were urged as kindergarten teachers to find ways of spreading the word about the importance of play to the wider communities in which we live, for play is the doorway to growth. It is not surprising then that while play is diminishing there is an increase in mental illness amongst children.

Acceleration and Retardation in Development
Dr. Michaela Gloeckler

Michaela described health as a slow and gradual process that is in accord with the right education. A healthy adult is one who is fully present in mind and spirit, like the eurythmy performers we had just been watching. Dr. Largo, a Swiss pediatrician showed in his studies an appreciation of the work done in anthroposophy in the realm of education for the present time in helping and healing in cases of accelerated and retarded development. Studies looking at adults who have made great achievements have found no similar patterns in childhood of optimum conditions for life. A strong individual will find his way, overcoming problems—of course, not that we should torment our children! Development is a mystery. Why are siblings so different? It is not only genes and our environment that is important but that also human relationship. We may meet only one individual in our early years that has such an effect on us, so that we can overcome the difficulties in our path. As kindergarten teachers, we must firstly meet every child where he is, and out of the child's own goal or situation we can help him.

Michaela gave an example of a seven-year-old boy with antisocial behavior and a developmental age level of three years. In one year with a kindergarten teacher, he had completely turned around and managed to go into Grade 1. He regressed at first, but had caught up with the other children by Grade 3. We need to teach parents that they, too, have a role as teachers. Not that they have to do anything special, but that life should be kept simple. In kindergarten, the child looks to the other children in the group, but the kindergarten teacher in her heart sees each

child as individual even though outwardly working with the whole.

A child could behave horribly until we see him or her the way he or she really is. When the child feels accepted and not judged, she can enter into constructive development. If children are healthy, are fed adequately, have love and protection and are set boundaries their development should be normal. If at kindergarten there is a meaningful organization of the time, this is the only way—despite all that is said about bright children. There are so many pressures on family life that many children grow up in far from ideal circumstances. Poor nutrition, healthcare, parents needing to work, poor language, poor accommodation, drug abuse, poor post natal care, perhaps a limited, one-sided upbringing either overprotected or neglected. Uncritical praise can also be damaging, the child remains infantile and narcissistic, demanding—these are all dangers and are all the more reason why we need to understand play.

Where does acceleration come from? Nutritionally, a mother's milk has less protein than other mammals. Human development is slower. It takes a baby five months to double its birth weight. Being able to do something quickly means to do it more unconsciously, this makes it more un-free. If we have a conscious awareness of something, we are able to play with it. People who have developed too quickly cannot teach others because they weren't conscious of the process of learning themselves and so find others stupid.

Children are so quickly influenced by the way they are judged by adults. "I felt good in your eyes." Do we have love in our soul for the child even when we have to be strict? The child knows this. If, for example, a child has to overcome rage, the teacher must bring her own experience to the situation and, knowing her own anger, her own weakness can help the child also with his. We are all wonderful people in our potential. Every weakness in others is also in me. Where does acceleration come from? If the protein in the diet is increased, is more animal like, then the more accelerated intellectual development does not keep pace with the

maturing of the soul. Happiness depends on one feeling at home in one's soul. There needs to be a sense of coherence, a connectedness with the environment. Steiner set one main task for Waldorf education—to separate feeling from will and to connect feeling with thinking. Damaged children need to learn to cope with feelings of envy, boredom, etc., otherwise they develop negative feelings. They need to develop good feelings in their bodies by doing small tasks. They must learn to handle their will well.

Feeling can be connected with thinking in stories and songs. In a calm atmosphere, this connection is made in the world of images. This is the principle of emotional intelligence. Memory is connected with feelings, the more strongly the teacher is feeling about that which he is doing, the more he is engaging the child. So we must encourage this identification with this middle sphere, this feeling realm that lies between thinking and doing by bringing in that which is artistic. We must cultivate a loving relationship with the child. We must trust in the concept of health and development. We must learn to live into the concept of love and friendliness. There is a point of weakness which is that it is too easy to judge the parents. We must help them observe their children, and if they say it is too quiet in kindergarten, that the children aren't doing enough, we must reassure them that the children are developing in a healthy way.

It has been found in research that children who watch a lot of television grow up to be overweight, have heart and lung problems, are more likely to be smokers and drug users. Waldorf educators were already saying this in the 1960's and 70's, and it is now seen to be true. We should use this to substantiate our own work today in our kindergartens. Thanks to anthroposophy and spiritual research we have a pattern for healthy development.

*Through the power of the word;
In the etheric to heal,
In the astral to give,
In the "I" to comfort.*

The way we speak cultivates the etheric and brings calm. By mastering difficult situations with

calm understanding, we can bring healing. Children in their waking selves can sense from “I” to “I” we are friends.

The Heart Organ and Heart Forces
Dr. Peter Selg

Steiner said that Schiller’s heart had burned up by the end of his life; he had given so much of it into his work. In his *Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller says that humans are un-free in their sense perceptions, they compel us. We are also un-free in our intellect, for instance: $2 \times 2 = 4$, there is no other possibility and is therefore fixed. Man is only really free in his middle realm; this is where they are able to play. This middle realm is also the realm of beauty, and our task is to educate the heart so one can freely choose for the good. Freedom does not mean to do what you like. Schiller anticipated Steiner education, which is to do with the mystery of the heart.

We live in a world of struggle, freedom is under threat and we must fight for it, our mission must be to work for the freedom of the “I.” The heart is the organ of empathy connecting the soul with the world. When the heart becomes hardened, it becomes unemotional, inert, slow. Hearts can have, as well as feelings, thoughts; insight, recognition, understanding. How our own “I” connects with experiences, this is a truly Christian understanding of faith. When insight comes, we must trust it, the power of the heart. The heart is also the central organ of doubt. Compassion is truth perceived in connection with the head. The thoughts of man which rise from the heart come from the source spring of the human being, we experience this true inner moral intuition as good and right. The inmost “I” lies hidden in this treasury of the heart, this is where good comes from. Language and speech are born out of the heart. True Christianity does not divide good from evil, every moment is a new moment, we can change, we can grow, be what we can be. In the heart, there can be spiritual and moral growth and transformation, the heart dances! It is the organ for spiritual growth and also the treasury for preservation and protection inasmuch as it can be moved, in motion it can grow. Anthroposophy is the language of Christ in the

Twentieth century. So the heart is the organ where this seed can germinate or not. When we betray our heart, this is a falling away of the “I” as in Judas Iscariot. We can struggle with evil in the heart, but it is also the organ of forgiveness. We connect with the world through insights; we must trust this without doubt. We can help to shape the world and ourselves. Through being in the world, we prepare gifts for heaven, the eternal higher “I”. Where our treasure is, there is our heart.

The heart begins to beat three weeks after conception. The heart is the organ of the beginning. Thinking comes late; it is mirrored and is old. In our limbs we are young—it is the world to come. The heart is present here, today, now balancing past and future. The young child is all head, one-third of the child’s body is head. All sensory being needs protection in the first seven years. Breathing and heart develops in the second seven-year period, thinking after. At nine or ten years the child has a belonging feeling to the world; children with heart disease only really feel it at this age of nine through ten. In the first seven years, we prepare the maturing breathing and heart for the second seven-year period. From youth onwards, all we do is inscribed in the heart and destiny is met; education and especially education of the heart is preparation for destiny on earth. Ahriman does not want the human “I” to live on earth. With the Christ presence in our schools, children live up to world destiny. If Christ is in the human being, Lucifer and Ahriman are overcome. The statue (Representative of Mankind at the Goetheanum) is redemption for Lucifer and Ahriman, a way of peace, a Sun path.

The Spirit of Christ—Thinking, Feeling and Doing: The Formative Forces around the Seventh Year
Christof Wiechert

With these attacks on the young child, one feels helpless. How can we do things better? There are different layers of reality. The threshold of kindergarten to Grade 1, around six- to seven-years-old, is a second birth, a moment of transition, this is also under attack. The child

must find himself in the flow of time and in the structure of the group. In the child study, we work into the child's soul, into the etheric body. The kindergarten teacher has to develop sensitivity of soul. We have to be more flexible than the parents; we are not educating them, but the children.

Formative forces radiate into the child, radiating back and resulting in the change of teeth. Also, formative forces already existing in the head create pictorial memory in children under seven, so they are able to create mental images; this part of the etheric body is already free. This etheric quality should be used for learning through play but can also be used for learning processes; even in kindergarten we can learn foreign languages, for instance. Anthroposophists also think that using etheric forces is most important to enliven thought using the imagination.

The kindergarten is the *University of Playtime*. Many children are not fully incarnated, yet, and the capacity for speech can be delayed. We should bring some elements of kindergarten to Grades 1 and 2 and maybe bring some elements of Grade 1 to kindergarten, perhaps a transition class.

