

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America • Issue 64, Spring 2013

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Yasmeen Amina Olya attended a Waldorf school through grade 11, where she was blessed to be surrounded by beautiful paintings and art, and later studied at the Victoria College of Fine Art in British Columbia, Canada. She now works primarily as a musician (harpist and vocalist), but also loves to paint. She says, "When I illustrate I try to convey the wonder and simplicity, the delight of childhood, imbuing each painting with warm gentle light and expression." She is working on a new website, waldorfstore.wisesophia.com where prints of her illustrations will soon be available.

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Words are powerful. As speakers, the words we choose communicate not only factual details but also overt or subtle attitudes that we hold about a subject. As listeners, the words we hear can go far to influence how we begin to think about what is described, particularly if it is new to us. We use words to clothe our thoughts and feelings. Rudolf Steiner, in *How to Know Higher Worlds*, describes how “feelings and thoughts are actual facts, just as real tables and chairs are in the physical-sensory world.” Thoughts are so real that they can build up or diminish without ever being verbalized. This is also true with the words we use to capture the thoughts. So our choice of words is no small matter.

The featured topic of this issue of our journal is our interactions with parents of the children in our care. What to call this? For many years I remember hearing the phrase “parent work.” The word “work” means “physical or mental effort exerted to do or make something.” It is also defined as “purposeful activity.” These are both true of our interactions with parents. But this term indicates an activity that may be one-sided. “Work” says little about what goal we are striving toward. The four articles you will read on the following pages encourage us to look beyond just the activity of interacting and toward the goal of *creating relationship* with our parents. The dictionary defines “relationship” as “the quality or state of being related, connected” or “continuing attachment or association between persons.” We tend to think of “work” as a strenuous or sometimes mundane activity. There can be a subtle negative association with this term; work can be seen as a burden. So it is not an ideal choice for describing our interface with parents. “Creating relationship” implies something that builds connections, that is dynamic and ongoing between human beings. This is a worthy goal.

Our responsibilities as educators have changed so much over the years. Most of us were probably drawn to teaching because we love being with children and want to foster their development. We thought the

time we would spend with parents would be incidental to the time dedicated to the children. This has shifted dramatically. We still spend our hours with children, but circumstances often require that we additionally spend large amounts of time communicating with parents, explaining and perhaps justifying Waldorf education, and calming fears and worries. The “olden days” where the teacher shared advice as a respected authority are gone. Modern people have ready access to information at their fingertips and expect us to answer questions quickly with research to confirm the truth of what we say. Ours is a society used to products and solutions. Our Waldorf commitment to process rather than product and to allowing situations to grow and unfold over time sometimes seems alien. Our study and experience has deeply ingrained in us a knowledge of what we know is truly good for children. But we may feel an urgency to share this information too quickly; parents can feel overwhelmed and sometimes spoken down to.

We also see that many families are under great stress, some actually in crisis. It is undoubtedly true that parents come to our programs so their children can experience a humane, respectful, compassionate start into life. Yet it is also true that many parents are seeking acknowledgement, encouragement, nurturing, and sometimes even healing themselves. This is a very big job to set before a teacher. Job descriptions do not often delineate the need for skills as counselor, coach, arbitrator, and sometimes even priest. How can we possibly do all this?

This issue’s articles on building relationship with parents have a common thread of encouraging us to listen. That is something everyone can do. Rudolf Steiner spoke to this, again in *How to Know Higher Worlds*: “Particularly important as we develop as [educators] is that we also work on the way we listen to other people when they speak. On the path to higher knowledge this listening skill is extremely important. We must become accustomed to listening in such a way that we quiet our own inner life completely

when we listen. . . On the path to higher knowledge we must learn to silence any agreement or disagreement with the opinions we hear.”

Each contribution on this subject gives us ideas in how to genuinely listen. Thanks so much to Louise deForest and Susan Weber for sharing thoughts on how to help cultivate this listening space. Christine Summerfield shares her interactions in parent classes that help families make their own choices in how to simplify their lives. This process includes much listening and sharing of experience without any judgment. My article is a contribution from the perspective of the therapeutic educator—which we all are in one way or another. This article considers how we might approach speaking with parents on the most tender and frightening subject of all—that there is concern about their child’s development. Here the choice of words and tone is critical.

After this big topic we return to the children. The WECAN East Coast February Conference was blessed to have Renate Long-Breipohl as keynote speaker. Her topic was “The Education of Feeling in Early Childhood.” She shared anthroposophical insights and discussed research that supports our Waldorf approach. She also considered some current mainstream cognitive approaches (“Talk about your feelings”), and pointed out the deviations from what we understand about child development and the threefold nature of the human being. Interestingly, the healthy development of feeling in the child is an essential foundation for relationship-building in the future adult. The included summary gives only a taste of her wise and deeply researched presentations. The lectures need to be studied in their entirety. WECAN intends to publish these three lectures in a separate volume. Treat this summary as an appetizer.

International activity has been concrete and full of energy this year. Two international colloquia in Dornach have been sponsored by IASWECE and the Pedagogical Section. Last fall a Birth-to-Three colloquium took place, followed by a Six/Seven-Year-Old Transition from Kindergarten to the Grades meeting this past February. Two articles describe the focus of these working groups. The research these groups are doing will all come together at Easter of 2015 with an international conference at the Goetheanum on “Transitions,” considering child development from birth to three, the transition to school readiness, and the nine-year change. This will be a rich collabora-

tion of early childhood and grades teachers coming together with doctors to advocate for health and happiness for children in their educational situations.

A spring circle by Laura Donkel of the Chicago Waldorf School offers inspiration for the classroom. It is full of lovely imaginations and lively movements. The newly published book *Tell Me a Story: Stories from the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America* is also highlighted with three little stories for spring, as well as the lovely illustrations by Deborah Grieder and Jo Valens scattered throughout these pages. We hope you will enjoy these stories and whisk them into your classrooms. A review of the book gives a description of the range of these 80-plus stories. Early responses to this collection suggest that this will become a treasured classroom resource.

Another book reviewed is *Cosmic Child*, available through WECAN books. In *Study of Man*, Rudolf Steiner states that we cannot understand the nature of the human being if we do not appreciate life before birth as well as life after death. This volume offers pictures in poems and recollections to help us appreciate this pre-birth existence and remember what the children have left behind in order to join us here in earthly life.

Looking ahead to future *Gateways*, we wish to feature **Storytelling and Puppetry** as the theme for the fall issue. Thoughts and insights about these activities are invited as well as examples. If the response is enthusiastic, we may have material for yet another WECAN book of stories and puppet plays! Please send your contributions. *Gateways* is also eager to receive little vignettes of transitional songs, hand gesture games, small movement pieces for transitions or to enrich a longer circle time, and so on. There are gems living in each classroom. We would like to see more of them.

May your remaining weeks of school be filled with new vitality and inspiration as “Spring comes tripping over the lea.” Parent-Teacher conferences will have already concluded for most of us. We trust that you will discover that you have intuitively embraced some of the suggestions in these lead articles. Through the deed of enrolling their children in our classes, parents have invited us to be partners and companions with them in welcoming and escorting their children into earthly life. May we walk this path together with equality, true listening, and appreciation for one another. ♦

FOCUS: Creating Relationships with Parents

Working with Parents: A Different Perspective

— Louise deForest

This article originally appeared in the UK Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education journal, Kindling.

Many years ago, when my two youngest children were still very small, I would occasionally visit a friend of my mother's named Mrs. Robb. She was quite active in those days; at that time she was the oldest living survivor of the *Titanic* and was much in demand to give interviews, visit talk shows and tape her memoirs for different maritime museums. She was in her mid-nineties when I met her and she lived alone in the village where my mother also lived. She was losing her sight but still remained active in her small community and had many friends. I considered myself one of those many friends. Because we lived quite far away, I would see Mrs. Robb only every four to six months. The children and I would knock on her door and she would open it with a big smile on her face. She would kiss the children, give me a hug and invite us into her lovely home. She bustled about as she gathered things for tea, telling me the freshest news from town and recounting amusing anecdotes from her latest round of interviews. Finally everything was in place—the tea was brewed, cookies were on the plate for the children, and we were all comfortably sitting on the sofa with the late afternoon sun streaming in through the windows. As Mrs. Robb poured out the tea for us, she said, "Now, tell me dear, just who are you?"

