Gateways

A Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America

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From the Editor

Stephen Spitalny

How are we to keep alive children's sense of wonder in the face of the onslaught of the consumerist/ materialistic world culture they are born into? It is as though forces are at work attempting to rob young human beings of something that is their birthright. This question lives in me each day as I watch the kindergarten children play, as I watch them interact with each other and their parents, and as I observe and think about our cultural environment. How can I nurture and support their joy in what they experience, and their interest in the amazing world around them? Where is the wonder and how is it developed?

For me, one answer is to regularly immerse myself in nature, whether a short walk around the block, or a long hike in a state park, and pay attention to what my senses are experiencing. What do I see, what does it feel like, smell like, how warm or cool, what is the wind like. . . all my senses are receiving information. When I can be awake to those sense impressions, I feel nourished and rejuvenated, and I am refilled with my own sense of wonder toward the world. Simply watching a snail move slowly along, or a hummingbird so still yet with its wings going so fast they become a blur, can be a reminder of the wonder of life. How better could I help the children maintain a sense of wonder than by cultivating my own?

Rudolf Steiner gave various exercises that can help, as does the alchemical thinking Dennis Klocek offers in his talks and books, particularly *The Seer's Handbook*. These profound resources can help to make observing nature, both its being and its becoming, a daily practice to nurture your own sense of wonder, and then too, that of the children. The basis of Waldorf education for the young child is the understanding that imitation is the primary learning method, imitation on many levels, and that the primary teaching tool, if you will, is the teacher or caregiver herself. So we must continually develop our understanding of our own self, and work at providing renewal and balance, and more and more awareness in all that we do. In a nutshell, we must develop our will through engaging it on all levels, so the children can educate their own wills out of imitation of our will development.

Rudolf Steiner (in *The Child's Changing Consciousness*) said:

> *Essentially, there is no education other than self-education, whatever the level may be. This is recognized in its full depth within Anthroposophy, which has conscious knowledge through spiritual investigation of repeated Earth lives. Every education is self-education, and as teachers we can only provide the environment for children's self-education. We have to provide the most favorable conditions where, through our agency, children can educate themselves according to their own destinies. This is the attitude that teachers should have toward children, and such an attitude can be developed only through an ever-growing awareness of this fact.*

This past November, I was at a talk in San Francisco by John Trudell, a Native American musician and political activist. I was struck by what he said about finding a daily connection to wonder, a daily practice, and about the necessity of becoming more conscious of our own responsibility in all that we do in life. I offer here a few excerpts from my transcription of his talk:

> *We strengthen what we are up to when we acknowledge the creator every day, when we give the creator thanks for life. Every day, to the creator say "Thank you for giving me life" . . . Nothing else helps us to remember to live. . . We should [also] thank the creator every day for the gift of intelligence, because we were given intelligence to go with this life. If we make those acknowledgments every day we are starting to activate something. . .*
>
> *Remember what we have in common as human beings . . . It is important that we think like human beings so we can start to remember who we are, and remember what it means to be a human being. . .What we have in common is that each human being [is] born with living consciousness, the consciousness of life. . .*
>
> *The power of our living consciousness, the power we*

have because of our relationship to reality, is that we can activate it by free will. We can activate it when we make the decision that we are going to activate it. And we all individually have to figure out how to be more and more clear and coherent. . .

In this issue we are bringing to the table many wonderful articles for your own journey of self-education. Many thanks to all the authors, some of whom have become regular contributors to *Gateways*. In this issue, we look further into the world of play of the young child, and the world of the will. We offer a quick peek into the work songs that can be so useful, and some thoughts on re-enlivening a story about a little duck. Thoughts on the self-education of inner life, and various aspects of working with parents are also included. There are reports from conferences that you may not have been able to attend. I hope you find the contents as inspiring for you as I have found them to be.

As we go to press, a new WECAN book has just been published: *Mentoring in Waldorf Early Childhood Education*, the fourth in the Gateways Series. We don't have a review to include in these pages, but it IS a wonderful book with nine articles on various aspects of mentoring, and will be an important resource for early childhood mentors, schools and also for individuals working on self-education, which is the theme of the first section of the book. We have included the chapter entitled "The Art of Fruitful Conversations" in this issue to give you a sample of what's inside. Last issue we included an article from the same book entitled "The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education."

Two other forthcoming WECAN publications are also previewed in this issue. We offer a short excerpt from Dr. Heinz Zimmerman's lecture, "Meeting Each Other," at the 2005 World Early Childhood Conference. The full proceedings will be published this spring as *Playing, Learning, Meeting the Other*. And Louise DeForest's article "Meetings with Parents on the Topic of Discipline" is from *You're Not the Boss of Me*, a comprehensive resource for those working with older children in the kindergarten, available from WECAN this summer.

I also want to bring to your attention two story resources. The first is a book called *Tales Our Abuelitas Told: A Hispanic Folktale Collection* by F. Isabel Campoy and Alma Flor Ada. There are a dozen stories and some of them will surely become part of my own storytelling repertoire. The book is also available in Spanish. The other is a book called *Rhinos and Raspberries: Tolerance Tales for the Early Grades*. It is published by the folks at Teaching Tolerance and they have provided many other wonderful resources free of charge to educators. This book includes another dozen stories that can help encourage compassion and community. (The book offers many suggestions for teaching various things to the children via the story, which I choose to leave out, letting the story speak for itself.) The book is available at this web address: www.tolerance.org/teach/resources/rhinos.jsp.

For many years, Lydia Roberson has been the Managing Editor for *Gateways*. She has done wonderful and valiant work, and as of our last issue has stepped back from the job. Many thanks to Lydia, and best wishes on your new adventures. With this issue we welcome a new Managing Editor, Lory Widmer Hess. I bid you welcome and wish you well as we embark on this *Gateways* journey together!

May you "always have plenty of fish to eat, no matter how hard the great wind of Winter Maker blows" (from *Shingebiss*, by Nancy Van Laan). (Vegetarians, please note this is meant as a metaphor.)

Stephen Spitalny, Editor
Santa Cruz, California

On the Seashore of Worlds

Sally Jenkinson

Previously published in our sister publication in the UK, KINDLING: the Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Care and Education. *Extracts from this article first appeared in* EYE *magazine, February 2005.*

The seashore of endless worlds. . .

Shell
Dinky car
Saturday sixpence
Bull's eye (sweet)/lolly – 3d superior to 1d
Catapult
Water pistol
Dead butterfly
Snakeskin
Interesting stone – obviously
Penknife – succession of (you'd lose them)
Rubber band – you fiddled with it mostly but it was a great projectile
Matchbox with something in it – an ant or spider
Magnifying glass
Collecting cards
Conker – in season
Metal and glass marbles – I liked the feel and the look of them

The boy, one-time owner of the above and now a man, paused thoughtfully as he metaphorically turned out the contents of his boyhood pockets. The hand of his memory reached back into long-forgotten spaces to draw out the treasures lying hidden there still. Held lightly now, in the palm of his imagination, he described the familiar objects with an immediacy and sense of intimacy connected only to the known and loved. A dead butterfly; an interesting stone — "obviously," he had said, it being unthinkable that a child wouldn't have had one of these; a conker — in season; glass and metal marbles — he liked the feel and look of them. It was clear that many of the individual items, while significant in themselves, also held a totemic value for him; each was a signifier for a set of other important feelings and associations. His rubber band; the papery snakeskin, which hadn't lasted long in those crowded cloth pouches, but what a find; the magnifying glass; the fluff-covered sweets; the penknives, which kept getting lost — everything spoke of his personal odyssey through childhood, of his journey to find himself. Each object symbolized at least one play adventure in the world: one self-sought, unique learning experience. Taken together, the contents were a tribute to the "raging originality of childhood" and to the diversity and eclectic nature of the growing human mind.

> *The child would know all the properties of things, their innermost nature. For this reason he examines the object on all sides; for this reason he puts it in his mouth and bites it. We reprove the child for his naughtiness and foolishness; and yet he is wiser than we who reprove him.* (Friedrich Froebel)

The boy's pockets were filled with what he chose to gather together to meet his own idiosyncratic needs. Some items helped him explore the world — the magnifying glass, the penknife; some were accidental but wonderful discoveries — the discarded snakeskin, the butterfly – which, even then, he knew connected him to beauty and death although he was unable to verbalize that thought at the time. All of them — his play tools, his treasures — the random accumulations of his childhood, were an affirmation of his individual self.

> *The child's toys and the old man's reasons are the fruits of the two seasons.* (William Blake)

Inside our adult heads, the collector's items that are our thoughts, feelings, and memories, jostle together like the contents of that small boy's pocket. In *The Renewal of Education* Rudolf Steiner suggests that the way we gather things together to create our playworlds as children is a necessary process that pre-empts and indeed informs the way we later collect the necessary concepts from our repository of experience to make good individual judgments in real situations as adults. To make good personal decisions we need to dig deep into the pockets of our experience.

The linear, perfunctory journey through the early

years by the fastest route possible, in which we arrive at our adult station out of breath and with a suitcase full of ticked test papers, is not necessarily the best way to achieve this. What makes us rounded, satisfied, and personally creative human beings who are able to make sound decisions is rather the long trawl, the lingering look, the collection of oddities, the storing of experiences, good and sometimes bad, which originate in childhood and populate our inner worlds from then forward. Children need places to play in safety in their own society — to meander, to look away from the business of learning for a while, and in so doing find themselves.

They also need to find each other! When questioned, children say that what they like doing most is playing with their friends, yet certain games appear to be in decline. A survey carried out in 2004 of 3,500 parents and head-teachers in the UK reported that parents were worried that traditional playground games were disappearing from primary schools. Only one in five children played chase or tag games, one in ten enjoyed skipping, one in twenty played conkers and less than one in a hundred played marbles. Cat's cradle had vanished altogether. Some games have been superseded by contemporary versions. Skipping rhymes are filled with modern cultural references: "Poor Jenny" now gets married, divorced and re-married within a few hectic minutes. This is a dynamic and inevitable evolution, but seasonal games, those which cost very little and have always given children great pleasure because everyone has the same access to them, have been elbowed out of the way by the sophisticated toys and gadgets that have muscled their way in to the playground. Delight in simple things, it seems, is increasingly short-lived.

Children are also losing their play spaces. There is less physical space, fewer places for adventure and healthy risk in relative safety, and also, in some quarters, less tolerance and understanding of why children need their "space to play," why they need time out from the busy schedules in their lives, and why play is such an important part of their learning process.

The natural world, alive in both urban and rural settings, has much to teach us whatever our age, and there is a clear need to encourage and plan for children's playful engagement with nature. Early childhood colleagues are working hard to provide opportunities for children to experience the great outdoors, for example by introducing garden areas into early years settings, and in the Forest Kindergarten Movement. Many years ago, the educator Margaret McMillan made the discerning observation that "The best classroom and richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky."

Simon Barnes, the author and naturalist, would agree with her. Writing about the discovery of a couple of newts lying "like drowned dinosaurs" at the bottom of a pond by his son, who breathed: "Wow!" in delight, Barnes argues:

> *It all depends on what you mean by education. Do we want to educate people to become a viable part of the economy? Or should the priority be to make them a viable part of the human race? It's a question of what we value. Your money or your life, if you like.*
>
> *And how can anyone value what he has never seen? Getting children's boots muddy is not about recruiting tomorrow's conservation workers. Perhaps the test of being human is the extent to which we value things beyond our own immediate circle of concern: to value life beyond family, beyond nation, beyond race, beyond religion, beyond species.*
>
> *But you can't make the first step to understanding the non-human world if you can't say 'wow' to a newt. It has become a political issue: every child has a right to say 'wow' to a newt[!]*

He's right, and I believe we should lobby for children to have these kinds of life-affirming experiences. Children watching hours of TV instead of being outside in streets and fields suffer from the twin ills of experience deficiency and information overload.

Ignoring the life curriculum, in favour of the work project has also been shown to place children under undue stress. In a survey commissioned by Phil Willis (Liberal Democrat party education spokesman) in 2002, 147 representative schools, teachers, and parents reported that 55% of children aged 7 were showing stress. Their stress manifested in various ways including the following:

- excessive anxiety
- loss of appetite
- insomnia
- bed-wetting
- forgetfulness and depression

Teachers were reported to be concerned that children were no longer allowed to be children and the case of girl who unexpectedly started bed-wetting again was used as an example. This girl had been taken to the doctor to get to the root of her problem, where it transpired she was preparing for tests and had been told that her teacher's job depended on the results. How sad for her; the burden of responsibility was simply too much to bear. We are putting weighty sacks on our children's backs again; in the industrial past they deformed the body, now they weigh down the soul.

A piece of older — but I believe still valid — research directs our gaze to a very different paradigm for childhood.

> *After finding that about one child in 30 is brilliant and happy. . . a great deal of research [was done] to determine what demographic or psychological characteristics distinguished those children. But the children came from a wide variety of backgrounds – rich and poor, small families and large, broken and stable homes, poorly and well-educated parents – and from all parts of the U.S. Finally, through extensive questioning, [Burton White of Harvard Univ.] determined that the bright and happy children had only one thing in common: All of them spent noticeable amounts of time staring peacefully and wordlessly into space.* (from *Creativity in Business* by Ray and Myers)

Staking a claim for the Imagination

I recently visited a kindergarten where children do have time to stand and stare. On this occasion, however, they had chosen not to stare peacefully, but rather to engage energetically in their free play (child-initiated play, without specific, external learning objectives). As they developed their themes — unravelling individual ideas and tying them together in new combinations with others — I was conscious that play is very often about *place*: about "determining the ground." Two boys were guarding an area of "land," hallowed ground, with a pair of entwined sweeping brushes. Children wanting to enter the protected area were required to say a password, whereupon the brushes slowly rose, like the drawbridge to a mediaeval fortress, or more prosaically, the barrier to a modern car park (a beautifully observed detail perhaps). The point about the barrier and what lay behind it was that the children were transforming the designated space into what they wanted it to be. On this occasion, the determined land ranged from being a house, where hidden inside, a cook was flipping pancakes and setting the table for her friend the chicken-cat (a self-determined role negotiated because the "cat" didn't just want to be a cat); a palace for a princess, who slept "over there," a horse's stable with a hobby horse who had stew cooked for him; and a yard for a kennel with a dog.

This idea of determining land in childhood may be more significant in later life than we realise. Melvyn Bragg interviewed the playwright Michael Frayn to discover what lay behind this man's remarkably inventive mind. Frayn spoke about his childhood, where he had played freely with friends on bomb-sites and other unclaimed areas: "undetermined land" he called it. "It became whatever you wanted it to be." This quality — of being able to overlay a place or a situation with an imagination (often accompanied by a physical construction) and thus determine it — proved central in Frayn's later literary work. In the interview, the seventy-one year old was shown reacting with obvious delight to the rediscovery of some rusty nails still anchored to a tree that had once supported the prow of an imagined ship he and his boyhood friends had built and sailed in so many years before. He spoke of the imagination as a vast tract of undetermined land waiting for us to claim and determine it for ourselves.