Christof concluded his lecture with a verse by Steiner beginning:

*To bind oneself to matter,
To grind souls to dust. . .*

Encountering

Dr. Heinz Zimmerman (to close the conference)

To encounter is to learn and to play. Begin to change things in the place where you are and do not be dogmatic. Be present in mind and spirit. The heart mediates between the head and the limbs. We must trust the efficacy of our education. We must cultivate the seed which is this education. Have the courage to cultivate free play—this is truly human. There will be opposition from people who would have children not develop. Where is the young child? If we can answer this question, then what is learning? To learn is nothing but to recall what you have learned before birth. Teachers are then to enable

this, to find this treasure so the child can recall what his destiny is. Plato spoke about this. Spirit is movement—eurythmy. Through the limbs and the heart, one must bring movement into thinking-living thought. Movement comes into children's play—a message from pre-birth. We work through the senses to the spirit. How do we meet the child where he is? The three- to four-year-old is open and full of trust, the world is good and worthy of imitation—this is basically a religious mood. The child always looks up, has an attitude, a mood of veneration, calm, of devotion, a relationship to the spirits in a mood of prayer. In a cultivation of this religious mood, this sacred sobriety—we see God as a child at play. Through all religions, the spirit of our age, the sun from the future comes towards us. The Goetheanum is here to bring this common cause. We begin with the child's prayer given by Rudolf Steiner:

*From my head to my feet
I am the image of God
From my heart to my hands
I feel the breath of God.
When I speak with my mouth
I will follow God's will
When I see God
In Father and Mother,
In Sister and Brother
In all dear people,
In animal and flower,
In tree and stone,
No fear shall I feel
But love will then fill me
For everything around me.*

We are human as individuals connected to our physical condition. We need strength for our work from our guardian angel, but we also need more. We live in a world full of fear and send a plea to the spirits in the realm of the archangels. A school has its own spirit—it may give us courage to work towards a common goal. We have to accept the world as it is and children as they are. Wherever there are big shadows, there is also light. We turn to this light in the sphere of spirit. Freedom and courage is the Spirit of Michael.

The Rest of the Conference

As well as lectures, there were many workshops, morning and afternoon to choose from, in addition to singing, eurythmy performances and more.

The whole conference was a truly wonderful experience; uplifting, inspiring, challenging at times, but with a tremendous feeling of common purpose around the world. In breaks between lectures and workshops, we heard about partnerships between countries where Steiner Waldorf education is well established and countries where it is in its infancy. Germany supports teacher training in many countries including Japan, Korea, Czech Republic, and Ukraine. Norway and Finland support training in South Africa, and there are several Steiner schools in townships there. As part of their presentation, the Scandinavian and South African teachers sang some songs from their own lands together. What a wonderful contrast there

was between the Nordic and African styles of music! Sweden is supporting Russia, and the kindergartens in the United States are supporting Waldorf schools in China—the first one has just begun! Australia and New Zealand are supporting initiatives in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Nepal. In some places, it is just the very beginnings, the first parent-toddler group in the Philippines, for instance. Even now, just remembering the joy on the faces of some of these teachers who were able to bring this education to the children of their country, brings tears to my eyes.

Jan Coles is a teacher at the Bristol Kindergarten in the United Kingdom. Her notes are from the International Kindergarten Conference in Dornach, March 29-April 2, 2005. This article was printed in Kindling, Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education, October 2005, Issue 8 and is reprinted with their permission.

LOGOS Seminar

Report by Heather Porter

Who are we referring to when we speak of the “New Child?” This was the first question we explored in the LOGOS Foundation Conference at Sunbridge College in June, led by Georg Kuhlewind. He was joined by several other leaders in the field of education and health, who each offered us their wisdom from a unique perspective: Linda Garofallou, from her work with infant massage; Mariola Strahlberg, from her experience with Brain Gym; Will Crane, from his experience in spatial dynamics; and Gregor Simon-MacDonald, from his work in caregiving. After days of delving into the various qualities found in this new state of consciousness, it became clear that we are not referring here to the child who is incarnating too quickly due to dietary, environmental and other influences, but rather to the child who is remaining

exceptionally open to the spiritual world and thus has great perceptual gifts. But many of these new children are living quite outside of the (physical) body and are having trouble orienting to the world of space and time. As a result, they are having difficulty attaining healthy ego integration.

The next question we explored was, “How can we help these children and support them in their process of incarnation?” We spent the days gratefully receiving the knowledge and experience from the speakers as well as the participants, doing meditative exercises together, and essentially trying to experience living from the perspective of these children. In the end, however, I believe a number of us were struck with the perhaps unexpected questions arising in our minds, such as “Where do you draw the line

between the 'new child' and other children, or even myself, or can you?"

In the field of early childhood education and health we speak of the "Indigo Child," "Crystal Child," or "New Child" because to give a name to a newly born state of consciousness is necessary or at least helpful in recognizing it and communicating about it as we do our work in trying to meet the needs of children. But as great poets know all too well, as soon as a word is put forth, it frustratingly limits what is truly indescribable. It puts an undefinable experience within definable boundaries. Alas, we live in the world of language. Naming is necessary, and clear expression is a beautiful challenge that we face as human beings.

But what happens if the name is removed for a brief time, and only the characteristics remain, endless in number? How does this change one's perception of a subject?

In retrospect, I see that I went into the seminar with my impressions about the "New Child" somewhat bound up within the name, inside a box. (How easily can our thinking unknowingly fall into that box, even with the best of intentions!) With deep gratitude, I left the seminar with a more experiential understanding of this new state of consciousness, outside of the boundaries, outside of the box. I left with a much broader view of the continuum, without the dividing lines. It is so easy to slip into dualistic thinking, such as the difference between "that child and this one," or between "that child and me." This seminar reminded me that every one of us lives on the continuum somewhere, and though we are each unique, every one of us is connected to a degree. If you'll forgive the linear image, I find it helps to give clarity: in terms of perceptual openness we have the well-balanced but still open "Indigo" children at one "end," somewhere in the middle are the numerous children with so-called ADD, and further along are autistic children who live in extreme openness and vulnerability, most extremely outside of their bodies.

Though it is impossible to relay all that was shared and experienced in the seminar, I would like to reiterate this particularly important point: we need to remember that these challenged

children are quite literally further along than we in certain gifts—they're already passed something that for us is still a task, as Mr. Kuhlewind says. And it is our job to become more like them in many respects, not the other way around. To protect their keen perceptual gifts, we can't try to hide. We need to have the courage and humility to be honest, through and through—to resist hiding a little sadness behind a happy face, for instance. What happens when we hide, even in the slightest? We give them reason to doubt their perceptions, which prevents healthy ego integration, and eventually leads them to feel wrong, bad or even "crazy" as they grow into adulthood. We need to, particularly through meditative exercises, extend ourselves into their world, and resist the temptation to try to make them fit into ours. We need to help them through their strengths, never through their weaknesses – to observe what the child likes to do well, and start from there.

The answers to the questions of how we can best help with each unique child, within each unique moment are available to each of us. Of course, we all know that it takes work—but almost entirely from the "soft will," as Mr. Kuhlewind calls it. It needs to come from our higher will, our gentle will, not our "hard will." Less is more, and to do *less* from the hard will takes incredible strength and courage for most of us. It requires us to pause when a particular child is having a difficult moment—to simply observe, lend support with our attention, and let him or her just be (unless of course physical safety is threatened). To offer the child unconditional love with the unspoken message that they're okay, they're not wrong to be who they are—this is truly the best gift we can give them, and indeed must give them.

Heather Porter graduated from Sunbridge College in 2004 and is currently pursuing certification in energy healing with the intention of working with parents and children. She attended the LOGOS Conference at Sunbridge College June 2005.

The Beginnings of Our Waldorf Early Childhood Movement

Susan Howard

This coming year, the Waldorf kindergarten movement will celebrate its 80th Anniversary! This brings an opportunity to reflect back on the origins of our work, to consider how this work has developed over the course of eight decades a rich lifespan in human terms and to ponder its renewal in the 21st century in light of the current needs of the child and cultural conditions around the world today.

The first "official" Waldorf kindergarten opened at the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart in 1926, a year and a half after the death of Rudolf Steiner. However, there was actually an early first attempt that is less known. I have looked through various articles, unpublished manuscripts and notes from conversations to piece together the following story of the very beginnings of our Waldorf early childhood movement:

Even before the opening of the first Waldorf School in 1919, Rudolf Steiner had spoken about the importance of the first seven years of life and his regret that the class teachers would receive the children only after this formative period was complete: "The teachers will take on children to educate who are already at a certain age; and they must consider thereby that they are taking on these children after they have already experienced the education or perhaps the miseducation of their parents in the very first stage of their lives. What we are striving for will only be able to be accomplished completely when humanity has progressed so far that parents understand that even in the first period of upbringing, modern humanity has special educational needs." (Opening lecture in *The Study of Man*, or *Foundations of Human Experience*)

Five years earlier, in 1914, Rudolf Steiner had met Elisabeth Grunelius, a nineteen-year-old from the Alsace region of Germany, who had just completed her state kindergarten training in Bonn. Elisabeth had read *Theosophy* by Steiner, and decided to help with the building of the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. She

joined a group of artists working under Steiner's direction on wood relief sculptures for the new building. Elisabeth stayed in Dornach for eighteen months, working on the woodcarvings and attending lectures by Rudolf Steiner, before resuming her early childhood studies at the Pestalozzi-Froebel Seminar in Berlin.

Afterwards, she was drawn to the newly developing Waldorf school in Stuttgart.

Once the first Waldorf School opened in 1919, Rudolf Steiner asked the teachers to free up a room for a kindergarten, but it was not possible. Finances were strained, and the faculty chose to use every available space for additional grade school classes. Later, in 1920, Rudolf Steiner spoke again with the faculty about the importance of the kindergarten: "It is true that it would be better if you could have the children in kindergarten. The longer you have them, the better. Thus you could admit children who are not yet old enough to come to school. ...It would be very nice if we could bring in some children in the first seven years of early childhood education. In the end, we must have them somewhat younger; it is much less important when they are older."

After a visit to an elementary class, he was heard to exclaim, "We need kindergartens! We need kindergartens!" He asked the teachers to free up a classroom for a kindergarten, but again they said it was not possible. According to a later comment by Elisabeth Grunelius, the teachers did not seem to grasp the importance of the kindergarten.