I find myself often wishing that parents in our schools would receive the same warm welcome I received from Mrs. Robb, basking in a sense of well-being and feeling as if they are already our friends. Instead, too often, they are met with closed doors, with *dos* and especially *don'ts*, and opinions and judgments about the "right" way and the "wrong" way to parent their child. Each year we teachers open our hearts and our classrooms to new groups of children starting on their journey into life, but often we forget to do the same to their parents. Too often, parent evenings are seen as a chore, and it is not unusual in our schools to blame parents for the difficulties their children may

have. And yet, if it weren't for the insight, courage, and sacrifices of our class parents, many of us would not be able to practice our vocations. They enable us to fulfill our destinies as Waldorf early childhood teachers!

There is much talk these days about the different kind of children coming into our classrooms and we have worked hard to adjust to this change. We have changed our rhythm of the day, we have incorporated much more movement into our circles, adjusted our snacks for those children with allergies, and spent long hours researching different syndromes to better understand these little ones. But there is also a different kind of parent these days; a parent who asks

— *We are asked to develop equanimity in the face of the unknown, in the face of the breakdown of all familiar forms, and we must increasingly rely on our inner lives to give us any sense of security.*

questions, who is not content to take our word for anything, who demands more information, communication and answers. And this is just the way it should be. We are in the fifth Cultural Epoch and humanity is striving to develop the Consciousness or Spiritual Soul. Our task at this time is to develop ourselves as individuals, becoming, in the process, ever more antisocial. We are asked to develop equanimity in the face of the unknown, in the face of the breakdown of all familiar forms, and we must increasingly rely on our inner lives to give us any sense of security. All of us increasingly experience alienation in our thinking, isolation in our feeling life and powerlessness in our will. Choices have to be made now that have consequences for every human being alive, yet our relationships are more and more impersonal. However, if humanity were not faced with this difficulty in mutual

understanding, the consciousness soul would not be able to develop. It is a trial we are going through, but an essential one.

And, as is true in each cultural epoch, we are also sowing the seeds for the next epoch, one that Rudolf Steiner tells us is significantly different from the world we know today. In the sixth Cultural Epoch, Steiner tells us that there will be three areas of major differences from our present times. The first is that belief in the spiritual world will be a given for the humanity of the future; the second is total freedom of thought. One will not be bound by organized religions, family perspectives, or traditions or social mores. And the third major difference is such complete empathy with the other that our own personal well-being will be completely dependent on the well-being of others. If one person is hungry or suffers, their hunger pangs will be ours; their suffering we will feel.

There are some meditative exercises that I find helpful when working with parents. These are called the Six Basic Exercises or Subsidiary Exercises. Rudolf Steiner gave these as preparation for leading an active meditative life, but I have found, after thirty years of working with them, that one never graduates from them. These exercises keep us oriented and, over time, allow the “I” to work less on keeping the body, soul, and spirit together and more on refining the spiritual essence of who we are. They involve exercises in concentration (our thinking), will, equanimity, positivity and open-mindedness. And the sixth exercise is harmonizing them all. You do the exercises one at a time, adding more as you become adept at the ones before until you are doing all of them all of the time. Rudolf Steiner suggests beginning with one, doing it for a month, starting over each time you forget or are unable to complete the exercise, before beginning the second exercise. It took me years before I was doing more than one at a time!

I want to look at these exercises from the perspective of working with parents. How am I *thinking* about the parents I work with? Is there warmth in my thoughts? Am I interested in who they are? Do I have critical thoughts as soon as I see them? How do I speak about them with my colleagues, or my partner at home? Is there kindness in my thoughts about them? When I have an antipathetic reaction to a particular parent, do I realize that this says more about me than it does about them?

Will: do I have the will forces to find parents the help they need if I cannot provide it? Can I have yet another conversation with a particular parent when I

am already tired, without feeling resentful? Do I have the will to do the research to better understand a child or parent in my care? Can I write a thoughtful, honest and fair report for their child at the end of the year? Do I have the interest to call a family, even when their child has not done something wrong? Do I have the will forces and imagination to look beyond the outer behavior of a child or parent to see the being of that person? Can I do for my parents what I would want a teacher to do for me and my family?

Equanimity: Can I respond, rather than react? Responding to a difficult situation means that on a human level we are both left free; reacting is on a much more animalistic level and leaves all parties unfree. Can I develop within myself a center of calm, no matter what? Can I not take things personally but rather ask myself what is the other thinking? Am I professional enough to move away from my sympathies and antipathies? Our own feelings say nothing about the other; they only express our own limitations. Feelings are really outside of who we really are. Can I not allow myself to be rushed into things, no matter what the deadline? Rudolf Steiner tells us that the only way we can move into the future and meet evil and survive, is through the development of inner tranquility.

Positivity: Have I found something that I can admire and respect in each parent? Can I give the parents (and find within myself) a positive picture of their child, no matter how difficult he or she is in the classroom? Can I embrace even the most difficult and unpleasant situation knowing that within it lies the potential for my growth? A dear friend of mine and a master class teacher once said to me, “When you see trouble coming down the road towards you, drop down to your knees and give thanks, for you are about to learn something important.”

Open-mindedness: Are we open to new ideas? Are we open to other ways of doing things? Waldorf teachers are famous for believing that we are the ones who have found the truth and are doing the best work with children, and we are very often disinterested in the work going on outside of the Waldorf movement. Can we develop interest in different ways of working? Can we truly say that we are free of prejudice? New manifestations of truth must find us ready at any time to receive them. Can we look beyond all the tattoos and piercings of a new parent or colleague and find the human being within? Can we accept a parent’s perspective and thoughts with the same enthusiasm as we carry our own? For those of us who have been in Waldorf schools for a long time, can we accept what the

younger generation of teachers bring to this work even when it is different from what we expected? Can we recognize the gifts each generation brings? How open are we to differences of opinion in our personal and professional lives? Are we so afraid of conflict that we become defensive or retreat?

Now of course, in this age of fierce individualism, conflicts will naturally arise. What can we do? The first thing is to ask yourself, *What is the problem?* Essentially, that just means taking time to not react but to think about what has happened and to identify the issue. Then one needs to ask, *How did this come about?* What were all the steps that brought you to the present situation? This is really looking at it ethically. It is never about placing blame but about recognizing all the nuances of a situation and our own part in it. *Why did this problem happen?* And here we have to put ourselves into the motives of another. . . and our own motives. Honesty is really important here. *Who is the person doing this?* is another question you could ask. And here we are reminded of the sacred mystery of the other. Which part of me is responding to this situation? My higher self or my lower, more personality-bound self? And why? And perhaps one of the most important questions to look at is: what am I being asked to develop within myself with this particular situation? If we believe in the Laws of Karma, we have to know that the big things that happen to us in our lives have been orchestrated by ourselves. Where do I need to grow? What do I need to let go of, however comfortable it may be? We can never change the other, as we well know through our personal relationships;

we can only be responsible for ourselves.

Looking at a problem in the above way moves the problem in us and makes it less fixed. It allows us to look at it with perspective and objectivity and helps us to remove our personalities from the mix, allowing understanding to flow. Any time we fail a parent, we have also failed the child.

Martin Buber once said, "All living is meeting." In our working with parents, we have the opportunity to overcome our sympathies and antipathies and replace them with true interest in the human being who stands before us. It is not struggle but the rendering of assistance that truly promotes progress. Many of us have had the remarkable blessing of meeting Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy and working and living with his insights. But with this blessing comes a responsibility: we must take anthroposophy personally! Anthroposophy offers to revolutionize our way of living through a path of doing. It offers nothing less than social renewal, and with it, the respiritualizing of the human being. It is our task and responsibility to be the midwives of a new age. In truly meeting the parents who come to us, we can participate in this new birth. ♦

After many years as an early childhood educator, Louise deForest now dedicates herself to the mentoring and evaluating of teachers and programs and is actively involved with teacher training in the US, Canada, Mexico and Europe. She is a board member of WECAN and is one of two North American representatives to the IASWECE Council.

*Drawing by Deborah Grieder
from Tell Me a Story*



Bringing Balance and Harmony to Everyday Life: Helping Parents to Slow Down and Simplify

— Christine Summerfield

In looking at the theme of last year's international Waldorf early childhood conference, *The Journey of the "I" into Life*, several imaginations come to mind. For example, with the gentle unfolding of a flower, each stage of development is allowed to unfold in its own time, culminating in a strong, flourishing plant. If it is rushed or hurried, the plant is often weak and floppy and does not exhibit strength or vitality. Similarly, the human being also has stages of development, in which the spiritual core or "I" gently unfolds over cycles of time with a certain signature in each stage. Just as with the plant, a young child's I can gently unfold over time, or be pushed into adulthood too soon, causing stress, anxiety and weakness.