> *Know you what it is to be a child? . . .*
> *It is to believe in love,*
> *To believe in loveliness,*
> *To believe in belief. . .*
> *it is to turn pumpkins into coaches,*
> *And mice into horses,*
> *Lowliness into loftiness, and nothing into everything.*
> (Francis Thompson)

Despite the importance of make-believe in childhood, research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) suggests that young children may be missing out on "pretend" games like pirates and spacemen due to the demands of the school curriculum.

The project, led by Dr. Sue Rogers at the University of Plymouth, found that reception classes were not always designed to meet the needs of four-to-five-year-olds. "Children of this age learn to make friends as well as to use their imagination through role play," says Dr. Rogers. "We know that they are capable of sustained and complex imaginative play and that capturing and engaging their interest is essential. Unfortunately, pressures on time and space, as well as the need to teach literacy, means that playing at shops, pirates, and hospitals is difficult to fit into the timetable."

The researchers made a total of 71 visits to groups of four-year-olds in schools from three contrasting areas in the southwest of England. A total of 144 children and six teachers and six classroom assistants took part in the project. As well as observing how indoor and outdoor play was organized in the three schools, the researchers asked the children about their favourite games and used drawings, stories, role-play scenarios, and photographs to build a picture of their perspective on role play. "Listening to children's views on use of space and layout could raise the value of play in the curriculum and reduce potential tensions between children and adults," explains Dr. Rogers.

Making Assumptions

The potential tensions between adults and children mentioned above often come about because of misunderstandings, or mistaken assumptions, and sometimes because of a lack of imagination on our part, as the following anecdote illustrates.

Did you hear about the teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put his boots on?

He asked for help and she could see why. With her pulling and him pushing, the boots still didn't want to go on. When the second boot was on, she had worked up a sweat. She almost whimpered when the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet."

She looked, and sure enough, they were. It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on — this time on the right feet.

He then announced, "These aren't my boots." She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, "Why didn't you say so?" as she wanted to. Once again she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off.

He then said, "They're my brother's boots. My Mum made me wear them."

She didn't know if she should laugh or cry. She mustered up the grace to wrestle the boots on his feet again. She said, "Now, where are your mittens?" He said, "I stuffed them in the toes of my boots. . ."

The point about this joke, perhaps, is that we don't always know what's going on with children. They don't always tell us because they can't. We make assumptions about them, which are sometimes wrong, or our knowledge about them is inadequate. Sometimes the shoes, or the experiences we try to push them into, don't fit, and that feels very uncomfortable, and sometimes there are hidden things, things we have no knowledge of, which also exert their influence.

I once watched a girl playing alone. First, she wrapped herself in a cloak, then numerous cloths of different sizes and colours. A skirt from the dressing-up box came next, then a hat, followed by a veil and crown and finally, a pair of gloves. I knew she wasn't wrapping up against the cold because this was Hong Kong, so her play was serving other, hidden purposes. Cocooned in layer upon layer of cloth and cloak, and speaking softly to herself she fluttered about the room absorbed in her own-world play. Thinking and being are not separated in young children, and I could see the flood of inner imaginings flowing directly into her outer movements. Although creating an imaginary other "being," paradoxically, she was also exploring the possibilities of an expanded self. I had no idea who or what she was in this metamorphosis, and would not presume to guess, but I felt that the time and space away from the noise and clamour of the world, the few moments she had been given for her imagination to blossom, had not been wasted. Play gives intimations about the future. When we play, we dream our way into the future selves we will one day become.

Susan Linn, EdD, associate director of the Media Center at Harvard University, and active and outspoken critic of the media assault on childhood, writes about the value of a quiet space for the imagination to grow:

Harry Potter did not evolve from a lifetime of exposure

to television, movies and the products they sell. His roots are in the silence J.K. Rowling found in the Forest of Dean. He grew in the space she was allowed to fill with her own vision. He grew in the glorious experience – endangered now more than ever – of listening to voices no one else had heard.

Many children also have imaginary companions. Far from being a cause for concern, these companions have been shown to have positive benefits. Anna Roby, a psychologist at Manchester University, has spent the past year studying 20 children between the ages of four and eight who had created extra mummies, imaginary dogs, and even a dragon to play with. Roby found that "children who have imaginary companions have more advanced communication skills." Dr. Evan Kidd, her colleague, says that the findings will help to reverse common misconceptions about children with imaginary friends: "They will come to be seen as having an advantage rather than a problem that needs to be worried about." Invisible companions can help children explore aspects of life that are puzzling or worrying, as well as being fun.

We cannot assume we know what a child may choose to bring into play for the needs of the inner world. For one child, it may be such a friend. "In the tale of myself, 'I' may need another me to be braver, stronger, more disruptive than the me I am; an ally, someone I can have a dialogue with. Someone who is me - and not me; in the real world and yet not." In this quotation from his book *Playing and Reality*, the eminent psychologist D. W. Winnicott claims that play lives between the real and the not real, between the inner and the outer worlds we inhabit. It is taking place and so is real, but it is also imaginary. He quotes from a translation of Tagore's *Gitanjali*: "On the seashore of endless worlds, children play." We can only imagine those worlds.

Play fulfills many functions for a child. Like life, its themes can be serious, scary, and violent as well as delightful, and tact and understanding in the face of difficult play when it occurs are always needed. In far more eloquent words than mine, Walt Whitman observed that the child becomes what he sees each day. We know this to be true: the forces of imitation are at their strongest in the early years, and while imitation is in the ascendant, discrimination has yet to appear. Experiences flood in unchecked, and for the most part what children see is what they then do. Life is their subject matter. Children play explosions after an earthquake; they played out the dreadful events witnessed in the concentration camps of the Second World War; they play suicide bombers on the streets of Palestine — in fact one of the most popular games the children play there is "Being a Martyr," which involves digging yourself a shallow grave in the sand in the street. In Sri Lanka they slowly began to play games of loss following the recent tsunami.

Though disturbing to witness, these tableaux need to be sanctioned and met with our compassion and understanding. It is vital that we don't assume children are necessarily being "naughty" when their play becomes challenging or makes us feel uneasy. "Playing out" can be as essential to the child as is thinking to an adult; indeed, in one sense play *is* the child's thinking. It is a reflection on life enacted with the whole body and not just the head. When play becomes too scary or dangerous, we may need to intervene with some gentle redirecting: perhaps into ways where people might help each other with rescue vehicles, or bring medical equipment and so on. Being conscious that it is quite normal for children to bring what worries, confuses, or frightens them into their play, however, will help us to respond with sensitivity. This kind of play is needed to help restore inner equilibrium. Play is the medium in which children mix the really big issues with the more quotidian ones. The big players, life, and death, love and loss, rub shoulders with the fools, the acrobats and dancers, and all that lies between, as they share the stage together in the wonderful theatre of play.

Play has a role as a healer: it is also universal. It crosses generations and gender and reaches across cultural divides to arise spontaneously and unexpectedly between those willing to enter its magical world. It takes intelligence and sometimes quick thinking to partner someone in *the game* – to meet another with the right response, as Eduardo Galeano writes in a celebration of fantasy from *The Book of Embraces*. He describes a visit he made to the town of Ollantaytambo near Cuzo, Uruguay. A small boy, skinny and ragged, approached him and asked whether he would give him his pen. Galeano wasn't able to do this because he was using his pen to "write all sorts of boring notes," but he offered

to draw a little pig on the boy's hand. Soon after, a throng of little boys surrounded him, all demanding the same thing for themselves. He drew a snake for one, a little dragon for another, a parrot for someone else.

Galeano continues:

> *Then, in the middle of this racket, a little waif, who barely cleared a yard off the ground showed me a watch [already] drawn in black ink on his wrist.*
>
> *"An uncle of mine who lives in Lima sent it to me," he said.*
>
> *"And does it keep good time?" I asked him.*
>
> *"It's a bit slow," he admitted.*
>
> *This boy had no pocket for his watch, nor did it ever need winding; it was keeping rather excellent time (if a touch slow), by the power of his imagination alone. In this shared enchantment between adult and child – and in so many other ways – given space and time, play's unfailing genius will extend and enrich our lives. Our task is to determine and secure its place in childhood.*

Sally Jenkinson taught in a Steiner Kindergarten for many years. She worked as the early childhood representative for the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, and is a founder member of The Alliance for Childhood. She writes and lectures on early childhood issues in the UK and internationally, and is the author of The Genius of Play, *published by Hawthorn Press and reviewed in* Gateways *several issues ago.*

"This Is the Way We Bake Our Bread. . ." – A Note about Work Songs

Nancy Foster

Work songs can be a lovely way to draw children to an activity, to create a mood of enjoyment and purposeful focus, or to discourage excessive chitchat by parents or older children in a group. Baking songs, grinding songs, sawing songs, cleaning songs: all may have a place in a group of children or parents and children.

On the other hand, if over-used, such songs can become a sort of "Waldorf muzak," going on throughout the time of the activity and becoming an unwelcome and invasive background music. This may seem a strong statement indeed, but it is worth considering the possibility that constant singing may prevent children from experiencing their own internal music or rhythm or imaginations as they participate in an activity or play elsewhere in the room.

There has been some study of the spontaneous songs and chants of children at work and play. What may arise naturally from children as an accompaniment to their activity is something at once personal and universal, which surely deserves an opportunity for expression. Aside from such spontaneous music or word play, the concentrated silence which can occasionally occur during activity is special in itself and should be permitted its place. Further, the art of conversation — "more refreshing than light," to quote Goethe — has its humble beginnings in early childhood. Teachers sometimes hear wondrous exchanges among children hard at work on their watercolor painting or kneading their dough. Wouldn't it be a pity if such conversational forays were frustrated by constant singing?

It is also good to avoid using songs as a sort of "disguised instruction" to tell children how to do an activity. We strive to teach through imitation. Occasionally a few words of direction will be needed, but these can be offered in a by-the-way, matter-of-fact, brief, and tactful manner to an individual child, perhaps accompanied by physical guidance, in a way that is less consciousness-raising than a song which is sung in a "teaching" manner and almost compels all the children involved to follow its instructions.

Finally, there is a fine line between having a familiar song that becomes associated with a particular activity — which is a healthy thing, such as always having the same song when lighting the

candle at circle time — and using a song as a *signal* for something. At clean-up time, for example, it would be fine to have a song to sing now and then during the process, like a happy accompaniment to the activity; but if the teacher starts singing a song as a signal that it's time to stop playing and clean up, this creates an abrupt waking-up moment and prevents a more flowing transition in the morning's rhythm.

In summary, work songs can be wonderful for "priming the pump" as an activity begins, and for drawing the mood together if needed along the way, but it is good to leave the children inwardly and outwardly free to find their own rhythm and mood as they work. Many teachers have experienced the magical hum that can arise in a room full of busy children; this hum may be the most beautiful music of all!

Nancy Foster taught children and parents at Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten and Nursery for over thirty years. Now retired, she is active in mentoring, speaking, and serving as a Regional Representative for WECAN.

SUPPORTING THE ADULTS

Meetings With Parents on the Topic of Discipline

Louise DeForest

Here is a sample of one of the excellent articles that will be available this summer in a new WECAN publication. Entitled You're Not the Boss of Me, *this publication will enrich the work of kindergarten teachers who are striving to understand the many challenging and joyful shifts that occur in young children when they go through the change of teeth.*

Among the challenges facing parents today, none is more difficult than setting and enforcing limits, creating and holding boundaries, and guiding children with loving discipline. Many parents, feeling that their own parents were too strict, give their children free rein. Others, knowing their children to be creative, bright beings, follow their child's lead, feeling that to do otherwise would infringe on the child's freedom and creativity. Still other parents, spending little time with their children during the day, don't want any unpleasantness in the little time they do spend together and therefore avoid any kind of conflict with their children. All of these situations are unhealthy ones for the child and the parent.

The young child instinctively expects guidance and when it is not forthcoming, the child tends to feel insecure and frightened. Growing up without guidance, without boundaries, often translates into being left alone to flounder in a world that the child is not experienced enough to understand. Constantly being consulted by adults about what the child wants is not only bewildering, but can create an egotist, unprepared for the world awaiting him or her. Many parents believe that choices strengthen their child but, on the contrary, too many choices can undermine the child.

Because parents are so close to their children they have many valuable observations to offer teachers. Parents can also benefit from the teacher's objectivity. I always hasten to reassure parents that being a teacher is ever so much easier than being a parent. Guiding a class with clarity, firmness, and consistency is what we do every day and there is much we can share with parents, either in our parent-teacher conferences, phone conversations, or class meetings.

Our class meetings are a wonderful opportunity to build community among the parents in the class and can serve as a forum to share ideas, questions, and thoughts. It is also an opportunity for us to share our expertise, giving parents the support and guidance that we often wish we had experienced ourselves when we were parenting young children. But how can we bring a topic as complex and as personal as discipline? Can we offer our thoughts in such a way that we empower others with deeper understandings? Can we inspire understandings that can guide parents under a myriad of situations with their children? The following are a few of the ways I have worked with this topic in my class meetings. These are, of course, not menus to be followed

exactly, but rather some ideas that may inspire you to create endless possibilities of experiences and conversations with the parents in your class.

One meeting, for example, may start out with me asking the parents to divide up into pairs, separating couples (it is best to do this part way through the school year when the parents already know and feel comfortable with each other). Choosing a partner myself, I then show the parents how to do a form of wrestling. Yes, that's right, wrestling! Facing each other, my partner and I put our right feet together in front of us, sides touching, and we touch our four hands in front of us, palm to palm. The purpose of the game is to move in such a way that the other person is forced off balance and must move their right foot. The left foot can move but the hands and the right foot of each one must always be in contact. It is not the type of wrestling that is aggressive or fast; on the contrary, each one slowly follows the subtle pressure of the hands of the other. First one person takes the lead, applying pressure with both hands and bending forward or backward, up or down, to force the other off balance. As soon as you feel yourself losing balance, you then take the lead and, exerting pressure with both hands, try to force the other to lose balance, using the same type of movements. And so it goes, listening with the hands and taking turns leading or following as your sense of balance calls for it. You can squat down and swivel from side to side, just so long as the right feet are always immobile. Try it at home with your family to get a sense of how this exercise works. Once they have been shown how to do it, the pairs wrestle for 5-10 minutes, then change partners and do it again for another 5 minutes or so. Much laughing and many strange positions follow, and it is usually a very fun exercise. When we have finished, we sit in a circle and I ask what the experience was like for them. Believing as I do that a large part of discipline consists of careful, wakeful listening, I ask them about whether they were able to "hear" the other's intentions and to communicate, physically, who was leading. What was the experience like, I ask them, when it was unclear who was leading? What was it like to have no resistance meet your hands? What if the touch of the other was overbearing? Could you make yourself heard? Can you identify, I wonder, what made you lose your balance? As you can imagine, the conversation and the discoveries parents make are most interesting; quickly they come to the conclusion that without meeting resistance, they lose their balance and that too much resistance makes them feel helpless. Getting mixed messages from your partner leads to feeling very insecure and frustrated. We then speak about these experiences in the context of discipline, and it is through their discoveries that they themselves come to the conclusion that meeting resistance helps them discover where they are; that clear communication and consistency gives security, etc. They can also get a sense of what their own style is as they find themselves overpowering or shrinking from their partner. Getting in touch with our own styles is another interesting conversation.