Steiner remembered Elisabeth from Dornach, and asked her to write a sixty-page proposal for how one would work with three- to five-year olds. She tried, but felt she could not do it, since she had not had any direct experience with young children.

"I felt I had to have experience first. One could not sit at a table and figure it all out. Today it is perhaps difficult to imagine a time when no one

had worked consciously with the imitative capacities of the child. We need to remember that class teachers teach, but the kindergarten teacher must show what should be done through her life and being."

(From an unpublished article, *Rudolf Steiner Asks for Kindergartens*, by Elizabeth Grunelius.)

Then, in the spring of 1920, a new government regulation changed the beginning of the school year from Easter to September. This meant that the children who would have begun first grade at Easter now had no teacher until September. On Good Friday, 1920, Rudolf Steiner asked Elisabeth Grunelius if she would take on a kindergarten group from Easter to September. She later described this moment as follows:

"I was now finished with my (state) training and was very certain that on no account did I want to work with children! I wanted to study medicine. I answered Rudolf Steiner, 'I must think about that further', and stood there looking down in thought. As I stood there, he also remained standing, as if he was waiting for an outer answer from me. When I looked up, I was puzzled that he was still there. I thought, well, if Rudolf Steiner is there and helps, then perhaps I can carry this out! And I answered, 'If you will stand behind me, then I can.'"

A week later, they began. But it was hardly an ideal beginning! She met for three hours each afternoon with about twenty pre-first-graders. The room was used for the eighth grade in the morning, with fixed benches running along the walls, and heavy table-desks that could not be moved, and the floor was painted black! Luckily, it was spring and summer time, and she could be outdoors with the children most of the time. She had no toys or play materials. She had only Rudolf Steiner's statements that meditation should be the basis of life in the kindergarten, and that she was to work out of imitation—two entirely radical thoughts that she had never encountered before in her training for early childhood education!

She later remembered one little girl who slammed the door each day very hard. She had asked her several times to do it nicely, to no avail. On the third day, Elisabeth realized that she herself did not close the door completely. So when the little girl was watching, Elisabeth closed the door "nicely," and after that, the little girl also closed it nicely every time. This was an incredible experience for Elisabeth at that time.

Once she showed Rudolf Steiner crayon drawings the children had made, and he said it would be even better to let them do watercolor painting with good, large brushes and flowing colors. "It is not the picture that is important," he said, "but the children should imitate your 'noble attitude,' they will want to dab around (*nachpatschen*) with the color, rather than exactly copy your gestures." (from a conversation between Elisabeth and Danish kindergarten teacher Ingeborg Brochmann at the World Kindergarten Conference in Dornach in 1984)

She also did clay modeling: "the children could hardly wait to plunge their hands into this sculptural material and start forming it," she later wrote, and she told fairy tales.

The kindergarten continued until the end of the summer holidays, but then there was no real possibility to go on in that unsuitable room. There was also "an overflowing deficiency of money," and still no real support from the class teachers. Elisabeth Grunelius joined the College of Teachers and worked as a handwork teacher and substitute for class teachers until 1926. She returned to Dornach from time to time to work with artistic activities eurythmy, speech, clay modeling, painting and anthroposophical studies these experiences were her Waldorf kindergarten training.

During these years Rudolf Steiner continued to urge the teachers to open a kindergarten, and gave lectures such as *The Roots of Education* and *the Essentials of Education*, where he spoke of the work of the early childhood educator. Finally, in 1924, one of the teachers, Herbert Hahn, heard Rudolf Steiner's call and decided to take up the challenge of having a kindergarten built on the school grounds.

The new kindergarten was finished in 1926, nearly eighteen months after Rudolf Steiner's death. It was described as "barracks" with three rooms, one a eurythmy room painted "bluish pink like rose mallow," a color Steiner had indicated for eurythmy. The room for painting was a dark blue, "darker than the sky," and the playroom was carmine red. Rudolf Steiner had expressed how different color experiences for the children, according to whether they were restless, slow, etc., would provide inwardly arising complementary color experiences to meet their different needs. For children with sleeping problems, for example, Steiner had suggested deep orange curtains around the bed. Outdoors there was a sandpit and a garden.

Elisabeth tried to build up kindergarten activities out of sensing in her fingertips what the children needed, working meditatively, and aspiring to work with imitation rather than "pulling things out" of the children.

Once she invited a basket maker to come and work in the presence of the children. "He was a young man, and he had his shirt sleeves rolled up so that the children could see how strong he was. He had a big basket, and he finished it with large branches. On the next day, in the cloak room, I saw reeds hanging from the coat hook of one of the children, a very inhibited girl. I asked her why she needed the reeds. 'To make baskets,' she replied. Then I immediately went out and bought reeds and bottoms for baskets and on the next day, all the four-year-olds made baskets. I wanted to help them, but they could do it themselves. They never could have done that if they had not seen the basket maker at work."

Three years later, Klara Hatterman, a young woman from Hannover, Germany, who was eager to learn to be a Waldorf kindergarten teacher, approached Elisabeth Grunelius and urged her to offer a training course. But Elisabeth felt too inexperienced; reluctantly, she agreed to meet with a small group of four to five interested people. But when they arrived, she asked them all to leave, saying that she was not ready. They all left, except Klara, who became her intern and later her friend and colleague for life. One could say that these two were the pioneers of our movement.

In 1931, Klara founded a small kindergarten in Hannover. The new Hannover Waldorf School was struggling spiritually and financially to establish itself, so the kindergarten had to be independent. Klara rented a two-room apartment and transformed one of the rooms into a space for the children each day. Here the work blossomed. For ten years, as many as twenty children visited the kindergarten each day.

In 1938, the Stuttgart and Hannover Waldorf schools were closed by the Nazis. Klara's home kindergarten, less visible, continued until 1941. When the Nazis closed it, she fled to Dresden and opened a small kindergarten in a cellar there. It was the only remaining Waldorf initiative until it too was discovered and closed by the National Socialists.

In 1940, Elisabeth sailed from Genoa to the United States at the invitation of friends. In 1941, she opened a kindergarten at the Myrin farm in Kimberton, Pennsylvania, as the foundation for a new Waldorf school. In 1948 she went on to found a kindergarten at the newly founded Waldorf school on the campus of Adelphi University in Garden City, Long Island. It was here that she wrote and published her book, *Early Childhood and the Waldorf School Plan*, which was translated into many languages, including Japanese.

After the war, Klara Hatterman returned to Hannover in 1946 and started a kindergarten again under very primitive circumstances, with a tar paper roof and umbrellas to provide indoor shelter from the rain. Grass grew through the floor, and in winter there were snow crystals on the walls. In the beginning, outdoor free play consisted of playing in the post-war rubble and discovering a spoon or a nail or something to help build up the kindergarten.

For seven years, the kindergarten, now a part of the school, took place under these difficult circumstances, until the "ugly duckling" became a "swan." The woodwork teacher developed the architectural plans and built the furniture, and the school's business manager devoted himself to creating the social and financial basis for a kindergarten building. At Christmas, 1953, the new kindergarten building was dedicated.

Beginning in 1950, at the age of forty-two, Klara Hatterman invited other kindergarten teachers to come together each year for several days during the Holy Nights, to deepen their anthroposophical study of the young child. They asked, "How can we develop ourselves so as to be able to receive the being of the young child from the spiritual world? What activities and approaches can we develop for work in the kindergarten? How can we provide real support for parents in the upbringing of children?" They struggled to deepen their understanding of the power of imitation, of the child as a sense organ, of the thought of reincarnation in relation to early childhood development. They committed themselves to founding and developing kindergartens, working out of an anthroposophical view of the human being.

We could say that these gatherings were the beginnings for what eventually incarnated in 1969 as the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens. Today, there is truly a worldwide movement that includes over 1,200 kindergartens, home and center-based child care, parent-child groups, and family centers.

We can look back with gratitude to Elisabeth Grunelius and Klara Hatterman for their courage, their tireless enthusiasm for their work in the face of adversity, their heartfelt love and warmth for the little child, and their profound devotion to ongoing deepening of their work through study and inner development. They were researchers, intuitively feeling their way along out of exact observation of the children in their care. They were visionaries, able to see far beyond their own immediate surroundings, and able to consciously work with the reality of the spiritual nature of the child.

Today, we carry forward the work of these pioneers, exploring new approaches to meeting the needs of the young child in a new century. What are the needs of the incarnating spiritual beings in our care today? How can we grow and deepen so that we can be worthy of their imitation? What is it that lies at the core of our work spiritually?

The early gatherings at the Holy Nights in Hanover grew into large international kindergarten conferences held each year at Whitsun. For many years, Klara Hatterman opened each conference with the following verse, "Whitsun Mood," by Rudolf Steiner, which reminds us of the spiritual context out of which our work can grow and flourish in times to come:

*Being aligns with being in widths of space.
Being follows being in rounds of time.
When you, O Man, remain in widths of space, in rounds of time,
Then you are in realms that fade and pass away.
Yet mightily your soul rises above them,
When you divine or knowingly behold the Eternal,
Beyond the widths of space, beyond the rounds of time.*

Note: I hope to gather more information about the early Waldorf kindergarten teachers in North America, and would be grateful for whatever you might be willing to share with me about the early days, between the founding of the Rudolf Steiner School in New York in 1928, to the founding of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association in 1983. Please contact me at 413-549-5930 or showard@waldorfearlychildhood.org.