In my own journey as a parent and teacher over the years, I have seen trends come and go. Especially in the field of technology, new gadgets seem to be invented and marketed every day with alarming speed. And along with devices, new parenting trends also are emerging affecting our experience of childhood. In our modern Western culture, one can see the signs and hear the messages everywhere of activities being pushed down to younger and younger children: computers in the kindergarten, early childhood literacy, Baby Einstein. If it's good for teens, then why not expose kids earlier? Surely it can only help them develop faster and earlier.

But what happens to the I of the child when it is exposed to adult content too early? And in the bigger picture, what is happening to the phenomenon of childhood itself? Counter to the emphasis on "too much, too fast, too soon," is a growing hunger to slow down and create more calm, more ease, and more grace in everyday family life. Voices including Kim John Payne (author of *Simplicity Parenting*), Sharon Elliott and Carrie Ferguson (authors of *A Child's Way: Slowing Down for Goodness' Sake*), and Helle Heckmann (author of *Childhood's Garden* and *Slow Parenting*) are helping to articulate ways to bring ourselves back into harmony with natural rhythms,

while coping with the challenges of modern life.

Parenting groups are one way to offer support for such efforts, creating a community that helps individuals to feel less alone in their struggles. In the parenting groups that I lead (which are based on Kim John Payne's *Simplicity Parenting*), I try to offer a safe place where parents can gather in a warm, supportive environment to share ideas and creative solutions for the parenting challenges in today's world. First, we look at the analogy of *Soul Fever*. What are the hot spots in our daily lives? Where can we see the inflammation in the behaviors of our children? Where is there stress and anxiety? Where is there too much stuff or too much hurry? Just as with a physical fever, how can we stop, take notice of an area that needs attention, slow down, re-connect to our children and help them navigate through the fever of the times we live in?

While the element of warmth does possess healing properties, too much of it and too early can cause inflammation of the soul life of the child. Restoring balance is the key. Where can we apply some coolness to soothe the soul fever? How can we create more space and more time for more connection and more ease?

After defining the elements of Soul Fever, we move in to simplifying and refining four areas of home life. These are the **Physical Environment**, **Rhythm**, **Scheduling** and **Filtering Out the Adult World**. (In anthroposophical terms, these relate to the four members of the human being, the physical body, the life or etheric body, the astral body and the I or higher self). Each parent is given a workbook to use for journaling, studying, drawing, and making plans of action for change. In keeping with the spirit of simplicity and gradual change, our circles take place every two weeks, so we can have time to digest the material and implement one small, doable change at a time. Then, each time we reunite, we begin with celebrating successes, along with "juicy mistakes." Over time, trust and warmth are generated and conversations grow deeper and more authentic with each passing session.

Physical Environment

So, what are these four areas of family life and how do we create change? The first area is the most concrete and practical to work with: the physical environment. Toys. Clothes. Books. Clutter. In other words, stuff. We talk about how much stuff we have in our homes and look at play. How many toys are really necessary in my child's room? How does my child play? What is play? Best of all, what is a toy? This session is often quite lively, as I reveal on the floor in front of us, a spectrum of items for play, ranging from violent-looking action figures, toys with parts that flash and beep, caricature-like dolls, toys with logos. . . to a bucket of dirt, a bowl of water, a sheet, and a bundle of ropes and string. In exploring these items, they discover the difference between an open-ended toy and a closed-ended toy. Often, a golden moment is remembered from their own childhood when they see a bucket of soil or a bowl of water. Stories begin to emerge. "I remember digging for HOURS at the beach when I was kid! All we had was some old buckets and shovels!" "Our dad let us dig in that empty lot the whole summer. When we found those old animal bones, we really thought we were paleontologists, making great discoveries!" We find our own perceptions of toys expanding and our thinking about the nature of play is stimulated in new ways. Often, at the next session, parents return with stories of how boxes of toys went "on vacation" or were donated to charities. They observe how children played more deeply and cleanup was easier, with comments such as "My kids didn't even notice they were gone! They could simply find the toys they had and went right into play!"

Rhythm

The second area we explore is that of rhythm. We ask ourselves, what is rhythm and where does it live? How is it different from scheduling? While scheduling involves writing down appointments and commitments on a calendar, rhythm is something much greater. What are things we do every day and every year? We soon discover that rhythm is connected to life. Rhythm resides in eating, waking up and falling asleep. It lives in the human heartbeat and in each breath; the monthly cycles of the moon, the yearly cycle of the sun and the turning of the seasonal wheel. We even see the timely wisdom imprinted in our bodily organs. And we depend on rhythm to build security, predictability and strength. Rhythm is the key to life.

Then, we look at rhythm in our own lives, in eating and sleeping. We look at mealtime and bedtime

rituals. What is a ritual? What rituals did we grow up with? What makes them meaningful and memorable? What are our family meals like? How can we create more connection at meal times? Can we have more reverence and more joy in the sharing of food? Together, we learn a simple verse to say or sing before meals. We explore the commercialization of food and its complications. We talk about how preparing food and sharing it together builds a sense of connection and how simplifying food lessens anxiety around food. When meals are simplified and more predictable, pickiness diminishes.

In this session we also look at the world of sleep. What happens during sleep and how does it relate to rhythm? What are bedtimes like? Are they at different times or predictable? How can we create a bedtime ritual? Stories are looked at. Can we share a story from our own childhood that nurtures our child? Perhaps instead of a series of stories before bed, one is enough along with a simple verse and candle. We learn a bedtime verse together, one that is a fit with our own family values and that we can say together; one that communicates a message of safety for a child before entering the world of sleep. As this is a large topic in itself, often requests are made to go deeper and have more time to explore storytelling and rituals.

Scheduling

The third area that we explore is the area of scheduling. What we often come to is that the young child in today's world is "over-scheduled" with a different commitment or class each day of the week. Today, the busy schedules of most modern children leave very little down time or time for unstructured free play. What once used to be neighborhood free play has now been replaced by organized "play dates" or scheduled activities such as sports, music lessons, dance, gymnastics, language classes and more. We look at competitive sports and how they have been pushed down to younger ages, with an early "burnout" age and sports injuries occurring younger in children, before they are developmentally ready. This can be a controversial topic for many parents and they have to find their way with boundaries that fit their family story. Nevertheless, it makes for juicy conversation and stimulating thoughts. In our workbooks, while mapping out a typical day and week, we look at active and calming moments. When we find "hot spots" that could use a little cooling down, we find places in our week that can use a little pause or a moment of down time to create bal-

ance. Finding a balance between movement and rest is a big theme in this area.

Filtering Out the Adult World

Finally, the last topic we explore together is that of filtering out the adult world. What does this mean? This involves protecting the young child from too much information, too soon. Too much information about adult worries and world events causes unneeded stress and anxiety in the young child. We look at the world of media and how to build protective buffers with limited media in family life. We explore the world of technology and alternatives to high tech entertainment. This inevitably leads to conversation about spending time in nature and its regenerative qualities. One parent recently commented, "Nature is an antidote to technology." In these circles, wisdom comes from the group.

We also explore the principles of speech. We look at the quality of speech and its uses. Three helpful guidelines that we look at are: *Is it true?* *Is it kind?* and *Is it necessary?* We also talk about choices and even look at brain development in relation to the faculty of decision-making. We discover how stressful it can be for young children to be confronted with too many choices when it is not developmentally appropriate. In observing our speech patterns, we can resolve to make

subtle changes in how we speak with young children, with using quality over quantity. The wise adage of "less is more" comes into play. More importantly, we learn how our presence carries more meaning with the young child than verbal clutter.

We also look at parenting styles. What are our parenting styles? We exercise the idea of loving the times we live in. In this sharing, we speak a verse by Karl König: "There is a Knighthood of the Twentieth Century." We name something we struggle with from our modern times and come up with positive attributes about it. These are all thoughts for stimulating change, helping us find ways to act as a filter for the young child, buffering them from larger worries and protecting childhood. ♦

Christine Summerfield has taught in Early Childhood Waldorf settings for over ten years. As a teacher of young children, she discovered a passion for working with parents. She now facilitates Simplicity Parenting circles and helps families achieve more flow, ease and calm with personal organizing services. As founder and director of Summerfield Fiber Arts, she also currently teaches classes in wool felting in the Boulder, Colorado area.