One of my goals in my parent evenings is to lead the parents to discover what they already know and allow them to uncover their own common sense and wisdom. This is in keeping with the age in which we all live: the consciousness soul age. In this time, no longer are we, as individuals, willing to take someone else's word for it. It is only through individual questioning and the striving of our own efforts that we truly know something. I try to make my class meetings experiential in nature, setting up certain possibilities and then guiding the parents in a conversation that may uncover the knowledge that lives within them. I always feel that a really successful class meeting is one in which, part way through, I could quietly walk out the door and never be missed. The experience to be avoided in our class meetings is when parents leave feeling that they have done everything wrong with their children. My goal in my meetings is to have parents leave feeling more confident in themselves as parents and proud of all the good things they have done for their children. For those of us who host evening meetings, we welcome parents at a time of day when we are all tired. So let's make our class meetings dynamic, artistic and fun so that we can all leave feeling enlivened by our time together. As a parent in a Waldorf school for 14 years, I have experienced some wonderful, thought-provoking meetings, and I have sat through my share of dull, boring ones, too.

Another way of working with the question of discipline is to ask parents what the first word that comes to mind is when they hear the word "discipline." I write down what they say without commenting on it (often even they are surprised by

what comes out of their mouths!) I then ask them to break into groups of three or four people (again trying to keep couples in different groups) and ask them to think of a person they knew when they were quite young, before seven. I ask them not to choose their parents — though it could be another family member, such as an uncle or a grandparent — and it should be someone with whom they felt completely at ease and true to themselves. I ask them to describe this person to each other, focusing more on the attributes of that person and less on the relationship they had with them. Each person has about five minutes to speak. I am not part of these groups but stay in the room going from group to group helping them to stick to the topic. Again, this is a wonderful way for parents to get to know each other and to build a community within the class. When each person has had the opportunity to speak, we all join the circle again and I ask everyone to speak about the common threads in the descriptions of these people from our past. Every time I have done this, the comments have been the same: someone who has time for the child, who is generally quiet and never lecturing or moralizing, who loves them with no ulterior motives, and who accepts them just as they are. Very often it is a grandparent or an older neighbor, and often people mention that, as children, they would *do* things with this person: bake cookies, go fishing, walk in the woods, thread their sewing needles, etc. After everyone has had time to contribute to the picture of this type of person, I then ask them if these attributes they have all mentioned are still important to them now that they are adults. Taking it further, I then ask how do these attributes live in them as parents? This always leads to an interesting discussion, especially when I read back to them their words associated with the word "discipline." We can then go on to talk about the root of the word "discipline" — disciple — and how that can fit into a rightful understanding of discipline. Slowly we begin to uncover an understanding of discipline as an inner attitude as well as a manifestation of outer deeds. We can also go on to speak about our own relationship to discipline. I often share with the parents my own struggles with self-discipline, citing the wonderful lesson taught to me by my youngest son.

At the time when my son was a young teen, and a very rebellious one, we had an experience together that was a teaching moment for me. I can't remember what it was that set me off with him. I do, however, remember working up a real head of steam and saying things that I knew I shouldn't say to him, but was unable to stop myself. At first he was contrite and a bit abashed, but as the harangue continued, with me yelling at him and wagging my finger in his face, his body posture changed. He relaxed and sat back with a rather smug, superior look on his face. He was no longer listening; instead he was watching me, in awe with just how out of control I was. I do remember uttering the words, at the top of my lungs, that it was about time, young man, he learn some responsibility and some discipline. His sudden laugh stopped me short. "If you could only see yourself now, Mom," he quietly said, and walked away shaking his head, disappointed with yet another adult who cannot practice what she preaches.

When I tell the parents this story we all have a good laugh at the image of our children sitting back and watching the show. But then we can go on to have a discussion about the inner work we as parents and teachers must do as our children grow and change, adapting our boundaries as our children's ages change. I share with them the image that serves me so well, both at home and in the classroom, of being the rock for my children, always there, always available to provide resistance, always solid and still and grounded. Or of the farmer who periodically walks his or her fields, kicking the fence posts to see if they can still be counted on. We are those fence posts and our children push at them to find out if they can still be trusted. Are they solid? Can I lean on this one and be secure? Often we can then speak about our willingness to sometimes be disliked by our children and what that means for them and for us. We struggle to clarify the boundaries between who we are and the experiences that have formed us, and who our children are. "What are your children asking you to develop?" I often ask, and we go on to talk about parenting as a schooling for us in mindfulness, observation, flexibility, and deepening understanding. We talk about our task of not just embracing the act of parenting but transforming it into the art of parenting.

Gudrun Davy, in her wonderful articles in the first *Lifeways* book (which I recommend all parents

read), likens the journey through parenting to three stages: for the first seven years it is like being in a small boat, taking a long journey. Sometimes the waters are calm, but often they are choppy and we are alone, guiding ourselves and our small children with no land in sight and no signposts along the way. The second stage (from 7 to 14) she compares to a journey through a rich countryside of trees, rivers, forest, villages, and cities. We are once again on dry land but now, through our children, we move into a broader social landscape. Suddenly we find ourselves centrally responsible for directing a large and complex drama with, as Gudrun points out, an extensive and varied cast and an elaborate plot unfolding from day to day. And the last stage of parenting is compared to climbing into the high mountains, a journey fraught with dangers and challenges but also full of excitement as our horizons broaden and the world spreads before our feet. Here the going is steeper and when we have finally conquered one peak, a still higher one looms in the distance. The joys arise when we look up and get glimpses of a high, ideal world, raying down on us with sudden moments of bright sunshine.

It is important to share these impressions from those wise elders who have gone before us in their parenting. When our children are small it is hard for us to realize that we are preparing the foundation for their future life. We can feel as if it will always be sleepless nights, battles over food and brushing teeth, and constant surveillance to ensure physical and emotional safety. But if we can look at our efforts to discipline our little children as the laying down of the framework of their future self-discipline during the teenage years, it can give us the perspective we need to strengthen our resolve to hold those boundaries as an act of love for our children.

I wish you great joy and fulfillment in your preparations for meeting parents. Teachers have much to gain by sharing the wisdom that our work with early childhood bestows. Joining wholeheartedly with parents as colleagues in this ever challenging, ever wondrous journey towards becoming truly human benefits parent, child, and teacher.

Active as a kindergarten teacher for many years, Louise is now the Pedagogical Director of the Early Childhood Programs at the Rudolf Steiner School in Manhattan. Louise is a WECAN board member, one of the North American representatives to the International Early Childhood Association and is actively engaged in mentoring and teacher education in the United States and in Spanish speaking countries.

A Summer Festival in the Parent-child Class

Nancy Foster

Author's Note: In teaching parent-child classes, I discovered that one of the special joys and challenges of festival celebrations is the need to create a simple and meaningful observance for very young children, while being mindful of seeking the essential meaning of the festival. In addition, I felt it was important to address the adult need for a cognitive deepening of the festival experience. This seemed especially important since at Acorn Hill, which includes Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other families, we observe the Christian seasonal festivals in a way which seeks to address the universal in the human being.

For me, Whitsun had always been a somewhat elusive festival, even though our faculty studied one of Rudolf Steiner's Whitsun lectures each year in preparation for our own observance. Last year – my last before retiring – our faculty's study for Easter was "Spiritual Bells of Easter II," found in The Festivals and Their Meaning, *and this helped things fall into place for me, giving me the picture I needed for a meaningful Whitsun festival in our parent-child groups. At a parent evening we made felted wool balls of oranges and yellows, and during class attached streamers in those fiery colors. The actual festival took place at an outdoor circle time on the last day of school, as described in the following article.*

I offer this article, which was given out the week before the festival, as one example of how the thoughts behind a festival celebration can be shared with parents in a way that encourages them to experience the festival at whatever level is most meaningful to them, while offering them the opportunity to look beyond the activity itself.

As our parent-child class comes to a close, we will celebrate a Summer Festival. Although it is really still late spring, we feel the growing strength of the sunlight drawing us outward. We know that at Midsummer — the summer solstice — we will experience the longest day of the year, when the sun is at its height. That is truly the time to "dance with the flowers" and "sing with the sun," as our song goes! Then, along with the world of nature, we will begin the journey toward late summer and autumn, bringing us full circle to the point at which our school year began.

Looking back, we can recall our observances of the role of light in the passing seasons. We honored the strength and light of courage on Michael's Day and were grateful for the gifts of the sun as we celebrated the harvest. As the autumn days grew shorter and the outer light decreased, we felt the need to kindle our own light within by creating lanterns to shelter one of the sun's sparks. The lanterns' light led us through the darkness, toward the time of our Midwinter Garden. In this quiet and beautiful space, we experienced the turning point when our inner light could begin to shine, bringing warmth and light into the world. Soon after Midwinter the days began to lengthen noticeably, and in spite of the cold, we could look ahead to spring as the sun's path crept further above the horizon and the sap began to rise in the trees.

Children feel this stirring much sooner than adults, but as spring arrives we too can feel, if we are attuned to such things, a loosening of our invisible protective winter cloaks. We feel drawn outward to the light. It is as if we no longer need to protect the sun's spark in our lantern, but can release it to meet the sun's growing light and reunite with it. Our own light begins to stream outward, like a flower opening to the sun. The sun, in return, sends its warmth and light down to us, bringing us joyful and healing messages from the heavenly worlds and inviting us to share this light through our words and deeds.

When we throw aloft our fiery balls with their streamers of flame, we can enjoy the sight, and the pleasure of catching them once again. This in itself can be a joyful experience for us, and for the watching children. But it can also take on a deeper meaning if we choose to imagine the balls' upward path as a picture of our inner light streaming outward, and their downward path as the gift of the sun's rays coming towards us.

It is interesting to consider that both the Christian and the Jewish faiths celebrate their festivals of Pentecost at this time of year (fifty days after Easter and after Passover, respectively). The Jewish Pentecost, more commonly known as Shavuot, commemorates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In

the Book of Exodus, we read of that event that "Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire." At the Christian Pentecost (often called Whitsun after the old tradition of wearing white on that Sunday) the disciples were together when, as we are told in the Book of Acts, "there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. . ." Whether or not we observe either of these festivals ourselves, we may appreciate that the image of the flaming light of spirit belongs to human experience at this season.

And so, we join in our Summer Festival and say together:

Flaming light, shine so bright;
Flaming light, give your might;
Make us strong and make us bold,
Turn our word to living gold. (M. Meyerkort)

The Inner Life and Work of the Teacher

Margaret Duberley

Previously published in our sister publication in the UK, KINDLING: the Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Care and Education.

Again and again, the question came: "What is the difference between State education and Steiner education?" How often, as I have been working in Steiner education, I had, usually in a conversation on a bus, or during a walk, or in a new group of people, a new group of students, to try to find an essence, to create a nutshell picture, to make sense of something vast in a few moments.

Now, through 25 years of struggling with this, and finding in these years that gateways have been opening in the souls of many, I have found personally that I can speak, at such times, as also with students, and new teachers, of the truly holistic nature of Steiner education: that we are working with every aspect of the child, which can be termed body, soul, and Spirit. So we try consciously to work with many levels, from the most physical to the most mysterious. A conversation can often lead to the question of the inner work of the teacher. Sensing what is appropriate for each occasion is vitally important.

What follows is, then, a brief resume of some aspects of that work, as applied particularly to those who work with the young child under seven years of age. Most of it is very basic but, hopefully, not to be undervalued in its repercussions. In *The Education of the Child* Rudolf Steiner writes:

> *What the adult does, feels and thinks are all imitated by the child under seven years, so complete attention to the task in hand, with a care, love, and joy in the doing actually helps in the formation of the child's physical body.*

Arrive well before the children. (Very easy to say. More and more this becomes a problem area.) When we take off our coat outside the door, we leave it, with outdoor shoes, and any excess baggage there. It is essential to leave at that point, consciously, those worries, grievances, tensions, which would sap the life energy that is needed for all our work with young children. It is healing for us consciously to free ourselves so that we can give to each task in the day the devotion that gives the young child a worthy role model for imitation. (I have found it a blessing to come out of the kindergarten room at the end of a day's work with children, and realize I have been totally free of all those worries for hours. How healing to have to be in the moment!)

Create a quiet space in the room. If there are colleagues, assistants, students, or visitors, ensure that you have arranged a regular time to meet, say "good morning," along with a verse, song, or some short exercise to focus attention, calm down, bring a morality into the room, and set the tone for the day. It really does alter the space for the children, and the adults. For example, there is a verse for each week of the year, collected in *The Calendar of the Soul* by Rudolf Steiner, which can link our inner soul life with the seasonal round.

Teachers often use the following verse, also by

Rudolf Steiner, either to begin the day, or to begin a meeting:

We have the will to work
That into this our work may flow,
That which, from out of the Spiritual Worlds,
Working in Soul and Spirit,
In Life and Body,
Strives to become the human being within us.

A verse given at the end of the basic lecture course for teachers is also to be recommended. In the original translation of Steiner's *Study of Man*, it reads:

Imbue thyself with the power of imagination,
Have courage for the truth,
Sharpen thy feeling for responsibility of soul.

In the more recent translation, *The Foundations of Human Experience*:

Enliven imagination,
Stand for truth,
Feel responsibility.

The Christian Community priest Adam Bittleston has written many prayers and verses, including one for each day of the week, collected in a little book called *Meditative Prayers for Today*:

Dwelling in silence on the beauties of life
Gives the soul strength of feeling.
Thinking clearly on the truths of existence
Gives the spirit the light of Will.

There are many other possibilities. I have worked with the eurythmy *Hallelujah* and also with *I, A, O*, as also with a song. What really matters is that you can feel connected to whatever you choose.

Be conscious that the way the adults work together, or not, will become an example for the children to imitate. Try to set an example of cooperation amongst the community of adults, which includes teachers, assistants and parents. (I shall not forget an occasion when an advisor, visiting a kindergarten, remarked that it was no surprise that the children were quarrelsome, as the adults were setting a fine example of that in that group!)

Having worked through the day in the kindergarten, and prepared the next day, time is set aside before sleep to take all that work, along with the preparation for the following day, and a loving inner picture of each child in the group, into the night, into one's sleep.

The first part of that is the review, when one travels in one's mind and memory backwards through the day, taking a maximum of 15 minutes. I tried to picture the child, with his angel behind him, and the parent(s) with their angels also. Then ask those beings for help and guidance on the following day. This means that I am not trying to work alone, or out of my smaller self, but with my higher self, consciously working with the Spirit Being of each of the children. I have all the support, and loving help, of my own angel, the angel of each child, and many other higher beings.

At that stage, a meditation will support the process of connecting my individual self with Universal Wisdom or Light: microcosm within the macrocosm. I, and others, have used:

I carry my sufferings
Into the setting sun;
I lay down all my worries
In its light-radiating lap.
Purified through love,
Transformed through Light,
They return as helpful
Thoughts, as strength
For deeds of sacrifice done
In full joy.

One then takes a few moments to picture the day ahead inwardly, along with the true being of each child. One can perhaps picture from the day a joyful moment for that child. To feel a restfulness is then a prelude towards giving all that up to all the invisible beings, to continue what has been begun, through the night, when in sleep; and I am then at one with all those we have experienced as separate individuals through the day. The mysterious world of sleep then takes over the work.