An Interview with Margret Meyerkort

Janni Nicol

I asked Margret Meyerkort if she would be willing to be interviewed for Kindling, and after much persuasion, she agreed. I visited her lovely home, and, over rosehip juice and nibbles, Margret spoke to me briefly about some of the background, history and some events during her many years as a Steiner Waldorf kindergarten teacher and trainer. Our conversation was so interesting and informative, that I often forgot to take notes, and I left feeling that we had only just touched the surface of Margret's fascinating life, so I will call this a "potted history" and hope that one day we may hear more from Margret, who kindly corrected my notes for me.

Margret came to England in 1950 from Switzerland (where as a nurse she had cared for an epileptic boy) to be trained as a Steiner Waldorf school class teacher at Hawkwood College in Stroud. The founder of Hawkwood College was Margaret Bennell, a friend of Margaret McMillan and a co-founder of Wynstones School. Among the other tutors were Dr. Ernst Lehrs and Dr. Maria Roeschl, both of whom had been direct students of Rudolf Steiner.

In 1953, Dr. Maria Glas, one of the two school doctors at Wynstones School, asked Margret if she would become the kindergarten teacher there. She agreed to help them out for a year, after which she hoped to become a class teacher. Three years later, a class teaching position became available, but Margret had grown to enjoy the particular creativity of kindergarten work and was intrigued to continue finding out what Rudolf Steiner had meant by stating that the teacher of the young child is like a priest.

At first, the kindergarten was in a wooden hut on the grounds of the school's hostel, one mile's walk from the school. The large room with a pitched ceiling had an iron stove. Margret had to light the fire at 7:00 a.m. after one hour's bus journey from her accommodation near Nailsworth, Stroud. She had carried over wood and coal from the hostel yard the previous evening. Kindergarten hours were 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Children brought their own sandwiches and had a rest after lunch.

After two years, Rudi Lissau, an upper school teacher, spoke of the importance of integrating the kindergarten into the life of the school, and the kindergarten was moved into what had been the staff room on the ground floor of the main building.

Margret's understanding of education and of life came out of her inner work and her studies of Rudolf Steiner's work. For instance, one day she read in one of his karma lectures, that the "stars are gateways to the spiritual world." Out of this study, she designed her Advent calendar, which was added to her classroom. Then she read that the straw of the wheat is condensed sunlight, so she made the bowls for two doll's prams out of thick wheat-straw. While studying nutrition and the development of the teeth, she gave the children biodynamic carrots and another year a mussel shell full of biodynamic wheat grains as part of their snack on Mondays. When she read about the activity of the spirit of a language, she studied English nursery songs and nursery rhymes and used these frequently in the kindergarten.

Priorities became difficult for Margret: especially on the occasion when Dr. Glas needed help in his nursing home in Stroud; when the school hostel needed help with a dormitory for lower school boys; when the school needed the city children to be supervised on the public transport bus into Gloucester; when mothers asked for help with birthday celebrations, at home, with sick children; and, last but by no means least, there was the participation in activities of the Anthroposophical Society. Fortunately, she had thirty to fifty minutes rest with the children after lunch, and occasionally went to sleep, too.

In 1953, Wynstones School had an Advent Festival for classes 1 to 4, a Christmas Festival for the kindergarten and a Midsummer Festival for classes 8 to 12. By 1980, the school had an Advent Festival for the kindergarten, as well. Sometimes, children of the Junior School Orchestra played the bamboo pipes which they had made in lessons and Swedish canteles, (a

forerunner of the kinderharp, which were made by older-children in woodwork lessons), and there was a Midsummer Festival for the whole school. (The kindergarten celebrated it partly independently). Then there were those festivals for the whole school which had grown out of kindergarten festivals as the children had moved into the classes, all of which the kindergarten continued to celebrate independently: a Whitsun Festival which had been helped by Eileen Hutchins, founder of the Elmfield School, Stourbridge; a Maypole Festival; an Autumn/Michaelmas Festival, (the Michaelic aspect with the help of Peter Roth, one of the founders of the Camphill Schools). Lastly, there were the following festivals for the kindergarten only: Snowdrop Day, a Spring/Easter Festival, an end-of-the-year-festival, and September/October lantern walks following the Autumn/Michaelmas Festival. In 1958, to mark Wynstones 21st birthday, Margret started what has since been called the Christmas Market.

For many years, the kindergarten, like the rest of the school, had parents' evenings every term in addition to home visits. The parents' evening in the summer term developed into a special meeting in that it prepared the handing over of the so-called "schoolchildren" to their class teacher-to-be (if she/he could be present) at the end-of-the-year festival.

In 1963, Margret took an unpaid sabbatical year and joined the second year students of Else Klink's Eurythmy School in Koengen, near Stuttgart. Since the inception of Wynstones School in 1937, the kindergarten had not had eurythmy. Wynstones' eurythmist, who had been trained in Dornach in the early 1920's said that of the "four different eurythmy's, the eurythmy for the young child was the most difficult." Together with what Margret had learned from previous courses in England and ongoing courses she was taking after the year with Else Klink, she risked giving the children the little eurythmy she could, appreciating that fully trained eurythmists did not approve.

In the mid 1960's, Dr. von Kugelgen (founder and head of the International Kindergarten Association for many years) asked Margret to bring the kindergarten teachers working in

Great Britain together, and the Kindergarten Steering Group was formed under the heading of the Steiner Schools Fellowship. For several years, it consisted of Stella Jarman from Michael Hall, Joan Marcus from Elmfield, Stourbridge, Eileen Simon from The New School, King's Langley and Margret, from Wynstones. They represented all the kindergarten teachers in the country, were in regular contact with them and organized conferences which helped to inform their teaching.

A year after Francis Edmunds began the Teacher Training Course at Emerson College, he asked Margret to give a one week course on "living with the young child," as he put it. Although Edmunds asked Margret to come to Emerson and work there with him, she felt that if she gave up her direct contact with children her work as a trainer would be out of touch. However, she continued the annual work at Emerson College and took students on for their practicum experience.

In the mid 1960's, Cecily Thatcher, a trainer from the Montessori College in Johannesburg, South Africa, came to Wynstones to work with Margret for a year. On her return to Johannesburg, Cecily opened her kindergarten and subsequent school. A few years later, Margret went to Johannesburg and Cape Town for nine months. This was the beginning of Margret's international work.

In 1977, Francis Edmunds had students who wanted to go into kindergarten work. He advised Margret to start a training course. She discussed the question with Dr. von Kugelgen, who encouraged her to get colleagues from Wynstones to help. The training course began in 1978 with seventeen students and ran for fifteen years. It was always supported by the International Kindergarten Association in Stuttgart. During these years Margret was one of the contributors at the annual teachers' conferences in Hannover, Germany. She tried to be innovative every year, giving, for instance, a workshop on the ninth Lesson of the School of Spiritual Science in relation to the education of the young child.

In the mid 1980's, Margret and Frances Wolls of Wynstones School began the Teacher Education Circle. Karla Kinniger from Edinburgh and representatives from other training courses joined them, including Emerson College, Elmfield School, King's Langley and others.

Margret stopped working in the kindergarten in Wynstones in 1980, but continued lecturing and training around the world. To mark the occasion of the first kindergarten teachers' conference in North America, she offered a puppet play of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" with four string puppets, which she showed by herself, and a lecture "How Can We Work with the Karma of the Young Child?" (The lecture has recently been re-edited and published by WECAN in The Gateways Series, Volume 2; *Working with the Angels: The Young Child and the Spiritual World*.)

Margret co-authored *The Challenge of the Will* together with Rudi Lissau which was published in 2000 by RSCP. Her last public workshop was given at the regional conference in Hereford in the spring of 2002. For her it was a new approach to the needs of the young child; "Education as a Question of Relating"

(published in KINDLING, Issue 2, and *Gateways* Fall/Winter 2002, Issue 43). Margret has now officially retired from her work of lecturing, giving workshops and visiting kindergartens.

Out of my own interest in the subject, I asked Margret about puppetry. She spoke about her developing in the late 1970's what has come to be called in America the "story apron." She understood Rudolf Steiner to have meant that the importance of this pedagogical tool was to support rhythm in the development of the young child, contraction and expansion. She therefore considered the size, colour, design, etc. of the story apron in response to his pedagogical indications.

Recently, Margret took all her notes and recycled them. At my expressed horror, she explained that every generation of teachers needs to be free to develop pedagogy out of an evolving spiritual science.

This article was originally published in Kindling, of which Janni Nicol is the editor.

Birthday Homage for Margret Meyerkort

Margret Meyerkort is honored in my book, *Kindergarten Education; freeing children's creative potential*. (Hawthorn Press) My daughter, Anna Rainville, was spending her junior year from University of California at Santa Cruz at Prior Weston in England. I wanted to come over to study that summer because there was a summer class being taught at Emerson College by Daniel Bittleston. I sat in his class hearing what I had believed and taught feeling all alone in my ways of teaching and was thrilled to hear that the Waldorf people had been doing just this for fifty years. At that time, we learned our trip to Switzerland had been canceled, so Mia (now Mia Michael), Anna and I all sat on a bench, with our voices and hearts saying, "Dear God, here we are with plenty of time and

money. What is the next step?" It was that afternoon that Daniel said, "I think you would enjoy Margaret Meyerkort's workshop at Wynstones." So off we went! Never have I seen such beauty in a Kindergarten classroom. Never had I heard such beauty of ideas and heartfelt passion. She has since been the speaker at our Kindergarten Forum here in Saratoga, California, where we presented her with the Summer Rose Award. This award is given to one who gives her life to the teaching of the young child. Her gift to the kindergarten teachers of the world is priceless and I shall ever be grateful for her inspiration and sharing her passion for beauty of spirit with me.