Drawing by Jo Valens from Tell Me a Story

Creating Space for Parents to Tell Their Sacred Stories

— Susan Weber

Awareness of what it is to incarnate in this time of human evolution calls for working with children and families in a new way. There have always been gifts and challenges at any time of incarnation. If we look at the painting of Sistine Madonna and the faces of the children in the clouds, we can call to mind what extraordinary courage children have in coming to the earth in our time. If they have that much courage, at least someone can be here to receive and support these children and their parents on their journey. How do we help each human being find his individual path to this personal mansion of the human physical body? The gift we can give is to offer the context and opportunities for him to find the way to who he is and what he has come to earth to do.

We have ourselves biographical moments when we feel we have aligned ourselves in knowing what our earthly task is. Sometimes we take the right fork in the road, sometimes a detour. From anthroposophy we know that each person does have a destiny and comes with pre-earthly intentions. Each human has a reason to come to the earth. What a gift it is to hold this picture, and be in relationship with the child to see his gift. Obstacles are part of the journey, making us resilient. But obstacles always want to be manageable and want to be carried in relationship with other humans. The reason we come to the earth is to meet one another. We have come to encounter one another. It is not always easy, but it is the relationships that make us human. This is the grounding anchor in the world—relationship.

How can we support parents in finding affirmation in their new role as parent? Like other initiatives that want to support healthy family life out of the resources of Waldorf education, Sophia's Hearth Family Center was created as a center that would acknowledge, respect, honor, and accept families' choices no matter what those choices were. When this center was envisioned, there was a prevailing attitude among Waldorf educators that young children belong at home. But the reality was that babies were not at home. They were in the grocery store or Walmart with their mothers; moth-

ers were working. mothers were isolated and alone with their new roles as mothers. In the past when mothers were expected to stay home, not every woman was happy with that role. Many young mothers who had prepared for professional careers were miserable. What was called into being was a center that wished to support whatever the family situation was. So Sophia's Hearth offered parent-child groups or, for working mothers, the highest quality childcare available for their needs. This, it was envisioned, would honor parent choices and validate them. We have humbly learned much through the doing of this work.

To be helpful to other human beings, we have to become more human in ourselves. As adults we have to nourish our sense of well-being because we are the imitative examples of what a human being is. We early childhood teachers have the responsibility of bringing the children into their bodies, so we have to set the example of doing this for ourselves, too. For example, we might go on a hike in nature to replenish and refresh ourselves. Eurythmy brings us into our bodies in such a way that we become more and more human. This is our assignment! We all need to be moving to feel life in our bodies. ***Touch, movement, joy, and patience*** are healing for all human beings. These help to buffer children and adults against the small and great traumas that may confront us. We know that Waldorf education is a healing education in its own right, and perhaps we just have to additionally fill our pockets more with the pedagogy than we have done yet. We want to feel joyful in what we do, of which we have a grasp. This commitment and attitude will help us to assist parents on their own journeys.

Another thing we can do to help the children is to put the Madonna's cloak around the parent, the adult. Cloaking the parent gives him or her a greater capacity to put the cloak around the child. We can do this by extending true interest toward the other adult. Most of us did not go into early childhood education because we were interested in the adults. But we want to meet the other adult without fear, with acceptance, and trust

in the destiny of the parent and of the child's choice to be with this parent. We may not understand, but the child is in a particular family out of his freedom. Rudolf Steiner has said it is getting harder and harder to find the right body. Sometimes children have to take other doorways in. The fit of temperament between parent and child may not be apparent to us. Parenting is hard because we will not know for decades if we have done the right things. As teachers we have to trust in the process, that things are happening for the child and parent in invisible ways that we can only get a glimmer of.

"How did my birth change my parents' lives?" It is a surprising exercise to try to imagine this. The birth of a child is an actual life crisis for every parent. Many of us do not meet the parents when the babies are tiny, and we do not have a feeling for what the parent has been through. By the time we meet them, habits and the gesture toward the child are more or less in place. Anna Lups, an anthroposophical doctor in New York state, feels that bearing a child is the initiation experience for women in our time. This thought can help us to appreciate how enormous it is for us to welcome this parent-child dyad into our care. If we can welcome the other with warmth and interest, something very special can happen. This wraps the garment around the child and parent that opens the door to new possibilities.

When we become parents, we are throwing off a garment, too—perhaps of how we were parented. We throw something off and make something new of our own. We are now in the Michaelic time where we all have to find our way in loneliness and solitude. There is an epidemic of post-partum depression for mothers, and also for fathers. If the parent is suffering, the child may manifest attachment difficulties. We are not all to become therapists, but we need to be sensitive, compassionate, and empathetic to each family's situation. How can we, as educators, bring something that is enlivening and safe and healing?

In parent-infant groups there can be a sacred space into which the parents speak their stories. This is a place for others to listen to the story. When we invite someone to tell a sacred story, the healing is there in the telling. By listening, we can put a sheath around the parents. In listening we use our higher senses, our soul listening.

There are questions we can pose as appropriate to our settings. Sometimes we are trying to get to know a parent individually. Sometimes we may be working with a parent-child group and would like to stimulate group sharing. Some possible questions may be: *Who were you before the birth of this baby?* This is an invi-

tation to share stories. *What are you most proud of in the parenting of this child? What is the most joyful thing that has happened? What role did you play in your family of origin? Are you re-enacting this in your own parenting? What do you remember about discipline in your own childhood? How does that impact your interactions with your child?*

How do we find abundance in the families who come to us and celebrate who they are? In our time we are building toward the future of humanity and constantly experience the gulf between our ideals and the reality of life. One goal for the future is community building with our families. We live in the time of the consciousness soul in which we often find ourselves working out of capacities we don't yet have. We are grateful that Rudolf Steiner has given us tools to make our way into the future. Through anthroposophy we know that we can receive help from the spiritual world. It is our striving, study, and openness to the realities of spiritual life that is sustenance for the hierarchies we wish to engage as our helpers. We have to be creative! Life and work in community is a possibility for reconnecting us with these higher beings.

The goal for us is to find a relationship to the serving will. If I can become who the parent needs me to be, I have offered an extraordinary gift. I have to set aside my concern that the family does not have a perfect rhythm (for example); I try to become the servant to them. Parents come to us out of optimism. But too often they end up feeling not good enough. We want them to feel abundance. Offering to others a serving will enables them to develop at their own pace. We generate soul warmth in which everything becomes more pliable.

Rudolf Steiner describes qualities we need to develop in our time:

When another human being suffers, I suffer.

When we are in our spiritual life, we have absolute, complete freedom. Each one's spiritual path is personal and chosen in freedom. I must not impose my spiritual values upon others. We have spiritual equality.

We also have to have freedom of thought. At festival times we want to bring universal, archetypal pictures that are rich and true. We have to penetrate to archetypes in life that are authentic and that leave a space for the parent to be active.

We must have courage when we fail. We must not be afraid to apologize. We have to have courage to reach out to the other human being. We can apply these principles to our work with parents. Doing this can bring us joy; and the spiritual hierarchies will become interested in us and come to our aid. ♦

Having the Hard Conversation with Parents

— Nancy Blanning

Some years ago at a workshop on developmental and incarnational support for young children, a teacher approached me with a question. She asked, “When can I tell the parents that their son is autistic?” My answer was, “Never.” This encounter has stuck with me ever since. My one-word reply needs much explanation to appreciate the context of how delicate our gesture toward other human beings has to be. As teachers, we must appreciate what challenges and responsibilities face us as we strive to create life with the children entrusted to our care and with their parents.

As educators, we need to be awake and attentive to what we see in a child’s development and behavior; that is our professional responsibility. Questions will form in our minds with many children, as had happened for this teacher. Do we see something that time will resolve—a transitional moment when the child falls apart while she is developmentally reconfiguring herself? Is what catches our attention a little quirk that marks the individuality of the child but is not an impediment? Or is there something that mystifies and troubles us? We question whether what we see may be a concern to accompany the child for a long while, perhaps her whole biography. When such questions come, what do we do? And, heaven help us, how do we speak with the child’s parents about our questions?