On awakening, it is advisable to give some moments of attention to any new thought, insight, feeling, which has "come out of the night" (for example, a realization about a child, especially one that has been a puzzle, a way forward towards a new

step for one who has a difficulty). Then, picture each child, followed by a review of the day to come.

The verse, or meditation, uniting the teacher with the divine then leads into a feeling of being supported by the Angels, Archangels, Archai.

I used this verse for many years:

O God, grant that in regard to my personal ambitions
I may entirely obliterate myself,
And Christ make true within me
The words of Paul:
"Not I, but the Christ in me"
That the Holy Spirit hold sway in the teacher.
This is the true Trinity.

As the day unfolds, perhaps the most important quality is to have an openness towards what each child is expressing, in his skin colour, his demeanour, his play: for example, how he joins in, or not. As my experience of teaching grew, I knew and saw clearly that I was not the teacher. The teachers were there before me. All I needed to learn was to be open to the messages they were giving me. Thus, to learn to observe objectively, and then to be open to letting go of what might have been prepared, if the behaviour of the children is showing a mismatch.

One great gift my teacher Margret Meyerkort gave me, as I began my kindergarten work at Wynstones Steiner School, was the following verse by a Dutch anthroposophist named Ledebur:

Inner labour	*Outer experience*	*Peace within*
Works outward.	*Works inward.*	*Love to the world.*
Do not judge	*Do not turn away*	*Say nought*
But listen;	*But seek;*	*But suffer;*
Do not wonder	*Do not resist*	*Do not ask*
But look –	*But endure –*	*But wait –*
Love them all.	*To the end.*	*Until you receive.*

This apparently simple verse has, over my years of teaching, proved so helpful and affirmative as a way of being within the early years work, and, then with Advisory work.

In the course of visiting those newer in the work, I so often see teachers who have laid on themselves false expectations of a "kindergarten morning," so that, for example, they feel obliged to have a 20-minute ring-time. No matter that not one child is still with them after one song! The children are not naughty. There is no point in blaming child, or parent. But if one were to live with these words:

Do not judge, but listen.
Do not wonder, but look –
Love them all,

a changed response would begin to emerge in the teacher, who would learn to listen, look, observe the children, but then be prepared to admit that their message is that "I, as the teacher, must change."

Perhaps, to go back to the above example, just try an opening song, a poem, and then, a song to lead out, if the children are not captivated, not engaged. Then one must ask: "What must I change so that the children can enter joyfully into this?" It could be too slow, and to work more with such polarities as slow/fast; large/small; sitting still/moving briskly, contraction/expansion might be what is needed. So, above all, learn to observe the children, and be prepared to take on what that says to me. The children's behaviour is my best teacher.

Ring-time for me became an increasingly special time. The children began to spontaneously, and joyfully, create in the centre of the ring exquisite small "gardens," with candle, veils, flowers, and so on. I used the time around the morning verse and song specially to connect with the angel being of each child.

One day I cannot forget, when I had two older boys, polar opposites in character: one who would love nothing better than to scale up an apple tree and look down on us from high above; the other who had spent two years sitting on the periphery, not joining in any play outwardly, and seemed to find it painful to dirty his hands in sand, water, etc. At that precise moment when I was quietly connecting with the one who seemed more inwardly active, the outwardly active one said gently to me: "Margaret, sometimes the flower comes out before the leaf."

I needed no other sign that here was a word from the angels, and all those steps outlined above needed, for me, no other "proof of the pudding." Put another way: "Inner labour works outward." The child had in those words concisely expressed a new

helpful way to look at the riddle of the child who had puzzled me for nearly three years. That "riddle" has now become a successful artist.

The work with the small children indeed led me to the realization that I am not the teacher, but the facilitator, and my job is not so much to speak, as to listen.

Then, the awe, the marvel, the privilege, the joy, and the healing of this work can grow.

Note by Janni Steiner: We note with sadness that a dear friend and colleague Margaret Duberley crossed the threshold suddenly in February 2007.

Margaret had a joyful, warm, and caring approach to everything she touched, and worked tirelessly for Waldorf early childhood since gaining her diploma with Margaret Meyerkort in 1982 (she was a qualified teacher before this). She worked at Wynstones school from 1980 to 1988 where, after qualifying, she became involved in teacher mentoring. She also completed the class teacher training course, which helped in her project with the Snowdonia Steiner school in Wales. There she taught children from six to ten years old in a variety of subjects until 1994, when she moved to the Dublin Rudolf Steiner school as kindergarten leader and trainer, and also class teacher. In 1996, Margaret became an educational consultant in Steiner Waldorf education, helping to establish and run the early childhood training programme in Ireland as well as working as a Fellowship advisor for kindergartens throughout Ireland. In 2001, Margaret became the coordinator of advisors in Ireland for ISWECA, the Irish Steiner Waldorf early childhood association, organising and leading workshops, including visiting all the kindergartens and initiatives, where she was welcomed and loved for her unstinting support, helpful observations, and advice.

Margaret will always be remembered for the sparkle in her eye, her boundless energy, her love of nature, her joy for the work, her commitment to furthering and enriching Steiner early childhood education, and her deep love of Anthroposophy. She had just retired from Ireland, settling happily in her new home in Stroud, and had applied to become a kindergarten advisor in the UK, when we heard of her passing. I was looking forward to working with her more frequently, instead of occasional visits to each other's homes across the sea. Margaret's contributions to Kindling *have been donated to the international association. She will be sorely missed by me, and those who knew her.*

The Art of Fruitful Conversation

Carol Nasr Griset and Kim Raymond

From Chapter Six of Mentoring in Waldorf Early Childhood Education, *WECAN Publications, 2007.*

> *"What is more splendid than gold?" "Light." "What is more refreshing than light?" "Conversation."* (Goethe, "The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily")

When we think of conversation, we tend to focus on what is said. On further reflection, however, we realize that listening is just as essential a part of conversation as speaking. A true conversation is a meeting of two individuals who together have the possibility of seeing something new arise from their understanding of one another.

The Role of Listening

When I am listened to, it creates me. (Brenda Ueland, "Tell Me More")

At the center of the mentoring relationship is the encounter we might call the mentoring conversation. At the heart of the mentoring conversation is the art of listening. Why is listening the mentor's primary responsibility? How does listening contribute to an individual's creative process? What do I have to do in order to truly listen to another?

> *The way we listen enables others to speak. In other words, to actively listen means giving others the possibility of saying things that they could not otherwise have said – or could not have said in the same way.* (Heinz Zimmermann, *Listening, Speaking, Understanding*)

Active listening to another is an act of love. It is a spiritual deed and requires courage, self-discipline and practice. Through listening, a mentor makes

herself available as a guide in the self-development process of the other. As listening mentors, we strive to create a fertile space within ourselves where the other's words may take root and grow. We open ourselves to them so that their unique way of being in the world and of caring for young children may flourish. We create a space for them to feel whole, valued and understood.

> *Listen to the new teacher. Listening is perhaps the most important thing you can do. Let the new teacher tell her story and encourage her in the telling. This is the story of preparation, questions, new ideas, struggles, concerns, worries. Be genuinely interested and try to resist the urge to tell her how you handled those problems or the temptation to sort it all out for her. And when you listen, listen; don't take notes.* (Trevor Mepham, *Teachers Helping Teachers*)

Trust in the mentor will make it safe for the mentee to speak honestly. According to one experienced mentor, it is crucial that the mentor not have a "hidden agenda" in the conversation such as wanting to bring attention to a specific defect or issue that she thinks is causing difficulties. The mentor's attitude needs to be one of interest, and of not knowing what the other wants, feels or thinks. The mentor cannot assume or presume what the other will bring. This atmosphere of openness allows the mentee to be vulnerable in her feelings and creative in her thinking as she speaks. In turn, the mentor may hear something profound that she needed to hear at that moment, coming from the person being mentored.

> *If we concentrate our hearing until we are filled with the sound of another's voice, then an intimate encounter with the essence of the speaker can come about.* (Zimmermann)

Attentive listening means we consciously work to withhold judgment and comparison. We withhold our responses, our thoughts and our expectations. In this process of holding back, we make space for the other and thus become truly available to them. We become aware that another's approach, though different from our own, does not necessarily need to be corrected or changed.

When asked what would be helpful from a mentor, a new teacher said, "Before you make a judgment, ask us 'why did you do it that way?' Even though you may be more experienced, please remain open to our new ideas."

> *In committing ourselves to listen, we have a chance to dissolve old forms and prejudgments, to loosen ourselves from our thinking and acquire a different kind of knowing – that which comes through our feeling and willing – our impressionable receptivity.* (Georg Kühlewind, *Star Children*)

. . .The mentor listens with all her senses. With her ears, she hears the words and tone of voice. With her eyes, she perceives the other person's eyes, facial expressions, body language and gesture. If we listen to another person as though to a piece of music we will get to know their "composing style" and give them space to express this style freely. Through deep, empathic listening the mentor becomes aware of the mentee's vision and how she is striving. The quality of the mentor's listening will draw out and confirm what the mentee already knows. The mentor observes and listens to ascertain the purposefulness in the mentee's decisions and actions. She may be able to encourage a gift the mentee may not fully appreciate in herself. For example, in listening to the mentee tell a story to the children, the mentor may see through an awkward presentation of the story to experience the mentee's enthusiasm and real gift for creating imaginative pictures in her storytelling.

Keen listening will allow the mentor to ascertain if the mentee is speaking out of her own understanding, or is borrowing from someone else. Perhaps the mentee is expressing what she thinks the mentor wants to hear; perhaps she is saying what she thinks she "should" be saying as a new teacher, or what she has heard other teachers say. With sensitive questions and empathy the mentor can guide the mentee toward authenticity, self-confidence, and true creativity.

The Role of Speaking

> *Improving our ability to converse means improving our ability to interact socially. We can give our partners-in-conversation opportunities to develop themselves, arrive at insights, find solutions and feel supported, or*

we can use conversation solely to develop and validate ourselves. (Zimmermann)

With this in mind, a mentor's listening will inform her speaking. Through open and fully-attentive listening, our speaking will arise naturally as we seek to clarify what the mentee is saying. Our thoughtful questions will support the mentee in discovering her capacities and developing herself as a teacher.

In moving from listening to speaking, asking questions is most helpful when the questions serve to develop the themes brought forth by the mentee. Bringing an attitude of warmth and empathy to her questions, the mentor seeks to hear more about the mentee's ideas. We may be able to remember how difficult it can be for a new teacher to express intentions and impressions to a seasoned teacher.

Remember not to patronize. The new teacher is intelligent, skilled, inventive, sensitive, and she may have something to teach you. Draw ideas and possibilities out of her through questions and observations and don't give easy answers. Have the tact to let her discover her own answers. (Mepham)

As mentors, we may need to remind ourselves that in order to understand another, we "stand under" them with a respectful and learning attitude, remembering that it takes years of teaching to discover one's own style and learn to be comfortably oneself with the children. Else Gottgens, a long-time mentor, says, "Before I go into a teacher's classroom, I first remind myself to look for something which that teacher can do better than I. What can I find to truly admire in the other adult?"

Establishing a Relationship and Asking Helpful Questions

Building a relationship with the mentee is a pre-requisite for having a fruitful conversation. Early in the mentoring process, the mentor will need to ask the mentee, "What do you want, hope for, and expect from the mentoring relationship?" We can then clarify, if necessary, how we see our role as a mentor.

Both mentor and mentee will find it helpful for the mentee to complete a self-assessment before the visit. This should include self-perceived areas of strength and weakness, and any concerns the mentee has in her work. When asking the mentee to prepare such a self-assessment prior to the visit, the mentor may help the process by asking the mentee to consider the following:

"What part of your work gives you the most joy and satisfaction?"

"What do you find especially difficult?"

"What are your priorities for this year?"

An experienced mentor suggested that if something is hard for the mentee, the mentor can encourage her to narrow down the area of difficulty. For example, if the mentee is challenged by circle time, the mentor may help her pinpoint the challenge. The mentor can begin by asking what parts of the circle go smoothly. From an awareness of the mentee's strengths, the mentor can better help her approach the problem.

It is important to ask open questions that encourage the mentee to become more conscious of what she already knows. A mentee is likely to appreciate questions that focus her awareness. During the mentoring visit, such open questions might include: "What do you think are your strengths?" and "In what ways have you grown since you started working with young children?" In helping a mentee to clarify her communication with us, we may offer a comment such as, "Let me see if I understand what you are saying." Then the mentor may reflect back as clearly as possible what she has heard. Clarity will enable the mentor to validate and support what the mentee is expressing.

In helping the mentee to reflect on the day, the mentor may find questions such as the following useful: "How was the morning for you? What parts of it do you think went well? What parts of the morning were most challenging?" In supporting and respecting the growth of the mentee, a mentor might need to guide her away from labeling or blaming a child or parent in a difficult situation A mentor may be able to offer a new approach that focuses the mentee on what positive actions she might initiate to help resolve a difficulty. The mentor can help the mentee to expand on her self-observation by asking questions such as: "Can you tell me more about that? Can you think of any way you might be contributing to the problem? Have you thought about a possible plan of action?"

By asking the mentee to describe the areas where

she feels most competent, the mentor acknowledges her abilities and reminds her of why she has chosen this work as her vocation. In addition, by allowing her to talk about her challenges, the mentor creates the opportunity for the mentee to place her pride, vulnerability or embarrassment into the chalice of conversation.

Additional Aspects of Conversation

There is another kind of conversation to pay attention to during the mentoring visit: the daily exchanges the mentee has while she is working. How is the conversation between teacher and children; the conversation/relationship between teacher and assistant; and the conversation/relationship between the teacher and the parents? Are the children being heard and are the children hearing the teacher? The mentor will be looking for the quality of these "conversations" even though they may sometimes be non-verbal. Is it a fruitful exchange, and is there understanding? Does the assistant feel acknowledged; do the parents feel appreciated? What is the quality of the exchanges between the mentee and the people she relates to every day?

A mentor may be asked for help with the mentee's relationship with the parents of the children in her class. She may suggest that the mentee approach the teacher-parent relationship as one would approach a conversation: that is, by setting aside pre-judgments and expectations and offering an open and empathic atmosphere for an exchange to take place. The mentor may remind the mentee of the importance of fully-attentive listening when interacting with parents, so that she may experience with them, as she does with the children, the love that grows out of interest. The mentee may need to be encouraged in embracing and respecting the parents' central role in their child's life. It can come as a surprise to a beginning teacher how much of her work will be with parents. Mentors can have an important role to play in helping new teachers find ways to include parents in the life of the class. Occasionally, the mentor may be asked to help the mentee plan a parent evening. By active listening and reflective feedback, a mentor can encourage the mentee's enthusiasm and help her focus her plans for sharing her ideas and observations with the parents. The mentor's experienced perspective is valuable in this area and can serve as a reminder to the mentee about how much she can learn from the parents.

Sometimes a mentor may enter into a mentoring relationship with an experienced teacher who is resistant to feedback or deeply entrenched in particular patterns or habits of relating to young children. The mentor may then approach more deeply the intention behind the teacher's actions, asking, "What is the thought behind the action?" She may pose the question to the teacher, "What are your reasons for doing it this way?" "Is it having the effect you hoped for?" "Have you ever considered trying. . . ?"