Betty Peck, Saratoga, CA

Margret's courses for teachers in the Washington, DC, area in the 1980's were memorable and deeply inspiring. She taught not just about early childhood, but about the true nature of the human being, thus calling on us to develop our own moral, soul-spiritual capacities and to become more worthy of imitation.

Nancy Foster, Maryland

I am continually inspired by Margret Meyerkort. Her example of trying to understand why one would choose to create a kindergarten environment a certain way or having a reason why one brings certain activities is a vital image of giving attention to the details and trying to perceive from every possible perspective. She holds the cosmic and the worldly pictures at the same time which gives her a depth of understanding and creates in her a vessel for intuition to enter. Margret is wise and well-read and open-minded and funny and fun, and a great influence on both the Waldorf/Steiner kindergarten movement as well as the Anthroposophical movement worldwide. She always sees the potential, the becoming in each of the children (and adults) she meets. Margret, a student of Steiner's writings, always acknowledges his thoughts and deeds in her lectures and workshops. I have profound gratitude for all I have experienced through my association with Margret, we have collaborated on various activities over the years, and I always found a balance of gravity and levity in that work, of humor and fun as well as thoughtful plumbing of the depths of anthroposophical thinking. I still hear her resounding in my memory, "What right do I have to stand before the children if I do not develop myself?" When I first met her, I asked if she would be my mentor, and she refused saying instead she would be my colleague. She has since been a beloved colleague and dear friend whom I miss seeing in person since her trips to the States ended.

Stephen Spitalny, Santa Cruz, California

Margret Meyerkort, you have brought and continue to bring so many, many gifts to ever so many people in this world. You have entered into a new decade in your life and that calls for a birthday gift to you. I would like to share one of many pictures I have experienced with you.

The picture-image is the *quiet space* you created in your talks, offerings, sharings with ever so many students, teachers and parents. Especially potent was the open quiet moment in the room at the end of your offerings. I witnessed this at every one of these I attended, and there were many, many of them, as I am sure you remember. Why this *quiet space*? What was living in it? I experienced that you touched these students, teachers and parents as human beings, and something was quickened in their hearts. They felt, heard, understood and accepted, perhaps even feeling a bit uncomfortable, even though you may have done much of the talking! They felt you open your humanity to them, as you wove interesting stories about children with a thread-line that pointed toward some aspect of our modern human soul condition, and how we can move in a different direction to support the lives of young children. What was also in that *quiet space* was an awakening in the thinking where certain aspects of life had never been so convincingly and amazingly connected, where Athena arose out of the head of Zeus. And that left everyone with a sense of one of your "hobby-horses," GRATITUDE. Yes, it was gratitude that lived in these *quiet spaces*, a place beyond words.

It is with Gratitude, from myself and I know, many others, that I wish you a nourishing birthday year filled with LOVE!

Janet Kellman, Penryn, California

Remembering Joyce Schild

Kim Hunter, Susanne Schonthaler and Marjorie Thatcher

Joyce Schild crossed the threshold on August 24, 2005 in her home on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia. She was eighty years old. A founding Waldorf kindergarten teacher in the 1970s in Vancouver, B.C., she had introduced many families to Waldorf education. When she moved to Okanagan in 1982, she helped found the Kelowna Waldorf School. Joyce's studies in art, eurythmy and speech were gifts to the children and the community. She had a special love for puppetry, and this legacy lives on.

Joyce took up pottery, building a studio and selling her work widely for many years. She also developed a large biodynamic garden and orchard which kept her working vigorously into her seventies while she continued to support the school. These years in Kelowna were her golden years. We remember her with gratitude and love.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS

Building Community through the Advent Garden

Joyce Gallardo

The following is an account of two women's experiences of the Advent garden, one indoors and the other outdoors.

An Indoor Garden

On November 6, 2004, my mother crossed the threshold. She would have been eighty-five on November 24. My mother lived a long life of devotion and dedication to her family, as did many women of her generation. During the weeks before Advent, I remembered how Mother had been so touched the first time she attended the Advent garden and saw my children walk the spiral at the Waldorf school they attended. "How special this is, how beautiful is this garden of light," she commented. Upon awakening one morning, I knew we should make an Advent garden in our home for the little children who attend Los Amiguitos, the nursery-kindergarten that takes place in my home, and for Mother to help light the pathway for her.

As I began the preparations, three days before the first Sunday of Advent, I was delighted by the offer of help from my nineteen-year-old daughter, Ana Lucia, who had recently

graduated from high school. Now she was ready to give back what had been given to her for so many years, and help to create a magical spiral of evergreens, flowers and crystals in our dining room for the children and their families who were invited to attend, and for Grandma.

I struggled with the idea of sharing a simple potluck meal after the garden. Several of the parents had never been to an Advent garden. Would staying for a meal too drastically change the mood of reverence with which the children would walk the spiral? After each of the Advent gardens I've attended, children, parents and siblings would file quietly out of the room and meet their child's teachers at the door outside where they would be handed their apple with the lit candle to take home. Then we would all go to our own homes to have a quiet dinner and lighting of our Advent wreath. The idea was to hold the mood of the spiral that the children had just walked.

But it felt as though something new needed to be created here, a different social impulse, something as sacred as the mood of the Advent garden with the space in between, the space for

meeting the other. I decided that the sharing of a meal and providing the families with a space to meet and commune with each other after the garden would be important components of this Advent garden experience.

I asked two parents who are musicians to play Christmas music for us. Vicky led us in singing traditional Christmas carols with guitar, and Juan Basilio, her husband, who is from Nicaragua, played and sang Christmas songs in Spanish. The older sister of one of the kindergarten children, who is a fourth grader, was our Advent angel.

The evening of the Advent garden flowed beautifully from the quiet mood of the dark room as I lit the candle and told the story of *Mary's Journey through the Stars*, to the children's mood of reverence as each one placed his apple with lit candle into the spiral, into their joy of receiving their apples with the burning candles outdoors in the cold winter darkness, and then finally into the festive mood of sharing a simple meal together with parents and friends in the light and warmth of the house. A community of twenty-five parents and children ate, talked with each other, played, and sang together on that first Sunday of Advent. Our home was truly blessed by their presence and I could feel Mother smiling.

The parent whose daughter was the Advent angel thanked me the next day. "As I watched Benjamin walk the spiral, I knew he was just where he should be. And it was so good to socialize later with each other. . .it made me realize that we are a community."

Another mother told me later, "It was great to be able to meet and talk with all of the parents. Since I am the last one to pick up my child each day, I have not met several of the parents. This was the perfect opportunity to get to know each other. Thank you for doing this!"

And a third parent, whose son has "graduated" from Los Amiguitos and is now in first grade said, "How important this was for us to come back and reconnect with old friends. It gives us a real sense of continuity, a sense of community."

An Outdoor Garden

A few days later, I shared this experience with my friend and colleague, Susan Weber, and she told me of her experience of the Advent garden of the past few years.

Susan had had little external festival life since she left kindergarten teaching and felt the need to create something in her home for Advent. The garden behind her home became the space she chose to enliven and use as the place for creating an Advent spiral. She and her husband made a spiral of stones with a candle in the center for the first Sunday of Advent, and they invited their neighbors and the neighbors' young child to come to the garden at dusk. Susan told the story of *Mary's Journey Through the Stars*, they sang songs, and walked the spiral with candlelit lanterns in hand. They placed the lanterns in the spiral of stones and said, "Goodnight."

Susan told me how comforting it was to look out of her window just before going to bed and see the candles still glowing in the stone spiral. This spiral has become a living part of her garden and adorns it year round.

The second week, she and her husband brought evergreen branches to the spiral and celebrated the second Sunday of Advent in the same way, with their neighbors. The third week they brought animals of wood and clay and, the fourth week, apples with candles, one for each child and adult. Each week, the children also hung golden stars in the trees.

Susan told me that they have celebrated Advent in this outdoor garden for the past six years with the same family. The group has grown to four neighborhood families and six children. As the children have grown bigger, they have begun to make the spiral of stones and evergreens and to bring new life to the garden each year as Advent approaches. Susan emphasized simplicity and continuity as two essential aspects of the beauty of the outdoor garden. The simple representation of the four kingdoms of nature, one for each week of Advent—the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom and the kingdom of man—creates an atmosphere of growth and life as the time of the Birth of the Light at

Christmas draws near. She tells the same story each week of the four Sundays.

"Experiencing the weather each Sunday outdoors, sometimes under a canopy of sparkling stars and bright moonlight, sometimes under a starless sky, and sometimes under flakes of falling snow, has kept us connected to the beauty and power of nature at this special time of the year," Susan added.

Last year, a potluck supper at Susan's neighbor's house was added to their Advent celebration. A space for meeting each other in a new way was created. This festive gathering of children and adults around a big table lit by candles and laden with warm, nourishing food to share on a cold Sunday in Advent helped to keep the light of community alive in the hearts of all who were there throughout the coming weeks of

the darkest time of the year, in anticipation of the Birth of the Light.

The creative potential of Advent (which means *the coming*—the coming of the Christ Child) for building and strengthening community is palpable, "Wherever two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I."

Joyce Gallardo is the director of Los Amiguitos (Little Friends), a N.Y. State-licensed Family Day Care Home, offering a Waldorf Nursery and Kindergarten program. She has taught kindergarten, high school Spanish, and calligraphy at Hawthorne Valley School in Harlemville, N.Y. As the director of Los Amiguitos Puppetry Troupe, Joyce has brought marionette performances to national and international audiences and offered marionette-making workshops to Waldorf teachers in Ecuador.