The “never” arises out of considering what our role is with the child. We are not medical or psychological diagnosticians; we have no authority to give the “labels” the world is so liberally assigns. We rather want to sense and understand the individuality of the child. As early childhood educators, we join the parents in escorting the child into earthly life, now in the social setting of the class. In his book *The Therapeutic Eye*, Peter Selg describes how Rudolf Steiner looked at other human beings, especially children, with deep, warm interest. This sincere, warm interest without judgment or classifying is our goal. This is the starting point with any child—with any human being—as the first step in creating the free, safe space into which the other per-

son can reveal herself. Commonly we are already in a state of irritation or frustration when we begin this questioning. These annoyed and frustrated feelings need to be acknowledged. They are a hurdle for us to strive to get beyond so these do not cloud or distort the picture of who this child is.

Then we watch. We work to create an objective description of what we see. What puzzles us? What concerns, worries us? These kinds of questions are usually what make us wake up to a child. But we also want to look for what delights us with a child. What gives us joy in this child’s presence? What makes us laugh or shake our heads in amazement when the child lets us into her unique experience of the world? When we have viewed the child from as many sides as possible, we will have performed the necessary prelude for speaking with the parents. We have to be able to describe the child in such a way that the parents feel, “This teacher really knows and likes my child. She (or he) sees all the wonderful things we know about our child and also fairly describes the things we are challenged with, too. There is no judgment here, only caring. We are all on the same side.”

This all takes time to prepare. Unless a child is at such risk or a danger to others that we must act quickly, taking time at the beginning to “warm up the space” for the child and the family is essential. We are not just working with the child; we are building a relationship with the parents upon which all future interaction will depend.

Dr. Gerald Karnow once stated a cardinal principle we must not forget: no parents can ever be objective about their own child. Whenever anything suggests that a child’s development or behavior is less than normal and healthy, parents will react in their shock and alarm. Parents commonly become defensive, distressed, angry, even accusatory toward the teacher. If this does not happen during the conversation, it is likely to unfold later on. If we understand and expect that “having the hard conversation” is going to evoke these responses, then we are better able

to hold a calm state of mind and not respond in kind and become defensive ourselves. Taking in and digesting such observations about one's child is a process and takes time. Knowing this helps us appreciate how important it is to carefully observe and ponder the question of "who is this child?" and let our sincere, warm interest guide what will be a tender conversation with the parents. This is going to be only the first of perhaps many conversations on behalf of the child. We cannot expect that everything will be sorted out and settled quickly.

— *Even if some offensive or scary label might be applied to this child, would he or she then become any less special, adorable, unique, or valued? The fundamental being of the child is not changed by such "sticks and stones."*

Staying in observation, describing what we see without implying judgment or conclusion, is a huge help. Words are both powerful and subtle; we must pay careful attention to which words we choose. An example of where we might get trapped could be as follows. "Joey never listens to me at circle time. He just gets silly with Caleb standing next to him." There are conclusions imbedded in this statement. We do not yet know what Joey's experience is. But we can describe what we see. "When the teacher speaks at circle time, Joey does not begin to gesture or look at the teacher. He and Caleb talk with one another and laugh." We could even go further and say, "They seem to be having a fun time with each other. I would like to find a way for them to have fun in the imagination of the circle."

The example above is relatively easy to address without giving offense or alarm. But we increasingly see more complex behaviors in children that are hard to understand. We see the spectrum from withdrawn, aloof children who miss social clues and seem isolated from the class to the child who is consistently disruptive, wild, distractible, and even physically hurtful to others. Sometimes we may have a hunch about what might be occurring but need to have others with more specialized expertise lend their view. Here is where it is both helpful and professionally responsible to ask for an outside opinion. After we have described as fair-

ly as possible, we can say that we are trying to understand what is prompting these behaviors or challenges for the child and request the help of other professionals to unlock this mystery.

This can be met with reluctance. Parents say that they do not want their child to be "labeled." And neither do we. Yet we want to understand so we can form ideas of what to do. We need information that other professionals can supply to achieve this. Even if some offensive or scary label might be applied to this child, would he or she then become any less special, adorable, lovable, unique, or less valued because of a new word? The fundamental being of the child is not changed by such "sticks and stones." Encouragement like this can help give the parents courage to embark on a possibly intimidating path. We can all do well if we keep reminding ourselves that the destination of the journey is to accompany the child into life so she can flourish as her destiny presents itself.

One of the things that can be so puzzling to parents is that what we describe may be things they do not see at home. The two pictures may actually be quite contradictory. For example, at home one little boy was quiet, played well by himself, and was a harmonious and calm playmate with another single child. In the classroom he was a tornado. The mother came to observe and was horrified by what she saw. Her immediate response was, "What is wrong with this classroom?" What can be baffling to both parents and teachers is that both experiences are objectively true. We are seeing multifaceted expressions of a human being in different situations. We have seen both with our own eyes. In acknowledging this and not insisting that one or the other is the "true" child, we can begin to take a step toward seeing what we can do to help harmonize these contradictions.

Nothing is more precious to parents than their child. Nothing is more tender or sensitive than to hear that all is not going well. Conversations to introduce concerns are not going to be easy, no matter how carefully we prepare them. Yet the more interest, time, and thoughtfulness we give to preparing our encounter will be of great benefit to all. The parents have tacitly chosen us to be their partners in escorting their child into life. We strive to honor and respect the child. To do the same with parents and invite their partnership with us will always be a right step. ♦

Nancy Blanning, *WE CAN board member and Gateways editor, is also a therapeutic support teacher at the Denver Waldorf School.*

Conferences & International Meetings

The Education of Feeling in Early Childhood: Laying the Foundation for Social-Emotional Capacities

— Renate Long-Breipohl, based on notes by Nancy Blanning

This article is a partial and abbreviated summary of the lectures given by Dr. Long-Breipohl at the February 2013 WECAN East Coast Conference. Due to space limitations much of the deeply researched content of the lectures had to be omitted. We plan to publish these lectures in a more complete form in the near future.

It is good to take a spiritual adventure in working into the theme of educating feeling life in the young child. Feeling as a developing soul force usually comes to the fore in the elementary school years. Early childhood focuses upon healthy will development since it is the first soul force [of Thinking, Feeling, and Willing] to arise. But if we look closely, we see a lot of preparation for the development of feeling during early childhood. How different aspects are supported during early childhood will have consequences for social-emotional capacities later on.

The terms “feeling” and “emotion” are often used interchangeably. When Rudolf Steiner speaks of feeling, he does not mean emotions but speaks about feeling as a force. Feeling appears as a dynamic of the soul and radiates into the body. But it is not a sum total of emotions. It is a force rather than a content. In the 1911 lectures on “Psychosophy,”* Rudolf Steiner speaks about two currents or force streams encountering each other in the inner space of the soul (represented as a circle diagram in the 1911 lecture.) One stream comes from the past and one from the future.** The stream from the past, associated with the ether body, he names as the stream of mental images; from the future comes the stream of desire, associated with the astral body. These have a meeting point in the soul. Where they meet or overlap, he speaks of consciousness of feeling arising. These two streams enable us to have a realm of feeling. The other two bodies, the I-being and physical body, are also part of this picture. The physical body is pictured below this circle, being our earth foundation and physical instrument for sensory experience. As we encounter sensory experiences, we respond to them with love or hate, sympathy or antipathy. Streaming down from the cosmos is the I of the

human being. Through the I we develop judgment and discernment.

As adults we have developed consciousness of self and, therefore, experience feeling as a capacity of the soul. Through feelings we participate inwardly in all we experience in the world and with other human beings. Adults discriminate a more developed, conscious form of feeling from a spontaneous form which we call “emotion,” for example when we say, “I reacted emotionally.” Our feelings are an expression of our general soul disposition and our way of relating to the world. We may be more inclined towards happiness or sadness, peace or turmoil, inner satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

In contrast emotions are often immediate reactions to experience and close to our sentient nature; when we speak about feeling, we mean inner soul reactions which already include the involvement of thinking and the I. Feeling is digested experience that is brought into relation with our aims, ideals and convictions.

It is different with young children. Rudolf Steiner explains that the young child’s soul forces are still hidden in the functions and capacities of his physical body. Thinking, feeling and will are not yet emancipated from bodily functions and, therefore, are expressed and experienced by the child indirectly within action. We can see thinking in the young child expressed through playing, anger in throwing oneself on the floor, joy in dancing around. Steiner named this state of feeling within action “feeling-will.”