Occasionally a mentor will encounter a mentee who is wondering if she should be pursuing teaching as her career; or the mentor might have this question. It might be helpful to inquire about the mentee's biography and why she chose to enter the field of teaching. The mentor may help the mentee perceive if she is experiencing a temporary difficulty or if a bigger question exists for her. This situation calls for honesty and tact from the mentor. A question such as, "Does teaching nourish you as a life's work?" may be helpful.

Some Practical Considerations

Just as the children's activity is nourished by a healthy environment, the mentoring conversation is affected by surrounding circumstances. Is the setting private? Is it quiet enough to allow for focus and concentration? What time of day is it? Are the participants hungry, tired, or needing a break? In some teacher education programs, it is the mentee's responsibility to ensure that the conversation is given the necessary respect within the framework of the day so that a fruitful exchange can take place. In this case, the mentee will be expected to attend to the practical details of arranging an appropriate setting as well as allowing for adequate time. For example, the mentee might need to schedule a substitute to cover for her if she has afternoon faculty duties. One mentor noted the difficulty of conducting a mentoring conversation while sitting at a picnic table on a windy winter afternoon during the mentee's playground duty.

Sometimes the planning may be the responsibility of the mentor. The mentor will be prepared to ask the mentee to "make time" for the conversation during the school day. Eating lunch

together after a morning observation may help the transition into a more relaxed conversation. Ideally, there would be some time between the observation and the conversation to allow both to collect their thoughts and digest the morning's experiences.

If the mentee has an assistant, or is an assistant, meeting for half an hour with both individuals before meeting alone with the mentee, can be helpful. In this way, the mentor has an opportunity to ask how the morning went for each of them, separately and as a team. By creating an atmosphere of trust and empathy, the mentor gives each a chance to speak openly about working together. If there are struggles between the two, the mentor can normalize or provide neutral ground to the struggles between teacher and assistant, likening them to the struggles in any close relationship. She may need to affirm how important it is for the children to experience an atmosphere of respect and caring between the two. The mentor may need to help the pair to have realistic expectations of one another and of their relationship.

It often helps to put a mentee at ease if mentor and mentee are able to socialize outside of the mentoring conversation. They may have a meal together or take a walk, or the mentor may stay at the mentee's house. The casual time that mentor and mentee spend together outside of the classroom in an informal setting may lead to expanded or enhanced conversation and deeper understanding of one another. If the mentor stays at the home of the mentee, she may have the opportunity to meet the mentee's spouse or family and gain a greater awareness of the mentee's life situation. This broader perspective will allow the mentor to offer a greater depth of support, compassion, and encouragement.

The passage of time is a mysterious element in the mentoring relationship. The quality of conversation will change as mentor and mentee come to know one another. As trust develops, conversations will ripen and yield more insight. Another aspect of time the mentor may notice is that often it will not be until the next day or the next week that the significance of a question or comment will surface. The mentor may find an opportunity to mention these insights or ask additional questions in a follow-up phone conversation or visit.

Qualities to Cultivate; Additional Thoughts

Through the ages, people have sought wise counsel from those who are more experienced. As a listener, a guide, and a mirror, our role as mentor is profound. Foremost for the mentor is facility in the art of communication. As experienced teachers, we come to the mentoring role with a wide variety of skills and an abundance of gifts to share. In order to be truly effective in aiding the self-development of the other, we have a responsibility to hone our communication skills through workshops and study. Often a mentor can spend much time and energy in conversation with a mentee and wonder if there was a positive effect. It may be helpful for the mentor to create a way for the mentee to give feedback regarding the mentoring experience. Such feedback could be sent to the mentor and/or initiating body. This information could provide valuable insights for the mentor's self-evaluation and bring to light aspects of the mentor's listening and speaking that need more awareness.

It is worthwhile for the mentor to review the balance of listening and speaking after a conversation, and to ask herself about the quality of connection. "How was the understanding between us?" As mentors, we need to develop the self-knowledge that informs us whether we should learn to listen more or to speak more. What is our natural tendency and how do we cultivate the other capacity? A mentor must be able to practice reflection on her own motives, strengths and weaknesses, asking, for example, "How do I respond to criticism or praise?" Our ability to be helpful as a mentor is grounded in who we are and who we are striving to become. If we remain open to the possibilities for growth, mentoring has the possibility of transforming the mentor as well as the mentee.

This chapter began with the quotation from Brenda Ueland, "When I am listened to, it creates me." As mentors, let us strive to cultivate the capacity to listen in a way that makes this thought a reality.

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Shingebiss Redeemed

Stephen Spitalny

Many of you are probably familiar with the story called *Shingebiss*, with the central characters a brave little brown duck, and his nemesis, the North Wind. I have loved that story ever since first reading it in *My Book House* (first published 1930) and it has been a regular in my kindergarten stories year after year. The story has gone on to great popularity among other Waldorf early childhood storytelling folks and has become a beloved winter tale. It was also included in *Winter*, from the Wynstones Press series put together by Margret Meyerkort.

The story awakened some questions for me, and after many conversations with colleagues, I came to realize that I wasn't the only one who wondered about its authenticity. Among my own questions, I wondered about those four great logs that Shingebiss had, and I wondered if the song Shingebiss sings and its translation were true to the original. It was to my great delight that one day in a bookstore I discovered a picture book entitled *Shingebiss: An Ojibwe Legend* retold by Nancy Van Laan (published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1997). Upon opening the book and seeing an illustration of a *green* duck in its pages my relationship with Shingebiss immediately changed. I knew that if Shingebiss wasn't a brown duck, then there could be some other fundamental differences as well, and I hoped that I would find clarity about the things I had been wondering about.

The Ojibwe people, also known as Chippewa, lived in the Great Lakes region of North America. They had a close relationship with the world of nature and learned practical lessons of survival from the workings of nature all around them. "Shingebiss" is a traditional Ojibwe teaching story of how a merganser duck, also called the diving bird or the diver, overcomes the harshness of winter Shingebiss is an archetypal spirit teacher, and this story has been passed down for many generations from the "way-back time." (Incidentally, there are many kinds and colors of merganser duck, including green, brown and multi-colored.)

Though this story comes from the oral tradition of the Ojibwe, Shingebiss has a long literary history as well. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow included Shingebiss in *The Song of Hiawatha* (Book 2) written in 1855. And while Longfellow took liberties with traditional names and storylines, one sees that this story has been around for hundreds of years. In Longfellow's version, when Kabibonokka (Winter Maker) heaps the snow in drifts around his lodge;

Shingebis, the diver, feared not,
Shingebis, the diver, cared not;
Four great logs had he for firewood,
One for each moon of the winter,
And for food the fishes served him.
By his blazing fire he sat there,
Warm and merry, eating, laughing. . .

I would guess that Olive Beaupre Miller, who collected and wrote *My Book House*, adapted her version from Longfellow. Many lines from *The Song of Hiawatha* are echoed in Miller's version.

The Van Laan book mentions that an elder of the Grand Portage Chippewa Band in Michigan advised the author on her written version of this traditional tale, helping to keep the story true to its ancient beginnings. Just like other true fairy tales, no human being made this story. It was received as a living teaching story and passed on person-to-person over generations. Within the images of this story profound wisdom can be discovered. True fairy tales show in imaginative pictures various aspects of an individual human being. Shingebiss and Winter Maker are parts of each one of us.

Shingebiss is a cheerful, resourceful, and brave character who perseveres in the face of a fierce and powerful foe. He has the capacity for patient waiting. He stands face to face with his own possible death and does not fear. Nor does he battle, but simply lives his life with courage and wits. In this story, Shingebiss is not helped by others; it is only through his own striving that he survives. And in the end his seeming foe is embraced as friend and fellow. The little duck is without arrogance; he

merely bases his actions in recognition of the place of each individual in the world. Then they stand as true equals. Shingebiss has a princely quality of patience and uprightness that carries him through his challenges. This little green duck has very Christ-like qualities, visible even in the healing green with which he is depicted in this book. He is at peace with himself, and meets the world also in peace.

The Van Laan story begins by explaining how Shingebiss gets his fish in summer and fall. Then we learn that Shingebiss has four great logs, one for each of the long, cold winter months. For me, this image was a great gift, answering a long-held question for me about the significance of those logs. The duck's nemesis is named Winter Maker, and it is he who sends the cold, north wind and snow to harass Shingebiss. In Ms. Van Laan's version, the traditional song is translated differently from Olive Beaupre Miller's version, with words more literally translated from the original:

Ka-neej, ka-neej,
Bee-in, bee-in,
Bon-in, bon-in,
Ok-ee, ok-ee,
Ka-weya, ka-weya!

The Van Laan translation:
Friend, friend,
Come in, come in
Sit with me or leave me alone
You are still my fellow man;
Never can you do me in.

And here, the Miller translation:
North Wind, North Wind so fierce in feature
You are still my fellow creature.
Blow your worst, you can't freeze me.
I fear you not and so I'm free.

Four tests for Shingebiss are portrayed in the story, four different challenges created by Winter Maker. First there are the high drifts of snow, then ice coating the snow. Next Shingebiss is trapped by ice under the water and finally the icy cold Winter Maker comes into the home of Shingebiss. The final challenge is at Shingebiss' very own home fire, his hearth (heart). This final test is his spirit initiation. This story shows an example of looking at oneself without fear, and then accepting what one finds. It is only then that one is open to one's own future. Shingebiss embraces the gifts he has been given, and uses them wisely.

Shingebiss literally means *diving bird.* He is a being who goes from the airy world into the watery world of spirit, and back again. Like the frog in other stories, he is at home in both worlds. He can bring the wisdom of spirit into the physical world. "He is a very singular being," says the story. Shingebiss is an individuality who knows himself. Perhaps in him can be seen the workings of the consciousness soul. It hearkens to a voice crying in the wilderness, telling of the new path for those who have ears to hear.

There are many possibilities for interpretation, yet it is clear that there is great truth and wisdom in this story. One must digest the story for oneself and allow the images to speak their meaning within. There is no "one and only way" to listen to what this story speaks. It speaks in its own way to each person who experiences it. Joan Almon once said in a lecture, "Fairy tales don't like to be pigeon-holed. They are beings who want to be heard." So we must have the ears to hear what is said.

Nancy Van Laan ends her retelling thus: "Just as this story, this sacred adizookan, teaches, those who follow the ways of Shingebiss will always have plenty of fish to eat, no matter how hard the great wind of Winter Maker blows."

This is a wonderful story for the young child, rich with images of challenges met and overcome. Children who carry this story in their souls have been given a gift that can help them through their own challenging times, even if they are not consciously remembering Shingebiss. He lives in their "dream consciousness," cheerfully, patiently, and persistently doing what is needed.

This book is a treasure. Along with the story, there is a glossary of Ojibwe words in the book, and a short, informative introduction. I encourage you to check to see if your local library or bookstore has a copy. Thanks to Nancy Van Laan for taking this well-loved story back to its traditional form. And thanks to little green duck Shingebiss for showing the way through challenging times.

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Meeting the Needs of the Times

Cynthia K. Aldinger

This article is excerpted from the forthcoming publication What Is a Waldorf Kindergarten? *(available September 2007 from SteinerBooks). It offers a brief overview of the expansion of the Waldorf/Steiner early childhood movement in North America from being primarily a kindergarten movement to the inclusion of parent-child programs, extended day programs and childcare. It introduces the work of LifeWays North America as representing one model of care that has developed from the Waldorf/Steiner early childhood movement.*

Rudolf Steiner believed that one of the essential aspects of education was to teach in such a way that the children would learn how to properly breathe. In early childhood we might say "to live in such a way that the children will learn how to breathe."

As a young child in the 1950s, when my mother worked part-time I was always with my grandparents. On days my mother did not work, I was home all day for several days in a row. Occasionally, mother would go to a neighbor's home for coffee and a chat, and I would go with her and play with the children of that household. Whether I was at grandma's house or at home, I was playing by myself or with neighborhood children while the adults went about tending the home. Often my mother would gather the neighborhood children together and sing with us and read stories. It was not called "home-based preschool" back then. It was just life, like breathing.

Thirty years later, when I was teaching in a mixed-age Waldorf kindergarten, it was a joy to create the flow of activities, time for active robust play and for quiet listening, for being together in a group or skipping away with a best friend, for cleaning and caring, for baking and eating, time to create useful and beautiful things and time to dig in the sand. The daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms were like breathing in and out.

The Waldorf kindergarten was, and is, a place that honors childhood. In my experience, it was even more: it was a haven. As a founding teacher, there was always more to deal with than just the parents and children of my own kindergarten. There were faculty meetings, college meetings, board meetings, festival committee meetings, long-range planning meetings, and so on. Going out into the school to attend to such things was like venturing out into the world. Returning to my kindergarten was like "coming home." Elementary school colleagues would occasionally come into my kindergarten in the afternoon to rest while their children were with another teacher. The couch was there to welcome them.

The kindergarten was not a classroom. It was a child's play garden. Over the years as the kindergarten became more and more permeated with our routines and rituals, our ebbs and flows, our joys and sorrows, our work and play, the room became like a silent pedagogue, the walls embracing us like a benevolent grandmother who sees all but knows when to turn her head to allow just the right measure of mischief. I remember those joyful occasions when I would step out of the room just before clean up time was finished, knowing the pure delight it provided the children to "barricade" the door while they completed the final details of putting things away. When the children opened the door, I would walk back in, not as the teacher, but as the village inspector to a chorus of giggles as I noticed all the marvelous detail that had gone into the tidying away. We were our own little community, and even when I was a younger teacher, I felt like the beloved grandmother or auntie who welcomed the neighborhood children over to play for a few hours in the morning. At the end of the morning, the children left with their parents or caregivers to go home or to visit with friends.

Over the years some things began to change. Children who had been in traditional institutional childcare since infancy were beginning to come into the kindergarten. Many of them did not understand how to enter into self-directed imaginative play. Other children came who had not been in child care but had been enrolled in multiple enrichment programs since they were toddlers. Many children also needed care beyond the kindergarten morning. Some families requested this extension because both parents needed to work in order to afford tuition for a Waldorf/Steiner school. Others simply felt that their children thrived in the longer day with

other children rather than at home. The reasons for wanting the longer hours varied, but the requests were strong. Also, more families with children younger than three emphatically asked, "What programs do you have for my child?" They made it clear that, while Waldorf/Steiner education was their first choice, if our schools could not serve their needs, they would go elsewhere.

Parents were seeking "more" for their children — more hours, more years in school, more activities, more time away from home. In this age of individualized loneliness, parents were also seeking community and were asking for guidance on how to be with their children. How were we, as Waldorf schools, going to meet these needs?

Schools began offering extended days. Children who needed the extended day would gather from all of the early childhood programs and have lunch together, followed by rest time, then a light snack and a bit more play time before being picked up. Some schools included lunch as part of the kindergartens and then dismissed the children to aftercare or to go home. Typically the early childhood aftercare program ended when the elementary school day ended around 3 p.m. Children who needed even later care would go to another aftercare program until 5 or 6 p.m. This continues to be the pattern for many schools. Others are beginning to offer full-day kindergartens to avoid so much switching around for the children.