The Day Dusty Gnome Took a Nap

It started out as an ordinary Wednesday in Lilac Kindergarten with the children engaging wholeheartedly in their play. They began by deciding what game and which roles they would play. Usually, that's when a dividing line is drawn (with some negotiation and often teacher intervention) between the boys' and the girls' territory. On this day, when the conversations ended, I observed the children began playing as a group; they bridged the gender gap. There were animals and caretakers in the game; some animals were boisterous and others quiet, but the children were all playing together. Then, when the sewing baskets were set out on the table and the stitching song was in the air, they sat down and got to work.

After they had used up all their thread and put their baskets on the shelf, a few children got up from the table and started to clean up. Others followed while I was still working with some tangled thread. Then a child announced that they were giving "Dusty Gnome" a break. He's

the one who comes down out of his basket above the Nature Table to lead the children in their room-tidying chores. He basically sings a song and delegates who cleans where. I wondered how it would work without any guidance during this time, but I continued untangling the thread, and, when I peeked up, it was quite a marvel to behold.

The children split up into small groups to put away the blocks, dress-up clothes and silks. They carried the play stands and boat back to their places, put the dolls in their beds and set our snack table with placemats, napkins, cups and spoons. They sprayed the plants with water, swept the floor and returned the saws and hammers to their place at the woodwork table. With my untangling done, I put my basket away and then brought Dusty Gnome down to thank the children before he returned to his basket to finish his nap. I am sure that Dusty Gnome will always remember that day and the kindness of the children.

Nursery Rhymes in Puppetry Workshop at Sophia's Hearth: The Weekend of the Flood

Joyce Gallardo

On Saturday morning, October 8th at 6:30 a.m., I left home in the pouring rain to drive two-and-a-half hours to Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, New Hampshire to where Suzanne Downe would give a workshop—Nursery Rhymes in Puppetry.

The room at Sophia's Hearth was a warmly welcoming antidote to the dismal, rainy, chilly weather. Seventeen women had driven from various parts of New England to attend. The large baskets in the middle of the floor were overflowing with carded wool dyed in delicious plant colors, and Suzanne's delightful finger and lap-top puppets gave a festive atmosphere to the room. Lovely, softly-colored silk and felted wool puppet aprons hung from hooks on the wall, waiting for puppets to peek out of their pockets in fairy tale and rhyme. We had lots of fun reciting nursery rhymes and singing verses as we moved the little puppets on our laps. The day went by in a hub of activity as busy hands made small wrapped and needle-felted wool girl puppets, each one beautifully unique. Lunch was served. Conversations were lively and animated amongst supportive colleagues, building community and nurturing relationship—the underlying theme at Sophia's Hearth—and why we all return again and again. And all day long, the rain pelted against roof and windows.

Everyone left in a jubilant mood, with a sense of accomplishment, and looking forward to the next day. We would meet from 9:00 to 1:00 and continue creating puppets. Kelly and I went off to Gretchen's home, where we would spend the night. We drove her car, and I left my car parked across the street from Sophia's Hearth.

All night long the rain pelted against roof and windows. At 8:00 the next morning we were on the way to the center of town for breakfast. We did not get very far. Three blocks away, we saw a large lake in the middle of the street, firemen and police directing cars away from the

flood, and many people from nearby houses carrying out their belongings. We watched a couple paddling towards the street where Sophia's Hearth is located. Later, we learned that the couple was Susan Weber and Hans Peter, her husband. They found a lake on the street and Sophia's Hearth flooded with three feet of water. Suzanne's beautiful puppets, carded wool and silks were floating in the muddy, murky waters, dolls and furniture from the infant and toddler programs were floating. Computers were not under water yet, the office files were above the water level. The sunroof of my car, parked across the street, was just barely visible and the car was completely submerged in water!

Susan and Hans Peter rescued the computers and many of Suzanne's puppets, wool, and silks in the canoe. Later several friends went back and forth in boats, carrying what they could. How strangely unreal it all seemed after the workshop of the previous day. We were all quite shaken as we huddled together in disbelief in Susan's kitchen. She shared a bottle of Rescue Remedy with us, and we each gratefully took some drops. The rest of the day was spent washing puppets, wool and silks, stringing up clothes lines, and hanging out everything to drip, keeping our hands and minds busy. Hot coffee and a cozy fire warmed and cheered us as we worked.

Many phone calls, offers of help, and visits came, and Susan was grateful for the support of concerned friends. Susan Weber and Nancy Macalaster (who also leads infant classes at Sophia's Hearth) are courageous women, deeply devoted to the work they do. They are determined to "rise from the waters" and continue the support work they have begun with families in Keene. Where and how they will do it is now an open question. They will need moral and financial support, which is certain to be forthcoming, given the many fruits already

visible from the Michaelic impulse that lives so strongly in the work of Sophia's Hearth, and in the workshops, the trainings, and the research that takes place there.

The waters of the flood had not receded by 5 p.m. Sunday, and my car remained under water. Susan generously offered to loan me her car to drive back home to Harlemlville, New York. There was not much hope that my car could be salvaged nor hope of insurance compensation. I thought about the economic impact on our family—perhaps a small concern in the larger picture.

Today is Thursday, and it is still raining...

Note: Donations to support Sophia's Hearth in making the transition to a new home may be sent to:

*Sophia's Hearth
c/o Susan Weber
22 Douglas Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431*

Lessons from a Hurricane

Heidi Anne Porter

When I evacuated on August 28, I wasn't planning on being gone more than a couple of days. The day before, I had just conducted a friendly, productive work-play morning for my Kindergarten families. There was a little chatter about the approaching storm, but the main conversation was about the children, the coming year, and budding friendships. As my assistant and I bustled about, introducing people, directing work tasks, and greeting children, we kept meeting each others' eyes with a smile. It was our third year of Kindergarten, and for the first time, we weren't moving into a new building the day before school started. We still had a week ahead of us to devote to sewing, fairytales, and the first circle. The day was balmy, the parents motivated, the children funny and beautiful.

There were other things to be thankful for this year: a school phone, a small office for the teachers, and best of all, proximity to the rest of our school. The church from whom we rented had found space for our fifth through eighth grades, so for the first time our faculty would be able to begin each day together. The year promised unity and growth.

By the end of the morning, the crayons were clean, the coloring mats completed, and the doll

clothes were drying on racks. The furniture had been dusted, the floors swept, the toys put lovingly into place, and the dishes washed and placed onto shelves. As I locked up, my assistant and I briefly discussed our evacuation plans and agreed to meet back at school no later than Wednesday.

At my house, I started evacuation preparations. Into my suitcase went clothes for three days, books and games for Mikey, my six-year-old, a favorite stuffed animal, snacks for the car trip to Houston, a journal, my knitting project, important records, and a few magazines I hadn't had a chance to finish reading. I took down pictures and special artwork, packed them in a box, and put them as high in the closet as I could reach. For a moment, I wondered if I should take any of my pictures or photo albums with me, but the idea of my home being destroyed was too painful to really think of, and I pushed the thought aside. After all, I'd evacuated so many times before, and New Orleans had never been struck. Besides, with a cat, a hamster, and a six-year-old boy, there wasn't room for much else in the car we would be sharing with friends.

We left New Orleans early Sunday morning and arrived in Houston at 10:00 Sunday night.

We were exhausted, but safe. I got up several times that night to check the news. The next morning, it looked like New Orleans had been spared a direct hit. We gave thanks and began thinking about when it would be safe to return. I didn't find out until the next morning, August 30, that the levees had broken and New Orleans was under water. There was no way to contact friends since cell phones ceased to work. There was no way of knowing how the school fared, how my house fared. In the space of a day, life as I knew it, as I depended upon it, had forever changed.

Mikey and I flew out the next day to my parents' home in California. We had to leave the hamster with friends, but were able to take the cat with us. I tried to make the trip as fun and normal as possible for my little boy, but on the inside I was numb and terrified. In the dark days that followed, in those first few weeks when I didn't know what became of my friends, my home, or my school, and when the only news that trickled out of New Orleans was devastating, it was hard to feel courageous.

Of course, I felt tremendous gratitude for my life and for the life of my son, but there was still this keening in me, this constant steady crying for my familiar life. Who was I, stripped of my house, my school, my job, the little things I had collected throughout my life? I had kept journals for thirty years, how was I going to remember my life without them? I grieved for my photo albums, for my son's baby book, for the things I had made for my kindergarten. Night after night, I lay awake picturing my home and my classroom, wondering if I had placed things high enough to survive the flood waters, wishing I had packed more items.

I prayed for my friends and for the families of our school, trying to picture each dear face before I fell asleep. There were so many people I hadn't heard from, so many people I didn't know how to contact.

One sleepless night, I started re-reading a copy of the Spring/Summer 2005 issue of *Gateways*. The letter from the editor seemed to have been written just for me. In it, Stephen Spitalny writes of the importance of awakening from the enchantment of the modern world. He

offers Steiner's suggestions to spend time in true observation of nature, and to consciously observe one's own responses to events that come into our lives. Spitalny adds that crises and painful situations often give us perfect opportunities to look at ourselves.

Although it felt more like a never-ending nightmare rather than an awakening from enchantment, I knew a great challenge was before me. I prayed for gratitude, and for a release from the constant fear and sorrow that filled me. At first, all I could say was "I *want* to be grateful. I *want* to be strong. I *want* to trust." And I would repeat that over and over, hoping that the intention would help get me there.