Young children act more or less out of pure sympathy, however strange this may seem; all that the child does, all its romping and play, it does out of sympathy with the deed, with the romping. In this sympathy towards the environment, the child’s behavior may sometimes remind us of puppies or kittens. Yet the child is never animal-like, because of the spiritual nature of the human being and the connection with spiritual beings. The child still has access to experiences of the spiritual world and is still a little clairvoyant. Therefore mental images in the child are not formed only out of sense experiences (the normal way of learning on earth), but

also through experiences streaming in from the time of “unbornness.” Therefore the attitude of infants and children under two is usually trusting towards the world, a gesture of sympathy. Yet if something is not wanted, there is immediate crying and rejection, and we see will in action as instinct and drive, a reaction which is different from anger later on.

At the age of two-and-a-half, however, the child has developed a dim sense of an inner space. At that time the desire nature becomes noticeable as the child verbally expresses its wants and cravings, no longer only through physical reaction. Once a new desire arises, the previous one loses importance. We also find a strong love-hate reaction to experiences and people. The life of feeling in the young child shows a constant flux of sympathy – antipathy, love – hate, with little consciousness and judgment involved. The desire stops when it is satisfied by some action. It is important for us to realize that desire, love-hate, and sympathy-antipathy are objective realities or forces, different from what are usually called “feelings.”

When the child says “I” and shows the emergence of consciousness of self, previously unconscious experiences can now be linked to the child’s own self. But where does consciousness of self come from? It is a mental image but not one that enters from the outer world externally as do other mental images. There arises now a contrast within the soul life between the inner experience of being an I and sensations based on physical, outer sensory experiences.

If we go back to a pictorial image of these different streams, we have the past/mental image and the future/desire flowing toward one another horizontally and overlapping. Then there is the I streaming down from above. Where these three streams meet, I-consciousness arises, differently from the rest of our experiences, because nothing has entered from the outer world. From this time onwards, at about the age of three, when there is a new experience of self, the relationship to the outer world changes. It is not an experience of oneness anymore, but of duality: here am I, and here is the world. At this point imitation changes, and the character of relationships changes. It is the time in which the child begins to discriminate his inner world from the outer, and it is the point of time when one has to deal with this inner space of the child, the time that begins the “education of feeling.” Only then will the child be able to process sensations and unconscious love-hate reactions further through the soul’s ability to put concepts to the experience. Only then will we see the first small beginnings of the activ-

ity of making a judgment linked to the experience.

At this time, after age three, the child is especially vulnerable to being caught in the inner soul dynamic of desire, of sympathy and antipathy. Desires become more persistent because they have mental images attached to them. Also memories of desires rise up in the soul and these memories are able to intensify the longing in the child. There are only two ways for any desire to be put to rest: either through the decision not to pursue the desire or to redirect it, which relies on the capacity of the I (usually the adult needs to help with this) or fulfillment of the desire.

If we now look at the faculty of the I within the soul to make judgments, we see that the child can make judgments only to a small extent. What we see in the little child is just a glimmering of this future capacity. But the ability to make judgments which arise out of one’s own soul will mature only after age fourteen and the birth of the astral body. Developing judgment will require transformation which loosens feeling from willing and develops a non-egotistical love for thoughts and ideals. But at the time of early childhood, it is developmentally appropriate when we observe feeling of the young child linked to desire and to the stream of will.

How do we support healthy development of this “feeling-will” with young children? First and foremost we must not squash the desire nature of the child’s soul. Desire is the “power house” of the soul. Desire is at the foundation of and the first step to developing connection to the world that will become enthusiasm, interest, and love. Without those the child will not be able to counterbalance intellectual activity sufficiently and the child’s thinking will be in danger of losing its liveliness, and may become dry and devoid of imagination. We have a lot of mainstream advice telling us that young children should be able to manage their feelings and desires. But it is done through curtailing the desire, by addressing the mental image / verbal approach. The child is to learn to manage his own emotions or feelings through a process of thought and intellectual understanding. This leads to mental images and concepts; to intellectuality, not to healthy feeling. Our first task is to take this feeling-will seriously in the child. We want to work *with* and not *against* the desire of the child so we do not squash it, deny it, or explain it away.

To establish a solid base for future feeling life, we have to take care of the physical foundation for the realm of feeling, the rhythmical system. This system has its cosmic counterpart in the moving stars, the planets,

which move together in such a way that harmony is created between them. Similarly it is the task of the rhythmic system to maintain harmony between all organs and processes in the body, and to mediate between the nerve-sense system and the metabolic-limb system. The way the rhythmical system works can inform us about the ways of educating feeling, about finding a supporting balance between the different streams.

We can observe at bedtime how important it is for young children that the day is completed in harmony of feeling and restfulness of will. The breathing becomes deeper and more regular; the child is able to let go and sleep. Children have trouble going to sleep with unresolved issues. If the child is unsettled, we approach restoring balance from the outside only; we do not go inside the child to sort out what started something, and so on. We want to bring the child into harmony with the environment. This applies to nap time as well, when activities should gradually fade. This is what we try to achieve when we introduce nap time rituals of physical care for the child: cocooning, warm wash cloth, lyre playing, and then silence and sleep.

We can observe during waking times how important it is that harmony prevails between the different activities of the day, with each activity having its rightful place, even that within the process of each activity there is a harmonious sequence. We can think of the rhythm of the day as a harmonious yet lively progression. Through this striving for harmony we are supporting and caring for the life forces of the child as well. What makes activity harmonious does not arise through the will. It is the feeling in will, which lets the adult and child experience harmony. In German there is a wonderful word, “*Zusammenklang*,” which means “sounding together.” We can use this as an image and work with imitation to move toward this “sounding together.”

Harmony is one aspect of music. Music speaks directly to feeling, in that the heart is involved as the organ of perception for harmony. Think about harmony and balance as being at the center of the education of feeling. [Dr. Long-Breipohl’s second lecture presented mainstream views and research regarding emotions and the prevailing attitude that emotions have to be managed by over-riding them through the intellect. The following picks up at this point in the lecture.]

With young children we see a lot of immediate reactions—joy, frustration, anger. These are not processed in the higher parts of the soul. Our fellow mainstream researchers have also noticed that soul development is not complete and that there is not

enough thinking. There are many spontaneous actions that can lead to trouble in the social context. These researchers have tried to form ways to mellow the reactions of the child that are carried by the stream of desire. They look to bring mental imaging and concept formation into the realm of sensation.

But in Steiner/Waldorf education the education of the will precedes the education of the intellect. Steiner warns that anything that does not link to desire and will remains alien to the young child. So here we part ways with the mainstream. What are our alternatives if we do not use this “thinking path”?

We aim to involve all soul faculties. We want to befriend ourselves with the desire and the feeling-will of the young child. Yet, we don’t want to trigger the shortcut reaction of sensation passing over directly into instinctual emotional reactions. How do we do this?

In Steiner early childhood education we use the word “mood” to describe the overall quality of experiences which we are providing: “mood of the fifth” in the musical field, mood of joy in the experience of color, the dreaming mood that prevails in free play, the mood created by the domestic work which we do, mood of the days of the week, or the seasons. What we mean is the etheric quality of a space or an activity in which the soul of the child can nest.

Some fundamental requirements for creating the right “mood” are:

- The days should be well planned and unfold rhythmically without rush.
- Avoid exposing the child to situations that demand quick responses.
- Try to lower the alert level in children by cutting back on verbal communication and using a more non-verbal approach through working with imitation and example as much as possible.
- Remember that little children are naturally sympathetic. But when sympathy is too weak, pervade the atmosphere of the kindergarten with joyousness and laughter, which expands rather than contracts and cramps.

When there is disharmony among children and strong desires expressing themselves:

- Observe what interests the child and direct that interest into the world around him, awakening interest for what life holds in store every day.
- Model the processing of sensations through the higher aspects of the soul. In conflict situations, be slow. Look, listen, pause, and feel into what we see happening. This pondering gives the complain-

ing child the satisfaction of being heard. The adult models how one can get away from the emotional short-cut and come to inwardly process what has happened.

- Avoid giving too much attention to emotions. Emotions are made bigger by trying to deal with them through extensive dialogue.
- Use fairy tales with their wonderful unity of imaginative pictures and the flow of desire in the dynamic of the story. Fairy tales put into play images, wishes, and the I learning to make the right judgment through trials and dangers, achieving a state of harmony in the end. This is the education of feeling at its best.