To respond to parents' requests to serve younger children, many schools began offering "nursery" or "preschool" programs for children just under three to a little over four. Some even began accepting a few two-year-olds. At my school it was called the Wonder Garden, and I remember the wise insights of its first teacher Laura Cassidy when she noted that it simply did not work to have a "pressed down" kindergarten morning for these little ones. She noted how much slower the pace needed to be with only little ones present and no older children there to help or model for them. She recognized that bodily care, dressing and undressing, toileting, and such were valid and important parts of their daily experience and needed to be given plenty of time.

Schools also began offering programs to stem the tide of loneliness of the parents and to bring in even younger children. Called parent-child programs or playgroups, these programs were usually one morning a week for a couple of hours. In some schools, parent-infant or parent-toddler programs were also offered. They have become so popular that several groups convene throughout the week. Many schools have begun to see them as enrollment builders, although many teachers view them primarily as support for parents. They want to strengthen the healthy development of families regardless of whether the families later enroll in their schools. Typically, many families do enroll in the school because they have been inspired by their experience in the parent-child programs.

These expanding programs that kept the children at the school for longer hours and brought children out of their homes at younger and younger ages were not always welcomed into our Waldorf/Steiner early childhood movement. In some schools there was excitement about this development. Others treaded forward with trepidation. Still others chose not to have young children in any school program other than the kindergartens. Why the resistance? Let us consider the following statement by Dr. Rudolf Steiner regarding the child in the first three years:

> *The first two-and-a-half years are the most important of all. During this time the child has the gift of being instinctively aware of everything that goes on around it, especially as regards the people who come in daily contact with it. Everything that takes place in its environment imprints itself on its physical bodily form. . . so that our behavior will influence its disposition to health or disease for the whole of its after life.* (*Understanding Young Children: Extracts from Lectures by Rudolf Steiner,* WECAN Publications)

Steiner speaks of the first three years of life with great reverence. He impels us to understand the depth of responsibility we take on while in the presence of these little ones so recently arrived from the realms of spirit. As poet William Wordsworth wrote in his poem "Intimations of Immortality," "trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home." Our movement has a very protective gesture toward this early period of life, holding as an ideal the image of the child at home, cared for by a loving family. To open programs for children under three-and-a-half, even though accompanied by their parents, was a big step for us to take.

Yet the phenomenon of playgroups was

becoming a cultural norm. If we did not provide these opportunities, parents would find them elsewhere. Many schools decided it would be wise to support families who were seeking not only community with other parents but also guidance about raising their children. Today parent-child teachers are grateful to meet these families who, regardless of lifestyle and parenting practices, have found their way to our schools. Every parent-child teacher can share testimonials of how the program has helped families make life-changing choices for their homes.

Now, let us consider the resistance to extending the school day for kindergarten children. Again, there was a long-held belief that the best place for young children was the home. The hope was that after a morning in the kindergarten, the children would go home and have lunch followed by a nap, then an afternoon of play. What has been happening for years, however, in North America, is that children who were being picked up after kindergarten were not necessarily going home. Perhaps they were going out to lunch and then to run errands or to attend a variety of "enrichment" classes such as ballet, music, gymnastics, or sports. Partly for this reason, some schools began adding lunch to the end of the kindergarten morning. Others began experimenting with extended day programs. It was a new dimension of our work, and we did not necessarily know how best to go about it.

At my school our first attempt at offering an extended day for the kindergarten children resulted in cranky, tired children coming to school the next day after they attended aftercare. Over the years and with dedicated intention on the part of those carrying the afternoon program, things improved. We changed the name to TLC (Tender Loving Care) and consciousness was given to how the transition took place from the kindergarten morning to the afternoon. The kindergarten teachers worked with the TLC teachers to build a conscious bridge of care and loving exchange. Currently most schools offer some type of extended day for their youngest children.

Today a common experience in our schools is as follows: a child as young as an infant or toddler comes to school with a parent or caregiver to attend a parent-child program for a few years, followed by attending a nursery or pre-school program for a year or two, followed by attending a kindergarten program, and often spending the afternoons with different teachers in an extended day program. Some children experience two extended day programs because the program for young children ends at 3:00 or so, and then they switch to the "after school" program that goes to 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. In the course of a day, they may have been with three different sets of teachers. The good news is that the children do not have to travel to a whole different school or day care program in the afternoons.

However, for many Steiner/Waldorf early childhood educators this is not the type of schedule they desire for young children. Consider this quote from Dr. Steiner in the book *The Child's Changing Consciousness:*

> *The task of the kindergarten teacher is to adapt the practical activities of daily life so that they are suitable for the child's imitation through play. . . The activities of children in kindergarten must be derived directly from life itself rather than being "thought out" by the intellectualized culture of adults. In the kindergarten, the most important thing is to give the children the opportunity to directly imitate life itself.*

Taking into account the current culture of adult life in the Western world with its busyness and days filled with a variety of activities and comings and goings and restlessness, this model of shifting the children from one setting to the next throughout the day is very contemporary. But is it the lifestyle we want them to imitate when they are so young? Does it allow the space and time for them to penetrate their play? Does it meet the fundamental needs of the young child?

In *The Kingdom of Childhood* Dr. Steiner said, "The joy of children in and with their environment must therefore be counted among the forces that build and shape the physical organs." He went on to say in *Essentials of Education*, "For the small child before the change of teeth, the most important thing in education is the teacher's own being." Compare this to what contemporary pediatrician Dr. T. Berry Brazelton says in his book *The Irreducible Needs of Children*: "Supportive, warm, nurturing emotional interactions with infants and young children. . . help the central nervous system grow appropriately." While young children may exhibit amazing levels of

resiliency, are we best serving their needs by shifting their environment and their teachers/caregivers so frequently?

In the mid-nineties, the Waldorf Kindergarten Association noticed that many teachers had begun caring for children in their homes, some for personal reasons and others because they felt that they could better provide the type of seamless day and rhythmical flow in which young child thrive. At the East Coast Waldorf Kindergarten conference in 1996 one of the workshops was specifically for individuals offering childcare in homes or centers. Many who attended spoke with tender vulnerability of their sense of being viewed as "wrong" to offer care for infants and toddlers or to offer care for long days. They experienced a pervasive feeling that this was not the Waldorf way and that children needed to be at home before the kindergarten years and needed to go back home each day after kindergarten.

Rather than being criticized for their efforts, the people attending the workshop were thanked for taking the courageous step of trying to meet the needs of the times. Not long after that, the Waldorf Kindergarten Association changed its name to the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN), sending a clear message that they were not only an association of teachers in kindergartens but also included colleagues in a variety of other venues.

Around this same time, Rena Osmer and I, both WECAN board members, began traveling and visiting traditional child care centers in the U.S. and studying the changes that were taking place in home life. There had been a paradigm shift regarding the daily life of the young child. Typically, fifty years ago, the home was the place where the children played and hung out and learned about daily life, and the kindergarten was where parents sent them for artistic and playful enrichment for a couple of hours in the morning. The parental home was still the place where children experienced the main thrust of domestic life. Currently in our culture, parents are drawn to taking their children out of the home for increased stimuli. The activities of "housekeeping" or "homemaking" are sometimes relegated to being done when the children are not at home or when they are sleeping. As will be mentioned later, the daily life experiences of what makes a household function are becoming less and less common for children.

Rena and I became convinced that it was time for Steiner-based childcare and support for parents to grow and be strengthened in North America. With respect for those who had already begun to work in these arenas and with an interest in expanding even further, we explored the question of what we thought Steiner-based childcare would ideally look like. Our conclusion was that it would be imitative of the qualities and activities found in healthy, rhythmical home life — the ways of life. Thus came the name LifeWays, which we adapted from our friends who wrote the first *Lifeways* books. By 1998, the first LifeWays Child Care Center was opened in rural southeast Wisconsin and several others have opened since.

LifeWays centers and homes are designed to feel like home-away-from-home. Too often the missing ingredients in traditional childcare settings are consistency, warmth, and long lasting relationships. The heart of LifeWays childcare is the "Family Suite" in which children, caregivers, and families develop long-term relationships in an environment that protects childhood and enhances optimal physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and spiritual health for the children and the caregivers. What ages the various sites care for and how long their days run vary from place to place.

The Milwaukee LifeWays Child Development Center has three suites with a full blend of ages from infant to six. They offer care from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Some caregivers choose to work for eight hours a day while others prefer to share a suite and work part-time. Set up to imitate a large family, there are usually seven to eight children in a suite with a primary caregiver. With three suites, they function like a small neighborhood or extended family. All the children get to know all the caregivers, and they have a special connection to their primary caregivers. The caregivers are supported by a part-time administrator (who is also the parent-child teacher), other part-time caregivers, a cook, a kindergarten teacher, and volunteers. The older children of the suites may attend the preschool or the forest kindergarten two or three mornings a week and are sometimes joined by community children who come only for the preschool or kindergarten. During this time, the youngest

children in the suites have a quiet time with their caregivers, similar to how it is at home when older siblings go off to school for a while. When they return to the suite, the infants and toddlers are delighted to see them.

In addition to LifeWays centers, there are individuals who offer LifeWays childcare and/or preschool in their homes. In many ways this is ideal. They are already in a home so they don't have to imitate being in a home. Trisha Lambert in Davis, California is a "Full" WECAN member and a LifeWays "Representative." She was a Waldorf kindergarten teacher in a school before deciding to offer care at her home. She was doing this already before the LifeWays organization began. Initially inspired by Helle Heckmann in Denmark, Trisha and the children spend a long time outside each day exploring the numerous gardens and grounds surrounding her home. Trisha prepares meals and snacks for the children, and they sleep in the living room and bedroom of her home. Most days they have a little time for some simple circle games and a story, and if there is a baby in the mix, the baby plays or sleeps while the other children sing and play. Like the Milwaukee LifeWays Center, Trisha has an ongoing waiting list. Many families feel that the simplicity of daily living offered in these settings is what best serves their children, and often wonderful stories emerge of how families begin to slowly transform their own homes to be more reflective of the practices they have observed.

The rhythms and activities of the days and weeks in a LifeWays setting are meant to imitate home life rather than school life — daily care and cleaning of the environment, bodily care of the children, doing laundry, putting away groceries, eating, sleeping, singing and playing, and crafting for special seasonal activities. While the cook prepares the organic lunch each day, the caregivers and children in each suite participate throughout the week in the preparation of the food — for example, peeling carrots, chopping onions, etc. Whether or not the children actively participate in the work being done, they thrive within the environment of the focused work of their caregivers.

Called "The Living Arts" (Domestic, Nurturing, Creative, and Social), these daily life activities are quietly disappearing from the routine experience of many children today. In full-day care it is easier to experience a natural flow of these activities without feeling hurried. One notices that the children have more time to penetrate such things as putting on their shoes, brushing their teeth, having their hair brushed, getting dressed to go outside, and watching a baby being fed or diapered. The breath of the mid-day sleep also helps. Whether or not the caregiver also sleeps (some do), there is a natural shift that takes place that allows for a qualitatively different experience from morning to afternoon. When they awaken from nap and have their hair brushed and faces oiled (a practice adopted from Bernadette Raichle's Awhina child care center in New Zealand), they are ready for the slower pace of afternoon play and getting ready to go home.

The caregivers attend a mentor-supported, one-year, part-time LifeWays training that introduces them to the Living Arts as well as to the LifeWays principles and suggested practices. Human development is taught from the spiritual scientific insights of Rudolf Steiner and contemporary child development experts. Students experience music, movement, and speech classes to strengthen them as human beings worthy of being imitated by young children. They are offered numerous handwork classes, including an introduction to gardening, to steep them in the practical, yet aesthetic, craft of homemaking. Other parts of the training focus on working with regulatory agencies as well as how to work with parents and colleagues. A unique aspect of the LifeWays training is that the students are comprised of parents, childcare providers, home-based preschool teachers, parent educators, and grandparents. The common denominator is the understanding that the fundamental needs of young children can be met through the life activity of the home regardless of whether you are a stay-at-home parent or a childcare provider or a parent educator.

Just as it was a privilege to teach in a Waldorf kindergarten so many years ago, it is an equal privilege to be a part of the ongoing development of Steiner-inspired childcare. While going back in time is not the answer, many Waldorf/Steiner early childhood educators have discovered the value of slowing down, shifting the emphasis to daily life activities, and expanding their time with children in their care. LifeWays is one part of this expanded work of Waldorf/Steiner educators. There are others who have been offering child care for two decades

or longer, and there are others offering training and support for parent-child teachers and teachers who wish to be involved with birth-to-three work.

At the Waldorf early childhood conference in New York in 2006, the keynote speaker was Dr. Michaela Gloeckler, director of the medical section at the Goetheanum. Susan Silverio, director of the Northeast LifeWays training, shared her notes quoting Dr. Gloeckler as follows: "Teach beyond guilt. Teach out of joy! Open up kindergartens outside of the school landscape! Organize farming/play afternoons in family homes. Receive children as early as possible and keep them as long as possible."

We are pleased to be involved with this expanded consciousness around early childhood practices and family support, and we are grateful to the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America for having the foresight and warmth of heart to support individuals and organizations that are furthering the work. It is a breath of fresh air.

Cynthia Aldinger is Executive Director of LifeWays North America and serves on the Board of WECAN. A former Waldorf Kindergarten teacher and childcare provider, she has taught children, parents and caregivers for over twenty years.

Educating the Feeling-will in the Kindergarten

Michael Howard

The following is an excerpt from Chapter 4, "Educating the Will in Practice," of the book Educating the Will *by Michael Howard. The book as a whole explores the quality and training of different aspects of the will in Waldorf education: the thinking-will, feeling-will, and comprehensive or common will. Here Michael Howard argues for the critical importance of cultivating the feeling-will in early childhood, with many practical suggestions. Reprinted with permission,*

The defining characteristic of feeling-will is the capacity to live deeply into the inner quality of something outside us, knowing and feeling it as if we are within it or it is within us. In the early childhood years a healthy child is naturally inclined to drink in the inner mood and qualities of places and persons. It is one of the tragedies of our times that the ways of the world, including the life of family and school, can dull rather than foster this natural soul attunement. Tragically, many young children come to kindergarten with a sense-nerve disposition already strongly developed. Their thinking has become prematurely intellectual and abstract, and their feeling life inclines toward strong personal like or dislike. It is crucial for later life that in these early years we do everything we can to keep the feeling-will alive as much and as long as possible.

In early childhood we do not "teach" the arts and crafts to the children so much as we create opportunities for children to be exposed to and engage in the realm of art as a natural part of everyday life. We can do this in a variety of ways.

One way to foster the artist in each child is to provide frequent opportunities for engaging in art and craft activity. The following are just some possibilities to consider:

A natural clay pit, such as can be found at the edge of a stream, within walking distance of the kindergarten, is a wonderful gift from Mother Nature. If we can overcome any personal aversion we may have to clay and the so-called mess it can create, then the children can reap the full benefit of her gift. Allowing our children to "muck about" to their hearts' and wills' content, without interjecting cautionary admonitions, is a true and lasting gift we can give them. Their souls' receptivity to the elementary quality of matter, the spirit of the elementals and Mother Nature, is a precious capacity that can fade all too soon. By enduring a little mess, we give our children experiences in heart and will which are a source of health and strength for a lifetime.