I enrolled my son in a little school nearby. It was a public school, but the teacher and staff were warm and welcoming. I let go of my need for it to be a Waldorf school and I decided to trust this new community. As the days passed, my gratitude to the school grew, especially as Mikey seemed so happy and safe.

It wasn't easy for me to let go of my old life. I'd never been comfortable with surprises. I liked order. I liked to know what was coming. I liked to make lists. In college, I used to turn my assignments in two weeks early! I *needed* to feel prepared. I hadn't been prepared for this upheaval, and yet—I realized I was surviving, with the love and care of my family and friends. I began to feel less afraid. Slowly, I understood that I had been given the perfect chance to embrace uncertainty. Could I learn to feel gratitude for this?

I began to spend more time in the woods around me. For the first time in thirteen years, I was experiencing autumn. I walked, ran, and rode my bike under golden canopies of alder leaves. Bushes blazed red. The Sierra Mountains cradled me. Tall pine trees tossed down their pine cones in generous offerings. I collected piles of them, each one so perfect. I also collected moss covered branches, dried wood, pretty leaves. I filled boxes of autumn treasures, wanting to take them back to my kindergarteners someday. Sometimes, I sat under a tree and let the tears come. How lucky I was to be in such a beautiful place as I searched for clarity.

I began to realize that gratitude didn't mean I felt happy about something, but that it meant I was less susceptible to despair, and was therefore open to what I could learn. I also learned that courage doesn't always mean you feel brave; sometimes it just means you don't give up.

As the weeks passed, I received more news from New Orleans. My home had survived, but many friends had lost theirs. Often the joy of hearing from someone was quickly followed by grief when I learned they wouldn't return to New Orleans. Little by little, I tried to find something hopeful in each loss. When I learned of students that would not be returning, I was grateful that they had been welcomed into warm schools. When I saw the pictures of my flooded classroom, I rejoiced that our upper grade classrooms were untouched on the second floor. When friends decided to move away forever from New Orleans, I was grateful that their lives were spared.

The losses to our school have almost been devastating, but we have decided to rebuild. Hope, and the desire to continue, is strong. Other Waldorf schools have begun to contact us and to pledge their support. Play groups, home school groups, parent groups, retired teachers, and even Waldorf students have begun sending prayers, encouragement, and donations in support of our school. There has been such an outpouring of strength that my grief over our torn community is beginning to fade. It's as if our sense of community has become larger. It feels as if we have friends all over the world, friends we can

depend on until we get our strength back. The community encompasses all of us. And that is an empowering feeling.

I will return to New Orleans, to help rebuild the school and the city that I love. We will be in a new building, in a part of town that wasn't touched by the flooding. Many of our families will not come back, but many are just as determined to try again. We probably won't have a phone, but all the classes will be together, and once again we teachers will be grateful to gather each morning before classes begin. Dolls, puppets and gnomes that have traveled from schools around the world will greet the children when they return.

I suspect that I will be a stronger teacher as a result of the past few months. Those little inconveniences like the bread that doesn't rise, the blue paint jar that breaks, or the realization after a nature walk in the rain that no one has dry clothes in their cubbies, won't be as unsettling. I suspect that the lessons I've learned from our hurricane might even inspire me to write a few fairytales.

Our lives will be at times scary and overwhelming, but because there are many people standing beside us, keeping us in their thoughts, we will be strengthened. Hurricane Katrina astounded us all by its force and fury, but I have discovered that the forces of hope, compassion and generosity are even stronger.

Heidi Anne Porter is a kindergarten teacher at the Hill School, a Developing Waldorf school in New Orleans.

Report from the Hill School New Orleans, Louisiana

We had just begun our sixth year at the Hill School, with a thriving Kindergarten, a first grade, second grade, fourth/fifth grade and a seventh/eighth grade when Hurricane Katrina came. Most of our staff had just returned from summer training with new hopes and dreams for a fruitful year. The seeds had just been sown for the new school year at the Kindergarten parents' meeting which took place just two days before the storm. Unfortunately, our kindergarten, first,

and second grade classrooms were severely flooded, having two to three feet of standing water. We will not be able to salvage our beautiful handmade puppets, dolls, toys, desks, etc. that made our Kindergarten such a magical place. Although our upper grade classrooms were on the second floor, we are concerned about the mold and mildew that has taken over many buildings in the city.

Where has Katrina left the Hill School? Many of our families, including teachers, have lost everything. We have been trying to reach all of our families to determine what their individual losses are and how we can reach out to them in their time of need. We as a community are spread across the United States, all the way from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Miami, Florida.

AWSNA (the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America) has opened an account to accept your kind donations that will make the difference as to whether we can continue our journey at the Hill School. Your donation will go directly to the purchasing of new desks, lesson books, supplies, handwork materials, gardening supplies, play equipment, and other school

expenses. The current plan is to relocate the entire school to a newly renovated historic building for this remaining school year.

If you would like more information about the re-opening of the school or donating to the Hill School, please visit our web site at www.hillschoolwaldorf.org. We are a strong and beautiful group of families and look forward to being together in the near future. Hope is alive and well in New Orleans. Thank you so much for your generous gifts and support to our school and families at this difficult time.

BOOK REVIEWS

In A Nutshell

By Nancy Foster

Reviewed by Ann Stahl

Published by Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten, 2005. Distributed by WECAN.

A fine light of clarity based on long experience and deep understanding shines through each of Nancy Foster's responses in this "Nutshell" to thirty-five questions most often asked by parents meeting Waldorf early childhood education for the first time.

The questions encompass three areas; classroom environment, work and play at school and children at home.

Some of my favorite questions include: "Could you address the question of musical instruments in the classroom? Many preschools have them, yet I have not seen them in the Waldorf kindergarten." Nancy replies; "The human voice could be said to be the first musical instrument, and for the early years of life it remains the most important instrument for the child both to hear and to 'play.' Another important 'musical instrument' is the human body—we clap, pat our legs, stamp our feet, or drum our fingertips on the floor to create sounds."

Another is: "Why do you provide play dishes and pots and pans, but no cars or trucks?" The reply; "A carved piece of wood may, for example, be used as a bridge, or as a telephone, a boat, a cradle, a delivery truck, a fish, a package, and so on. Cars and trucks are more specific in orientation because they have wheels. The wheels seem to speak so strongly of locomotion—particularly fast locomotion—that these vehicles are rarely used for other purposes by the children."

And; "Why are the Grimm's fairy tales with the 'good' associated with the 'beautiful' and the 'bad' with the 'ugly' in some of them told to the children?" Nancy's reply; "Some of these fairy tales are told because we believe they provide an important basis for human life. It is important, however, to choose carefully what fairy tales are told, according to the age of the child. Children who are ready for fairy tales sense that beauty and ugliness refer to inner qualities, not external appearance. If the story is told without the

'baggage' of adult feelings or intellectual interpretation, the child will be able to hear and digest it."

Her answer to, "Is the world a good place?" is pertinent for adults who question the current state of the world and a sound reflection for the children of today.

Nancy embodies the quality of conscious striving, rather than absolute knowing, in the way she answers the questions parents have put to her over the years of her teaching life at the Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten and Nursery in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Her thinking about the topics will also help, in addition to parents, newer teachers who have not yet acquired the fullness of experience needed to answer questions in a non-dogmatic or prescribed way. I wish I had had these answers when I was brand new to Waldorf teaching in the 1970s!

The "sweetmeat" contained in this nutshell is juicy and full of flavor and will provide both nourishment and further questions for its readers. We thank Nancy for opening the "nut" and placing its contents in such an accessible form.

Eurythmy for the Young Child for Kindergarten and Eurythmy Teachers and Parents – A Guide

By Estelle Bryer

Reviewed by Susan O'Reilly

Published by WECAN, 2005.

This wonderful book is a veritable treasure chest! It contains gems for the reader, from the parent who asks the question "Why does my child do eurythmy?" to the kindergarten teacher looking for ideas and guidance at ring time, and also for the eurythmist planning and reflecting upon the lessons with the young child.

As a guide or reference book, it works very well, clearly laid out and therefore practical and accessible. As a source of inspiration, it is packed full of original, imaginative rhymes and stories with movement indications for teachers as well as vowels and consonants for the eurythmists. These are preceded by an introduction for both kindergarten and eurythmy teachers on such subjects as child development, clothing, beginning and ending the lesson/ring-time, how to deal with disturbances, structure, music, the role of the kindergarten teacher in the eurythmy lesson and, most important, gesture and movement. The lessons are suitable for three- to eight-year-olds, and are presented according to the seasons and festivals, including beginning and ending verses, working with contraction and expansion and veils. There are many stories which are complete in themselves,

such as "The Turnip" or "The Golden Goose," and include rhymes and songs. There are also verses for many occasions, from dwarfs to dragons!

The tone is that of a warm and friendly voice, and we are fortunate indeed that Estelle Bryer has decided to share these gifts, permeated with her years of experience from working with young children.

As a kindergarten teacher and eurythmist, I have used many of her suggestions and was rewarded by happy, smiling faces and a ring-time full of joy. Eurythmy for young children has a great advocate in Estelle Bryer. Thank you for giving us this wonderful book.

Susan O'Reilly is a kindergarten teacher and kindergarten eurythmist in Cambridge, England.