Feeling has to do with the overall soul dynamic, not just emotion in immediate reaction to sensation. Emotions as such cannot be changed; they come and go. But we can try to harmonize the dynamics within the soul of the child, the interplay between desire and mental image. We have to do this indirectly from outside. The inner soul space of the child is sacred for us, and up to the age of five is closed to admonition and teaching.

We can harmonize the dynamics of the soul through consciously slowing down, through mood

and rhythm, and through making the kindergarten into an “island of peace,” a cradle for the emerging feeling of the child. This is what I would like to call the foundations of the education of feeling. ♦

Notes

* The reader is referred to the “Psychosophy” lectures in *A Psychology of Body, Soul, and Spirit*, lectures of Rudolf Steiner, particularly Lecture 4. Limitations of space cannot adequately convey the content from these lectures which Dr. Breipohl worked with intensively. Only a very simplified summary of the content is included in this article.

** Rudolf Steiner gives a different picture of this diagrammatically for teachers in Lecture 2 of *The Study of Man (The Foundations of Human Experience)*.

Renate Long-Breipohl was the keynote speaker at the 2013 WECAN East Coast Conference. She taught kindergarten in Australia for many years and now is active internationally as a teacher trainer and lecturer. Her publications include *Supporting Self-Directed Play in Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education*, published by WECAN.



Renate Long-Breipohl speaking at the 2013 WECAN East Coast Conference. Photo by Bill Day

International Colloquium on the Older Child

— Louise deForest

What is the appropriate age to go into first grade? What do we mean by etheric ripeness? And what are the long and short-term consequences of going into first grade too early or too late?

These are some of the many questions discussed during the Older Child Colloquium held at the Goetheanum, in Dornach, Switzerland, this past February. Co-sponsored by IASWECE (the International Association of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education) and the Pedagogical Section, leading experts and researchers on this theme gathered for a weekend of presentations and discussion. It was an international meeting with school doctors, early childhood educators and class teachers coming from many European countries, South Africa, and North America. Nine areas of research and work around this theme were presented—look for them on the IASWECE website, www.iaswece.org—and several introductory lectures were given by Dr. Claudia McKeen (school doctor in Stuttgart), Philipp Reubke (former early childhood educator and presently in the Coordinating Group of IASWECE) and Claus-Peter Röh (co-leader of the Pedagogical Section). We also had the opportunity to meet with a large group of (mostly German) high school teachers to begin a conversation on this theme.

In North American Waldorf Schools, the importance of this stage of early childhood development has often been misunderstood and confused with the separate question of first grade readiness. Indeed, there is a lack of clarity around the signs of the beginning birth of the etheric, the importance of this stage of development in the whole of human life and the process for establishing school readiness in many of our North American Waldorf Schools. But the situation in many other countries, and here in the United States, as well, in our public educational system, has now reached a point of crisis. Many Waldorf Schools are subsidized by their governments and increasingly the age for entering first grade is being mandated by those governments at a younger and younger age. In the Colloquium, Dr. Rainer Patzlaff (co-author of the book *De-*

velopmental Signatures, among others), presented his research into the economic rationale behind this move to put ever-younger children into the grade school and emphasized that there is no pedagogical research informing these decisions. Dr. Martina Schmidt, from Germany, shared some results of the IPSUM research project with the focus on School Entry Age and Health Outcomes, embarked upon in response to the lowering of school entrance age in Germany. Among many other findings, the researchers found that the younger the school-age child is, the more at risk he or she is for illnesses, asthma and accidents.

— *Each developmental stage has its purpose in the growth of the human being and the forming of his or her soul forces.*

There is no better way to undermine human potential and spiritual freedom than to educate children through rote memorization and testing. It is clear that all children pass through the same developmental stages at the same time and that each stage has its purpose in the growth of the human being and the forming of his or her soul forces. Waldorf schools are unique because they are based on observing and serving the developmental needs of the human being. So the question arises of how much our schools can compromise with governments and Boards of Education before we have lost the ideals of Waldorf education? By sending children to first grade either too early or too late, we ignore this pivotal stage of development and weaken the child's will to take hold of life through his or her own initiative. As Claudia McKeen said in her opening remarks, "We must all become spiritual revolutionaries."

A second Colloquium is planned for October 2014 in preparation for a World Conference in 2015 with the theme of transitions in the life of the child. ♦

International Birth-to-Three Colloquium

— Claudia Freytag

On November 22–24, 2012, the Pedagogical Section in collaboration with IASWECE invited experts in working with very young children to meet in Dornach. Thirty Waldorf teachers and caregivers from Europe, Canada and the U.S. came to the Goetheanum to exchange their experiences and research results with their colleagues.

At the opening Florian Oswald, co-leader of the Pedagogical Section, warmly welcomed the participants. He explained that it is very important for the Pedagogical Section to shelter childhood from the very beginning. It is their special concern to focus on the whole arc of childhood, from birth to age twenty-one.

Our working time was divided into five sessions. In each session colleagues gave presentations, leading to conversation and a shared deepening of the theme afterwards. The goal of the colloquium was to perceive the special personal approach of each presenter and to stimulate a lively exchange.

A central theme connecting all the contributions was the question of how we can help the child to find his or her own special way in life. The first approach was “The attitude of the educator” (presented by Martin Derrez and Bernadette Lange). The adult has to learn to work inwardly, to be in harmony with himself and the whole cosmos. He should develop a culture of self-education. This enables him to encounter the child without personal bias. The study of the twelve senses can also help the adult in his self-education, to find the right inner attitude. That is the basis for becoming an educator whom children like to imitate.

The next contributions widened our point of view. As we know, within the first seven years the child is developing his etheric body. But what is “The etheric” (Claudia Grah-Wittich)? How do the etheric forces of the small child develop between expansion and contraction, between being-within-oneself and being-with-others? In another presentation we saw that the gestures of development during pregnancy can also be found in the gestures of development after

birth (Angelika Knabe). Rhythm and a healthy environment support this process—illustrated by examples of best practices (Brigitte Huisinga and Dorothy Marlen).

Children today often suffer from a lack of movement, especially walking, running and playing outside. This influences their ability to talk, and causes problems with eating and sleeping. (Helle Heckmann). We can observe different phases of children’s play that embody archetypical gestures. Can we research the question of the forces of the zodiac during pregnancy and after birth and their connection to the phases of play (Marie-Louise Compani)?

The final contribution showed us how we can observe the Christ forces at work as the child learns to orient the body in space and walk (Jane Swain).

At the end of the colloquium questions and concerns were collected. Ten of these were taken up by participants. They will continue their research, coordinate the questions and concerns, and can be contacted by colleagues.

- Angelika Knabe: *The etheric*
- Karen Whyler-Lheurex: *Bonding*
- Nicole Schreyeck: *Professional bonding*
- Marie-Louise Compani: *Play*
- Bernadette Lange: *Care for the lower senses*
- Philipp Reubke: *Metamorphosis of role models and imitation within the first seven years*
- Martin Deretz: *Inner attitude of the educator*
- Dorothy Marlen: *Birth-to-three Training*
- Gabi Deretz: *The art of talking and advising parents*
- Clara Aerts: *Stillness, the space in between*

To contact these individuals, please contact the Pedagogical Section.

The participants felt very grateful for and enriched by this colloquium as they left Dornach. The next possibilities for meeting and exchange are the Whitsun Conference in Hannover, Germany (May 17–21, 2013) and the Birth to Three Conference in Dornach, Switzerland (June 20–23, 2013). ♦

A Circle for Spring

— Laura Donkel

With today's child, I believe it is of utmost importance to fully move in the morning circle. How else can one find one's limbs and feel one's muscles and joints and experience the wonderful curves and lines that make up the body?

Science, math, and literacy—the foundational studies that many parents are seeking for their child—are all found in morning circle. As early childhood educators, it is paramount that we embrace this delightful time of structured movement, of exploration and self-discovery. Hopping in the linear vertical plane, a child faces gravity; rolling around on the ground, the child massages the vestibular system and experiences her own sensory self in connection with the earth; crawling on the floor and then going into a standing position, a child feels the horizontal shift to uprightness and experiences the adjustment. This delicate balance of back and forth, up and down, in and out, resonates throughout the day. The breath is called to task.