In the absence of the good fortune of having a natural clay pit nearby, we can create one. Dig a hole a foot deep and two feet in diameter and fill it with at least 100 pounds of clay for the children to seek out in free play. A bucket of clay available indoors for free play is also desirable.

In addition to outdoor sandboxes, we can also

create a sandbox for free play indoors. With a sheet of plywood and some 1" x 4" or 1" x 6" pine, we can make a 3' x 6' or 4' x 8' sandbox with sides or legs of appropriate height. The developmental value of moving and shaping sand is so important that its use should not be limited by the seasons but be possible year round. Snow is a wonderful material as well, but does not replace sand as a form-building medium.

We can use earth-tone beeswax for modeling with the children. All materials have color — natural beeswax has a golden earth tone color. But as educators we have good reason to be sensitive to the different effects produced by modeling a material that has strong color — primary and secondary colors — in contrast to one with earth tones. Can we distinguish between a deeply felt color experience and a deeply felt form experience? In finger-painting, for example, children have a tactile experience that competes with and may override their color experience. Likewise, the strong color experience of brightly colored beeswax interferes with a vivid form experience. This is even more pronounced when children assemble beeswax figures from part to whole, using several different bright colors of wax.

To become fully engaged and absorbed in something means to give our whole heart and mind to it. Here the distinction between color experience and form experience is also related to the distinction between sense-nerve and feeling-will experience. When we give children brightly colored beeswax, however good our intentions, we are exposing them to two different worlds at the same time. If we want them to develop a capacity to live deeply into form, we will want to minimize rather than maximize the color experience during modeling. The use of simple, natural-colored beeswax allows the child to have a pure form experience, which strengthens the feeling-will.

Provide sunflower seeds, corn kernels, rice, or other grains and let the children draw and create patterns with them on a large surface. Unlike drawing on paper, this allows them to move and change the forms so that, for example, a tree turns into a bird. The seeds also lend themselves to creating non-outline forms — outline forms are the result of sense-nerve experience, while the filled-out forms allow the feeling-will to be active.

Provide good rasps that allow the children to rasp to their hearts' content. Sawing logs and hammering pieces of wood together with nails is a great favorite, but is largely a sense-nerve experience. Rasping, and rubbing sticks and/or corncobs against softer wood, inspires a more feeling-will creative play. Little children do not need to be making anything specific, unless their own imagination spontaneously sees something like an animal — it is natural that what they see in the form will change and evolve as they work.

There is every reason to have stone and stone tools in the playground as well. Limestone and marble are not too hard. An old, not-so-sharp hatchet or roofer's hammer is a good tool. Again, children do not need a preconceived idea of what they are making, nor do they need verbal instruction in how to use the tool. All that matters is that the children have the freedom to chip away, that the free play of their limbs communes unconsciously with the beauty of the material — they will covet the sparkling chips as precious treasures. In terms of safety precautions it is sufficient that we are quietly present nearby, provide safety goggles, and allow only one child at a time to work.

The above suggestions are just a starting point and stimulus for early childhood educators to become more open to the potential of all manner of materials that may be readily available and can serve this vital need of the children to engage in formative activity. The list of activities is limited only by our openness to the possibilities, yet the point is not for every kindergarten to have every possible material on hand. These few examples are intended to bring into focus developmental considerations that can influence our choice of activities and how we provide them to the children.

Michael Howard has taught sculpture to adults and children for over 35 years. He edited and introduced a collection of lectures on art by Rudolf Steiner entitled, Art as Spiritual Activity: Rudolf Steiner's Contribution to the Visual Arts. *He lives with his wife and daughter in Amherst, MA.*

Connections with the Pikler Institute

Susan Weber and Vanessa Kohlhaas

This report is by two attendees of the November 2006 Pikler Institute Course on Socialization and Conflict in Budapest.

Susan Weber: For those of us working with parents and very young children, or working with children alone in the first three years, an aspect of social development that will come to each of us sooner or later is that of aggression and conflict. Observing the child make her way from walking to joining her social community in play as a three-year-old, we cannot help but recognize that conflict is part of this journey. As a playgroup leader and teacher of teachers for many years, I have tucked away so many moments of the experience of conflict — child to child, child with parent, and child with teacher. I have pondered, studied, and practiced facilitation of groups of little ones who are tenderly reaching out into their worlds in anticipation of strengthening their nascent selves and of building connections with others.

Out of these questions, observations, and reflections it was with tremendous anticipation that I traveled to Budapest for two weeks to study once again at the Pikler Institute, as our primary course theme was that of aggression and conflict. We immersed ourselves in this theme for many days, listening to the wise experience and research of Anna Tardos, Emmi Pikler's daughter and the current director of the Institute. Eva Kallo, one of the master researchers and instructors at Lóczy (the informal name of the Institute, after the street upon which it is located) often joined us as a lecturer. Eva wove together her wide-ranging scholarship with her years as pedagogical leader of groups of children at Lóczy.

In addition to Anna and Eva's lectures, we studied video material from the Institute's archive of past decades, viewing special material that illustrated many diverse possibilities for supporting the children in situations of conflict. Ute Strub, who in her childhood attended the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, Germany, led us in experiential activities that brought many an "aha." Course participants also brought video and written observations from their own work. Each example led us to new questions, new strategies, and new insights.

The four American Waldorf teachers in our group pondered the ways in which our studies illustrated the journey of the incarnating child in the first three years, as we understand it through our studies in Anthroposophy. For each of us, the course brought affirmation as well as new possibilities, and we were eager to return home to continue our personal research into these themes. How much conflict is comfortable in a group? How can our engagement in these moments be most sensitive? How can we find more comfort within ourselves with this necessary element in human development? With these and other questions, we returned home filled with gratitude for the wisdom and devoted work of our Hungarian colleagues.

Anna Tardos truly works in the realm of the angels, where the teacher (or caregiver) touches the child in his deepest individuality, working out of her highest self. Those who have been a part of the Institute's work over these many decades have learned so very much about the young child out of their sensitive experience and their respect for the dignity of the child, and they are truly our partners in developing understandings that meet the needs of today's children.

The Pikler Institute will celebrate its 60th anniversary in Budapest with an International Symposium this April. I am honored to be invited to share the work of Waldorf early childhood education in the English-speaking world in a workshop, and look forward to building bridges of colleagueship with others who carry a deep, abiding devotion to the very young child.

Susan Weber has been involved with Waldorf early childhood education for over twenty years, as an early childhood teacher at Monadnock Waldorf School in Keene, NH; as coordinator of the Waldorf early childhood teacher training at Antioch New England; and as one of the founding circle of Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene. She has been invited to present the work of Sophia's Hearth Family Center at the Pikler Institute's 60th anniversary symposium in Budapest in April 2007.

Vanessa Kohlhaas: The theme of conflict was extremely relevant to my work as a nursery and parent-child class teacher. The experience and information I received greatly influenced how I support the children and parents in my classes. I would like to share a few of my notes from the conference.

It is a common misunderstanding of the Pikler work that children should develop naturally — meaning, that they do not need adults. However children do need adults, not just for basic needs (caregiving), but also because children learn through adults' modeling of appropriate behavior.

Our lives and environments are full of expectations and rules. Children experience rules in daycare, the playgroup, and the family. Anna Tardos gave the example that she counted over 20 rules children must follow when eating bread and butter. If there are that many with one task, then obviously the child must learn hundreds or thousands of rules.

Socialization is the process of internalizing social norms or standards learned or adopted by the environment. The "norms" become a part of a well-socialized individual's internal characteristics. A well-socialized person does not follow rules because he is afraid of punishment, but because it is a part of him. This process begins at birth.

A child enters the world not knowing all the social expectations around her. She begins her experience doing only what she wants. As she gets older, the adults around her begin to tell her (through words or actions) that an action is not allowed. This creates tension in the child and may become a source of conflict for her. Over time the child begins to understand the meaning of the rule or expectation and is physically able to follow it, but still she does only what she wants. The parent or caregiver may respond to her in a variety of ways: understanding, frustration, consistent boundaries, permissiveness, etc.

The child needs to learn how to assert her own will. It is sometimes pleasant and sometimes not pleasant when a child is developing her will. The development of a strong will has an impact on the ability to obey rules. How much freedom we give to the child to express her will is also important. The child should learn and adapt to social rules while standing up for her own desires. The child must learn to do this in relationships with adults and other children.

The child continues her development on the road to socialization by following the understood rule when the caregiver is present. However, when the caregiver steps out of the room, even if another adult is present, the child will revert to her own desired behavior. This stage is followed by the child following the rule even when the caregiver is not present. In due course, the child integrates the rule into her own will. This allows the previous feeling of tension to be released. The child now experiences the rule as a part of her own inner standards and may even tell others the rule (for example, younger siblings).

The process of socialization does not end, and therefore we all experience the tension and conflict that comes with being a part of a community. Conflict is especially difficult for caregivers of young children. Conflicts are complicated pedagogically because they take place suddenly and the adult doesn't have time to prepare for a response. We can plan, but not in the same way as caregiving. In addition, our childhood, past relationships, and inner work affect our work with children. Conflict situations are the moments when an adult is sometimes carried away by her own emotions. We must first deal with the conflict situation as it occurs and then reflect on how we can prevent it from happening again.

No magic spells or answers were handed out at the course on conflict at the Pikler Institute. There are no rote answers on how to handle a conflict situation with young children. We did, however, receive countless examples, guiding wisdom, research, and experiences to inform our work with young children. The following can serve as guidelines, but caregivers must use their own knowledge, observations, and meditations to lead them to what will work in their individual situations.

Our speech should always distinguish between the person and the action. We should not judge the child. The child isn't bad. Only the action needs to change. During a conflict, our words and/or actions should convey to the child, "I notice you. You are important to me."

When a conflict situation is occurring between young children it is often helpful to first observe what is happening. Is it a real conflict? Can it be

solved by the children independently? We don't have to interfere immediately. Watch the children to see if they can solve the conflict on their own.

If the conflict continues, increase your proximity, if possible. This can be done as simply as glancing over at the children to let them know that you are aware of their situation. You could also come closer to the children with an open, nonjudgmental gesture.

If the children are not able to solve the conflict on their own, give advice before you interfere with the situation. You should speak to all the children involved without singling out a "bully" or "victim." If the caregiver speaks only to the hurt child, then the child learns: "If I am hurt and cry, someone will come and care for me." If the caregiver speaks only to the child who hit then the child learns: "If I hit, then someone will come and give me attention."

Real aggressive behavior has to be directly and immediately stopped. The adult must not only deal with the immediate situation, while accepting the child, but also find the underlying cause of the problem behavior.

Once the initial conflict has passed, it is important for the caregiver to review the situation. What happened before, during, and after the conflict? Can I prevent this from happening again? Consider such things as the rhythm of the day, environment, health, sleep, and food/allergies. Our work with Anthroposophy also allows for greater support through our meditations and relationship with the child's angel.

Socialization and conflict have an impact on all of us who work with young children. I hope that our continued relationship with the Pikler Institute will help to enliven our own work and research within the Waldorf movement. For more information on the Pikler Institute, please visit www.pikler.org or contact me by email: butterflygarden@gmail.com.

Vanessa Kohlhaas is the nursery and parent/ child teacher at the Whidbey Island Waldorf School. She participated in the first and second course in English at the Pikler Institute in Budapest, Hungary.

The Power of Touch

Joan Almon

In February 2007, I had the pleasure of working again with Fred Donaldson as we both delivered keynote talks at the east coast Waldorf early childhood conference. For those who don't know Fred, he is a "play specialist." He travels the world playing with children, youth, adults, and elderly persons in all kinds of venues from ordinary preschools to prisons. He also plays with animals, most notably wolves, elephants, and lions as well as dolphins and manatees.

He's learned important lessons along the way, and at the essence of his work is the realization that play is a form of love. It is a gift from the Creator and provides a deep connection between us and other living beings. It is part of the wellspring of all that is creative within us. A child once said to him, "Fred, when we play we're not different." This expression of unity and love that is experienced within the world of play is among the great gifts that Fred imparts when he speaks and shares his stories.

Fred's background is not based on Waldorf education or Anthroposophy. He was a professor who became unhappy with academic life. He walked away from it and took a job at the other end of the education spectrum: he became an assistant in a preschool. There he learned profound lessons about play and began to practice those lessons with children, adults, and animals. The play he discovered is what I would call a primal form of play. It is the type of play we have in common with all other human beings and with many animals as well. It happens most often through touch, such as when you see puppies — or young children — rumbling and tumbling on the ground with each other. It may look wild but it is actually very peaceful, for if it becomes aggressive it ceases to be play.

When Fred speaks of the divine quality of play, I am often reminded of an experience I had in my kindergarten. I would be working on some basic activity such as baking or shoe polishing and the

children would be deeply engaged in play all around me. There was a hum in the kindergarten that was a sure sign that deep play was taking place. On some of these occasions the thought would arise from deep within me, "This is as close to heaven as you are likely to get on this earth." It seemed to me that to enter into the child's world of play was to enter a heavenly sphere, and I relished each moment there.

But there is a world of difference in how Fred interacts with children in play and how I do, and that is what is both very interesting and challenging to understand. As a Waldorf teacher I had been taught to enter the sphere of play without actually playing with the children. My early teachers, especially those from Europe, had made a strong point of saying that the teacher is not supposed to get down on the floor and play with the child. We do the work of the kindergarten and through imitation the children enter into the spirit of play. In fact I experienced the power of this approach thousands of times with the three- to six-year-olds I worked with. I worked, they played, and we shared a wonderful intimacy with each other in that common space of meaningful work and genuine play.

But working with Fred makes me question the strictness of some of the "rules" that governed my work. Even as a teacher I frequently "broke the rules" in order to bring children back into play. There were many times when I entered the world of play with a child to get him or her started on play. I learned when to withdraw so the child could go forward alone or with other children. But Fred enters a space I rarely allowed myself to enter. It is the space where we touch each other in play with a clean, safe touch, where we are down on the floor interacting with the children with our whole bodies. I touched the children in passing, or held their hands on walks or when saying a blessing over a meal. I washed and dried their hands, oiled their hands, or stroked their backs at nap time. I learned many things about touch but I never rolled around on the floor with children as Fred does. I never engaged in full body touch with the children, and I'm not sure I would now if I had a kindergarten again. But I am left wondering about the place of touch-based play in the lives of children, not only touch that involves adults but the rumble-tumble play that is so much a part of many children's lives.

I ask myself if I was too strict in this area and did not give children time to explore the full range of play. One thing is clear to me as I hear Fred's stories: this type of touch play is very profound and touches a deep chord in people, as well as in animals. The other thing that strikes me is that there are definite guidelines or boundaries involved with this type of play. There is nothing aggressive about it. There is no tickling or other subjugation of one person by another. It is a safe space and is an ultimate form of safe touch.