These books are available through the Waldorf Early Childhood Association
285 Hungry Hollow Rd.
Spring Valley, NY 10977
845-352-1690
Online bookstore: <http://www.waldorfearychildhood.org>

Calendar of Events

Conferences, Workshops, Summer Courses

Early Childhood Teacher's Conference, Feb. 10-12, 2006 at Sunbridge College. The theme is "The Spirit of Humanity in Early Childhood Education" and the keynote speaker is Michaela Gloeckler. Contact info@sunbridge.edu or 845-425-0055, ext. 11.

The Social Encounter: February Teacher's Conference, Feb. 19-22, 2006, Rudolf Steiner College featuring Johanna Steegmans, Nancy Poer and Christof Wiechert on the theme of relationship and the encounter with the other. Many early childhood workshops are scheduled for the afternoon, including one with Harriet Grebler, RIE educator, entitled "Toddler Conflict." Call 916-864-4864 for more information and to register.

Teachers Conference, February 16-18, 2006, Honolulu Waldorf School on child study with guest speaker Christof Wiechert from the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum. The conference will also have puppetry workshops with Suzanne Down. Call 808-377-5471 for further information.

Waldorf in the Home Conference, March 4-5, 2006 at Sacramento Waldorf School. Brochures and online registration will be available in late December. Our keynote speakers bring together various disciplines to enrich your parenting: William Bento, psychologist and cofounder of Gradalis; Elizabeth Seward, Waldorf teacher, mentor and adult educator; and Thomas Cowan, MD, anthroposophical doctor and principal author of *The Fourfold Path to Healing*. Contact www.waldorfinthehome.com.

LifeWays Weekend, March 24-26, 2006 in East Troy, Wisconsin on Nurturing and Nourishing, a workshop for health home care for children and caregivers. Contact Cynthia Aldinger at 405-579-0999.

Rudolf Steiner Institute, July 3-23, 2006, Green Mountain College, Poultney, Vermont, offers wide range of learning experiences for those who want to deepen the spiritual foundations of their lives. Courses in art, music, philosophy, Waldorf education and science. One and two week formats, grants available to Waldorf teachers, children's program. Contact Lynn Bufano, 800-774-5191, registrar@steinerinstitute.org or www.steinerinstitute.org.

Training Programs

Sunbridge College Part-Time Early Childhood Teacher Education. New program begins June 2006. A two-year, part-time program, with three week courses

each summer for three summers, plus a week each fall and spring (thirteen weeks total). Certificate and Master's degree options. Open to those working in Waldorf early childhood settings with a minimum of one year of teaching experience. For more information contact Matt Burns, 845-425-0055, ext. 24, mburns@sunbridge.edu.

Sophia's Hearth Family Center Training Course, July 3-14, 2006. New group begins 14-month, part-time program; designed for parent-child teachers, childcare professionals, other early childhood teachers interested in deepening their understanding of the child in the first three years and her family, info@sophiashearth.org.

Sophia's Hearth Family Center, July 3-7, 2006. Two courses: Week one of "The Child in the First Three Years" with Jane Swain and Susan Weber; Helle Heckmann will lead an advanced course for early childhood teachers to include independent projects for course participants with Helle's mentoring. Contact info@sophiashearth.org.

Sophia's Hearth Family Center, July 10-14, 2006. Two courses: Bernadette Raichle, founder of Awhina, an anthroposophically-based childcare program in New Zealand for infants through kindergarten age children, will co-teach with Connie Manson, Waldorf early childhood kindergarten in Sarasota FL, master puppeteer and musician. Week two of "The Child in the First Three Years" with Connie Manson and an introduction to RIE (Resources for Infant Educators), contact info@sophiashearth.org.

Sophia's Hearth Family Center, July 17-21, 2006. Advanced course on the young child with Susan Weber and Jane Swain, info@sophiashearth.org.

Lifeways Training, July 27-August 5, 2006 at Merriconeag Waldorf School, Freeport, Maine. Contact Susan Silverio, 207-763-4652.

Puppetry Events, Workshops, Courses

For information on all courses below, as well as costs and payments plans, contact Suzanne Down, 1-888-688-7333, www.junipertreepuppets.com, suzanne@junipertreepuppets.com.

2nd Annual Arizona Regional Early Childhood Puppetry Conference: The Healing Heart Puppet, Jan 21-22, 2006, Tucson, AZ. Will focus on the Hand and Rod Puppet, the most therapeutic of puppet types in terms of the connection it makes through the heart and healthy breathing of the children. Create Mother Earth Rod Puppets and soothing stories.

2nd Annual San Diego Regional Early Childhood Puppetry Conference: The Healing Heart Puppet, Jan. 28- 29, 2006, San Diego, CA. See above for description.

All Hawaii Early Childhood Puppetry Conference, Feb. 19, 2006, Honolulu, Hawaii. We will explore the joyful and meaningful use of puppetry and storytelling for our young children. Demonstrations, practical skill building exercises, and puppet making. Contact the Honolulu Waldorf School or Suzanne Down.

Early Childhood Workshop and Puppetry through the Grades, March 3-5, 2006, Washington, DC. Contact Jack Petrash at novainstitute.org or Suzanne Down.

LifeWays Weekend with Suzanne Down at Rudolf Steiner College, March 8-10, 2006 on development of speech, nursery rhymes and puppetry. Contact Suzanne Down or Rudolf Steiner College for further information, 916-961-8727 or www.steinercollege.edu.

The Healing Heart Puppet: Early Childhood Puppetry Intensive, March 11-12, 2006, Los Altos CA. See Arizona conference for description.

Chicago Regional Early Childhood Puppetry Conference, March 25-26, 2006. Delve into the "Protection Story," story creation and puppetry that weave a healing story for the children of today, look at the fundamentals of therapeutic puppetry for sensitive and overwhelmed/anxious children and learn how to bring stories for the crucial needs of the times. Puppet making, demonstration, and presentation practice.

2nd Annual West Coast Therapeutic ECE Conference: In Changing Times, April 1-2, 2006, Sacramento, CA, Children's Garden. "Exploring Briar Rose and the Twelve Virtues." How we can gain practical insights and skills for our inner life and outer work with young children to meet the challenges of today's times? Claudia McClaren Lainson, Therapist, and Suzanne Down.

2nd Annual Southern States ECE Puppetry and Storytelling Conference, April 8-9, 2006, Florida, on the wonder of speech development in young children and how storytelling and puppetry support it, working with the storytelling rod puppet, the heart puppet, and explore the wise wisdom of how a child acquires speech and what lives in the cosmic powers called consonants and vowels. Puppet making and storytelling voice work.

Minnesota Regional Puppetry Conference, April 29-30, 2006, Minneapolis, details TBA.

Ontario Puppetry Conference, May 2006, details TBA.

Fundamentals of Therapeutic Puppetry and Storytelling, May 27- 28, 2006, Glenora Camphill Farm, Vancouver Island. Keynote Adola McWilliams, co-founder of Ita Wegman Assoc and Glenora Camphill Farm, with Suzanne Down. We will work with the basic principles that make puppetry of such healing value for ourselves and the children we work with. Adola has over fifty years experience with therapeutic teaching and puppetry. A rare opportunity to learn from the Master!

Other Announcements

The **Cape Ann Waldorf School** is looking for a Lead Kindergarten Teacher for January through June 2006. The school is located on the North Shore of Boston in Beverly Farms, MA in walking distance of downtown and the ocean. The class includes 16 children ages four-and-a-half to six, and a full-time Assistant. This position could also continue on a permanent basis into the next school year. For further information, please contact khiselman@capeannwaldorf.org or call 978-380-9113.

Hella Heckmann, Waldorf earlychildhood educator from Copenhagen, Denmark and author of *Nokken: a Garden for Children*, will be available next year from late October through early December to visit kindergartens and child care programs in North America. She is interested in advising in kindergartens and offering parents evenings or weekend workshops. Each host school would be asked to provide an honorarium and accommodations and to carry a portion of her travel expenses. If you would be interested in having her visit, please contact WECAN Coordinator, Susan Howard at showard@waldorfearlychildhood.org.

The Bay Area Center for Teacher Training is holding information evenings at Waldorf schools in California to include Santa Cruz, Summerfield, East Bay and Marin. Visit their website at www.bacwtt.org for dates and more information.

Classified Advertisements

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Hinode Farm: Pure Beeswax Candles: Tapers, Votive, Pressed Flower Pillars, Angels, Lavender, Cream/Balm. www.hinodefarm.com 1-888-855-1932 candles@hinodefarm.com.

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Special Thanks

We would like to thank everyone who contributed articles for this issue directly,
or indirectly through other publications.

Past issues of *Gateways* are available online with many articles posted at
<http://www.waldorflibrary.org/gateways.html>. The most recent issues will not be posted online.
Hard copies of current issues and back issues can be ordered from WECAN.

Seeking Your Contributions

- *Articles based on your experiences, observations or research.
- *Practical activities such as stories, circle times and crafts.
- *Book reviews of books that are resources for our work as early childhood educators.
- *Reviews of books that support our work.
- *Articles about or interviews with the elders in the Waldorf early childhood movement.
- *Websites that support early childhood work.
- *Your comments and questions about *Gateways* and past contents.

Annual individual membership, which includes subscription, is \$30.
Deadlines for articles and advertisements are September 15 and March 15.
It is preferable that articles be sent on disk or emailed as an attachment to
publications@waldorfearlychildhood.org.

Gateways is published twice yearly by
the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America, 285 Hungry Hollow Road,
Spring Valley, New York, 10977. Telephone (845) 352-1690, Fax (845) 352-1695.

Gateways

A Newsletter of the
Waldorf Early Childhood Association
of North America

Fall/Winter 2005
Issue 49