I left the conference with more questions than answers, especially the question of whether I had held too narrow a conception of play while I was teaching. Social make-believe play is for me the highest form of play, for it leads directly to the development of free, creative thinking, but it is not the only form of play. Movement-based play, such as running, climbing, jumping, and balancing, is also critical for children. Indeed, for many children who are blocked in their imaginative play, physical play opens the door to social play.

I ask myself now, is it the same with touch-based play? When children rumble-tumble on the floor with each other are they exercising a form of play that is satisfying in itself and also opens doors to imaginative play, to deep communication with others, to a profound sense of social relationship?

A whole new research field about touch and touch-based play has opened before me. At the moment I can only invite others to join with me in exploring what we know about the importance of touch in early childhood. I am sure that many of you have been consciously working on the sense of touch already, especially those who have taken up therapeutic approaches in early childhood work, and perhaps you would be willing to share some of your experiences and insights in *Gateways*.

Joan Almon is the Director and Founder of the Alliance for Childhood.

FLY ON THE WALL

5 year old girl —
When I woke up I thought I was a grownup because I was so serious.

Meeting Each Other: The Human Encounter

Dr. Heinz Zimmermann

The following is an excerpt from the opening lecture of the 2005 World Early Childhood Conference at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. It was given by Dr. Heinz Zimmerman, longtime Waldorf educator and former leader of the Pedagogical Section of the School of Spiritual Science. In 1964, Heinz Zimmerman wrote his doctoral dissertation on the "Typology of the Spontaneous Conversation." This interest in what takes place during our human encounters has continued for more than forty years.

Dr. Zimmerman gave the opening and closing lectures of the 2005 conference to early childhood educators from 40 different countries. The following excerpt is from the end of his opening talk, where he spoke about the art of education as an art of human encounter. In early childhood education today, working together with other adults is often the most challenging aspect of our work. Dr. Zimmerman describes how we can cultivate our ability to truly meet each other, "I" to "I". It is this human encounter that creates the vessel of community in which our children develop.

In his book *How to Know Higher Worlds* Rudolf Steiner writes the following words:

> *When one practices listening without criticism, even in cases where an opinion is brought forward which is entirely contrary to one's own, one will gradually learn to become one with the being of another person, and to fully enter into that person's world. One will learn to penetrate below the surface and hear the soul of the other behind the words.*

"Behind the words. . . ." Every human being has a unique voice, and by entering into that voice a communion takes place; a connection is formed with the being of the other. In another context, Rudolf Steiner calls this the "mystery of compassion."

The best place to start practicing is to choose the one who annoys you most, or to pick a person to whom you don't normally pay much attention. By doing this, we build up a connection that will become fruitful in the future. We have some encounters that are brought about by the past; our legs simply carry us to the people concerned. But there are also encounters that I can consciously cultivate and make fruitful that way. In exactly the same way I can learn from encounters and in doing so make future encounters fruitful as well. Digesting the experience will make future meetings more fruitful.

I would like to conclude my contribution by telling you two little stories. The first story — both have been changed a little bit — stems from India.

After God had created the whole world, including the human being, he sent the human beings down to earth. But they didn't enjoy the earth all that much and soon came back again. They returned to heaven much too early, and God really didn't want to have them come back that soon. So he thought to himself, "What can I do now?" and after pondering this he came up with the following idea. He thought, "I simply have to close heaven. Only the question is, where should I hide the key? For people are smart, and they will look everywhere. Even if I sink it to the bottom of a vast ocean, they would find it."

Finally he had the splendid idea to put the key in the heart of the human being. Within every human being there lies the key to heaven, and it can be found when one seeks the way to the heart. This is what self-transformation from out of the future means: it has to come from the heavenly being within each human being.

The second story is the story of a dying monastery (or perhaps to make it more current, we could say an anthroposophical "branch"). The members are all over 70, and only five of them are left in this monastic community. A friend arrives, and together with the abbot he laments the situation. "We are doing what we have always been doing, but no new people are coming." We know how this is, it is a familiar dirge, which might sound somewhat like this: "We are doing the same thing, only the students have become so different." So the two of them are complaining together about the terrible decadence of present-day civilization, and

how the end is in sight.

On leaving, the friend says, "I can only wish you luck, but one thing I would still like to say to you. There is one among you, who is blessed by God." (In the anthroposophical branch one would perhaps say "an initiate," or that this person "had special spiritual gifts.") With that, the friend takes his leave and the five are alone again.

Now all of them are beginning to think. "Now who could that can be? The abbot? Could it be I? Who knows? It isn't out of the question. But I don't really think so. Maybe it is Brother Felix? Or someone else?" And while they are all thinking about this, they begin to meet each other with a very particular quality of respect, because after all, anyone could be the chosen one! Through this, they build up a cohesion and relationship among one another that radiates from the community to such an extent that new people are attracted. The result is that the monastery blossoms again and acquires new members.

So this second story is also wonderful. What it implies is that we can discover that a divine source dwells within every other human being, and when we actively cultivate this fact within ourselves, we will also be able to work together in a different way instead of only seeing one another as acting in "typical" ways, this way or that way. Instead, we can say, "No, it is not "typical"; within this person's "type" something unassailably divine expresses itself, something from out of the future — a seed, which is the child within every human being, just like the child which comes into the kindergarten to us in the morning."

This discovery is wonderfully expressed by the philosopher Martin Buber. He says, "On the way to becoming I, I say: You." On the way to becoming myself, in the process of becoming I, I see the other.

The full lectures by Dr Zimmerman, as well as those by Joan Almon, Christof Wiechert, and Dr. Michaela Gloeckler, will appear in a volume called Playing, Learning, Meeting the Other, *available through WECAN Books this spring.*

New from WECAN Publications

AVAILABLE NOW

Love is the ninth volume in the Little Series of "spiritual gifts for the educator" by Rudolf Steiner, collected by Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen, the founder of the international Waldorf early childhood movement. Dr. von Kügelgen wrote of this collection, "Rudolf Steiner's knowledge of the human being develops the strength in our souls to not only live in knowledge, but at the same time in love, which should stream into our work every day. . . it is the work of anthroposophical spiritual science in its totality which leads us to the sources of human and divine love." WECAN is pleased to offer this collection, which speaks to the very heart of our work as educators and as human beings– with children, with adults, and with those across the threshold. The collection includes beautifully translated mantrams and verses, as well as short passages that lend themselves to individual or faculty study.

Mentoring in Waldorf Early Childhood Education, edited by Nancy Foster with contributions from the Mentoring Task Force, is Volume Four in the Gateways Series.

Hand Gesture Games for Autumn and Winter by Wilma Ellersiek is the latest volume in the Ellersiek game collections, translated by Kundry Willwerth.

COMING THIS SPRING AND SUMMER

Playing, Learning, Meeting the Other, proceedings from the 2005 Dornach World Early Childhood Conference.

You're Not the Boss of Me! Understanding the 6/7-Year-Old Transformation – the long-awaited resource created by our WECAN Task Force on the Six-Year-Old.

Calendar of Events

Conferences, Workshops and Summer Courses

...and listens at the shores of a great silence... Public Summer Intensive at Eurythmy Spring Valley, June 24 – 29, 2007. Contact: Jennifer Kleinbach, 845-352-5020 ext. 13 or info@eurythmy.org.

Encouragement on the Path of Incarnation, June 25 – 29, 2007, with Adam Blanning, MD, Laurie Clark, Tom Clark, Nancy Blanning, Marielle Levin, at Denver Waldorf School, Denver, CO. This workshop is for early childhood educators working with Waldorf principles to look to the needs of today's children as they strive to incarnate in a healthy way. Presentations will feature keynotes by the anthroposophical doctor and workshops on movement with children, color work, and shadow puppetry. Contact: Laurie Clark, 303-777-0531 x166 or laurieclark525@comcast.net.

Nurturing the Young Child from Birth to Three, July 2 – 6 and July 9 – 13, 2007 with program co-directors Jane Swain and Susan Weber at Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, NH. Designed especially for playgroup leaders, childcare providers, early childhood teachers, parents and expectant parents, this two-week course offers an understanding of the sensitive processes taking place in the beginning of life. Contact: 603-357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org, www.sophiashearth.org.

Infant and Toddler Caregiver Program, July 2 – 13, with Bernadette Raichle, Dr. Johanna Steegmans, Marjorie Thatcher and others. Sponsored by the West Coast Institute for Studies in Anthroposophy and held at the Sunrise Waldorf School, Duncan, BC. This is part one of a two-part series. Part One will include The Archetypal Home and Family of Today and the Supporting Role of Anthroposophical Child Care, and Embryology, Birth and the First Three Years in addition to artistic and other courses. Part Two will continue in July 2008. Contact: Marjorie Thatcher, 604-985-3569 or info@westcoastinstitute.org.

Vital Years Australian Conference 2007, Holding The Dream Time: Working with Fairy Tales and Movement in Early Childhood, July 7 – 13, sponsored by the Australian Association For Rudolf Steiner Early Childhood Education. Contact: Renate Long-Breipohl of the Australian Association for Rudolf Steiner Early Childhood Education at breipohl@optushome.com.au.

Developing an Early Childhood Program with Children from One to Seven, July 9 – 13, 2007 with Helle Heckmann at Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, NH. Helle's themes will create a framework for being with young children in healthy ways that strengthen their well-being and that simultaneously support the needs of teachers, caregivers, and parents. Contact: 603-357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org, www.sophiashearth.org.

Advanced Insights in Working with Young Children: An Experiential Course, July 16 – 20, 2007 with Ute Strub from the Pikler Institute in Hungary, at Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, NH. This course will offer an experiential path toward developing deep insights into the sensory, physical, and social development of the young child. The course will focus upon sensory experiences and training in observation. Contact: 603-357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org, www.sophiashearth.org.

Introduction to the Waldorf Kindergarten, July 30 – August 3, with Leslie Burchell-Fox, Connie Manson and Patricia Rubano at Sunbridge College, Chestnut Ridge, NY. This week-long immersion in the world of early childhood has become a popular annual tradition, mingling handwork, puppetry, music, presentations and discussions with the first-hand accounts of three experienced teachers intent on sharing their love and appreciation for working with pre-school children. Contact: www.sunbridge.edu or 845-425-0055.

Therapeutic and Practical Insights for Early Childhood Educators, July 9 – 3, with Nancy Blanning and Laurie Clark at Sunbridge College, Chestnut Ridge, NY. This one-week course for the experienced early childhood educator is to provide further training in understanding and responding to the needs of the modern young child. Developmental movement with lively imaginations that therapeutically support the foundational senses will be studied and practiced. Challenges to visual and auditory processes will also be explored along with practical classroom activities. Contact: www.sunbridge.edu or 845-425-0055.

Nurturing and Nourishing: Care of the Young Child and Care of the Caregiver, August 9 – 11 with Wiep DeVries, Anthroposophical Nurse, and Cynthia Aldinger in Fair Oaks, CA. Learn about wraps, poultices, massages, inhalations, salves, and physical and emotional care of ourselves and children. Contact: Rudolf Steiner College 916-961-8727 or rsc@steinercollege.edu.

Teacher Education

Midwest LifeWays Child Care and Human Development Training, starts June 11 – 22, 2007

with Cynthia Aldinger, Mary Schunemann, Suzanne Down and colleagues in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at Milwaukee LifeWays Child Development Center. This is the first session of a new LifeWays training in the Midwest. Contact: Cynthia Aldinger, 405-579-0999 or ck.aldinger@sbcglobal.net.

Early Childhood In-Service Program, July 8 – 27 at Rudolf Steiner College, Fair Oaks, CA. Part-time early childhood educator training for those working with children in Waldorf early childhood programs. Contact Lauren Hickman, Program Director, 916-961-8727, or rsc@steinercollege.edu.

Sophia's Hearth Family Center's Training Course: The Child in the First Three Years, beginning July 2007 with the faculty at Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, NH. This summer begins a new cycle of our 13-month part-time training course, featuring a holistic, inspiring study of the development of the young child and the experience of creating a family. The program is designed for child care providers working with infants, toddlers and young children; early childhood teachers wishing to deepen their understanding of these early years as a foundation for their work with nursery and kindergarten children; parent-infant and parent-toddler group facilitating teachers, and those who work with expectant parents. Parents will also find this course of great interest. Study the development of infants and young children with gifted, devoted faculty, and experience handwork and the arts, reading and journal activity, the art of observation, and further development of your own relationship to movement. Contact: 603-357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org, www.sophiashearth.org.

Remedial Education Program (M.S.Ed. Option), New Cycle begins July 9 – 27. Joan Ingle and Mary Jo Oresti, Program Directors, at Sunbridge College, Chestnut Ridge, NY. Contact: www.sunbridge.edu or 845-425-0055.

Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher Training, 2007-2009. The new program of the West Coast Institute for Studies in Anthroposophy begins July 2007. This two-year part-time course of study in Waldorf early childhood education is intended for practicing early childhood teachers who wish to deepen their knowledge of Waldorf education as indicated by Rudolf Steiner. Each year students attend a three-week summer session (July) in Duncan on Vancouver Island, as well as two one-week sessions in Vancouver during the fall (October) and the spring (March). Contact: Dorothy Olsen, 604-740-0539 or info@westcoastinstitute.org.

Southeast LifeWays Child Care and Human Development Training, starts September, 2007, with Rena Osmer, Connie Manson, Mary Schunemann and colleagues in Sarasota, Florida at Sarasota Waldorf School. This is the first session of a new Southeast LifeWays training. Contact: Rena Osmer, 772-214-5541 or rena@steinercollege.edu.

California LifeWays Child Care and Human Development Training, starts October 19 – 26, 2007, with Cynthia Aldinger, Trisha Lambert, Rosario Villasana-Ruiz, Suzanne Down and colleagues at Rudolf Steiner College, Fair Oaks, California. This is the first session of a new LifeWays training at Rudolf Steiner College. Contact: Admissions Office, Rudolf Steiner College, 916-961-8727 or admissions@steinercollege.edu.

Puppetry Arts: Juniper Tree Puppetry Events

Elements of Therapeutic Early Childhood Education:The Therapeutic Wisdom of the Seven Life Processes and Fairy Tales for Circle and Puppetry, June 18 – 22, Professional Development Week with Nancy Blanning and Suzanne Down in Sacramento CA.

New Cycle Beginning: Certificate in Puppetry and Story Theater Training, June 25 – July 5 in Viroqua, Wisconsin. Part one of the three-summer training.

The Curative Clock and Therapeutic Puppetry, July 9 – 13, with Camphill Master Teacher Trainer Adola McWilliam, and Suzanne Down at Rudolf Steiner Institute, Poultney Vermont.

Healing the Eye and Soul with Color, August 27 – 28, Vancouver Island. A four-day intensive in dyeing silk, wool roving, and wool felt, and puppet making.

Ohio Regional ECE Puppetry conference, October 13 – 14. Location TBA

Vermont Regional ECE Puppetry conference, October 20 – 21. Location TBA

The Therapeutic Wisdom of the Twelve Senses and Nursery Rhymes for Circle and Puppetry, October 27 – 28, Professional Development Weekend with Nancy Blanning and Suzanne Down. New England Location.

For further information and registration for any of the above puppetry events, call 1-888-688-7333 or contact suzanne@junipertreepuppets.com, or visit www.junipertreepuppets.com.

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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.

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