Finding one's way back to circle in relation to the whole class gives an experience of point and periphery—geometry. And then come the words: articulated clearly, balancing vowels with consonants. Poetry. Song. Verse. Language. And finally, the spiritual realm: we enter together into this magical place called circle, inviting each and every child to imbue the healthy imagination. In harmony with the seasons, we speak with reverence to the child's oneness with nature. All in a simple circle.

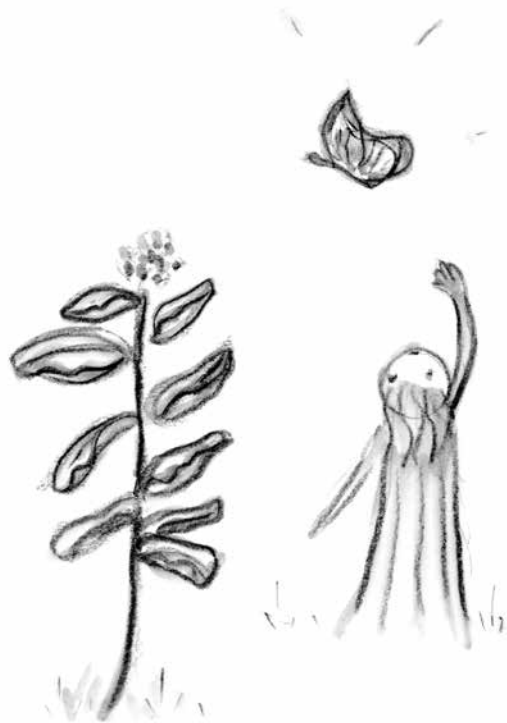
Beginning the day with intentional movement is a real gift to the child—and indeed, it also awakens and refines our own sensorial make-up. Enjoy.

This circle includes Mother Goose rhymes, songs and poems passed down from teachers and friends as well as verses from *Spindrift* and *Spring* from the Wynstones series. My daughter, Annie, taught me the Spring Birdies' Ball, which she learned when she was six years old. It's a favorite of both of ours. ♦

Laura Donkel has been an early childhood teacher at the Chicago Waldorf School for the past twelve years. She is also an Arcturus Rudolf Steiner Education faculty member. This fall she will be on sabbatical and can be reached at ldonkel2@aol.com.



NOTE: This circle needs a bit of set-up before beginning. You will need a green cotton play cloth suspended between two child-sized wooden chairs. I used play clips to hold the cloth in place. Drape it like a bridge for you and the children to crawl under. I set it up about two feet from where we do our morning circle.



Drawing by Jo Valens from Tell Me a Story

Spring Circle

Can you catch a rabbit with ears so very long?

He'll hop and hop and hop about on legs so very strong.
He'll nibble, nibble carrots for dinner every day

And when he's had just enough he'll scamper off away.

A caterpillar climbed to the top of a tree

I think I'll take a nap said he.
Under a leaf he began to creep.

Sing:

E' D' B E' D' B E' D' B-A G G B D'
I'm creeping, I'm creeping, I'm creeping under a leaf.

E' D' B E' D' B E' D' B A G B D
I'm creeping, I'm creeping and soon I will go to sleep.

He spun a silk bed and fell fast asleep.

Springtime came tiptoeing over the lea
And found caterpillar sleeping so peacefully

Wake up, wake up, wake up sleepyhead.
Wake up, wake up, it's time to get out of bed.

The caterpillar woke up that fine springtime day
And saw he was a butterfly. Off he flew away.

Sing (song adapted from L. Henning):

D' B D' E' D' B D' B A B E' D' B
Lovely little butterfly, flying high, butterfly.

B A G E D E G-A
Spread your painted wings so fair,

B A G E D E G-A
Blossoms sailing through the air

D' B D' E' D' B D' B A B E' D' B
Lovely little butterfly, flying high butterfly.

*Standing on both feet, hold arms straight up over head,
hands bent at wrists to mimic floppy bunny ears*

*Begin hopping around the circle, arms up over head
Stop and bend knees, bring fisted hands by your
mouth and pretend to munch across knuckles
Return to rabbit position and hop some more*

*Repeat above section. Then, in standing position, keep
arms above head from previous verse. Now bend legs
down while your arms are up. When you straighten
your legs bring your arms down so that your hands are
about shoulder height. The movement mimics how a
caterpillar crawls.*

*Crawl on ground around in circle and then under a
green play cloth suspended between two chairs*

About the musical notation:

*C, D, E and so on represent middle C and the
notes in the octave just above. C', D', E'
etc. are notes in the next octave above that.
Songs may be sung in a free rhythm, one
note per syllable, unless indicated otherwise.*

*Crawl under the green cloth, do a log roll across the
room and then crawl back to the circle and sit with
head down and arms wrapped around bent knees.*

*Optional: tiptoeing around in a circle once. I prefer to
stay in the chrysalis imagination.*

Begin to knock on the floor with one hand

*Slowly uncurl from position, stand up, stretch arms
and begin to move like a butterfly*

*Moving arms forward and backward like a butterfly,
dip up and down and circle around the room as you
sing.*

He flew to the woods and with his ears did hear sing
The fairies gathered around in their fairy ring.
This is the fairies' washing day.

With acorn caps for wash tubs
And tiny leaves for wash boards
Each fairy scrubs and scrubs
Their tiny sheets so fine and clean.

Upon the grass they're lying.

A spider weaves a little line to hang their clothes for
drying.

Sing to traditional tune:

*The itsy bitsy spider went up the waterspout
Down came the rain and washed the spider out.
Out came the sun
And washed away the rain
And the itsy, bitsy spider went up the spout again.*

The great, big hairy spider went up the waterspout

Down came the rain and washed the spider out.

Out came the sun and dried up all the rain.

*And the great big hairy spider crawled up the spout
again.*

And who has come this fine spring day?
Why, butterfly's friend, Larky Lee, and here's what she
has to say.

Larky, larky, larky lee
Who will fly up to heaven with me?
Never a lad who lies in bed
Or a sulky girl who hangs her head.
Up into the air go we, tahee, tahee, tahee.

What does Larky have in her beak?
An invite for birds, butterflies and bees
An invite for everyone, one and all
To the Birdies' Springtime Ball.

*Return to circle and come to a stance with one hand
to the ear as though listening.
Go on tummy, legs straight behind, resting on elbows
and forearms with palms face down on ground.*

*Connect pointer finger with thumb, one hand at a time.
Connect middle finger with thumb one hand at a time.
Rub first two fingers of right hand upon first two fin-
gers on left hand then switch (palms facing)*

*Rub floor with palms while staying on tummy and
keeping legs straight and still*

*First finger on one hand touches thumb on oth-
er hand, then first finger on other hand reaches for
thumb of other hand and so on climbing upward.*

Repeat hands climbing gesture

*Stand on knees and lift arms above head to form circle
Cross arms in front and out
Resume finger movement as above*

*Stand up, arms straight out to the sides. Reach out-
stretched right hand to touch left sole then return to
position. Repeat with left outstretched arm touching
hand to right foot sole.*

*Lift arms above head and gesture rain pouring to
knees and clap hands to knees.
Standing gesture arms above head round like the sun*

*Repeat outstretched arms to midline crossing and
touch opposite foot or do back crawl around in circle*

*Standing in circle, link your thumbs together, fingers
spread apart gesturing from right hip across midline
to above head and then repeat gesturing from left
hip across midline to above head.*

*Gesture a sleeping head on hands
Bend head down at neck and swing head left to right
Repeat linking thumbs up in air*

*Hands together palm to palm
Open palms up and reach out
Hold hands with partners on right and left side and
wait for teacher to pair up children*

Sing:

D' G' D' D' D' D' E' B B
The spring bird said to the nightingale

B A A D D G G G
We need to give the birds a ball

D' G' D' D' D' E' B B
So birdies great and birdies small

A A D' D' D' G G G G
All must come to the little bird's ball

D' D' G' G' E' B B B A A B B G
Tra la la la la la la la. Tra la la la la.

D' D' G' G' E' B B B A A B B G
Tra la la la la la la la. Tra la la la la.

The wren and the cuckoo danced with delight
The raven stood by the yellow bird's side.
The awkward owl and the bashful jay.
Bid each other a very fine day.
Tra la la la la la la la. Tra la la la la.
Tra la la la la la la la. Tra la la la la.

They danced and they sang
Till the sun went low
The mother birds then prepared to go
And birdies great and birdies small
All flew home to the little bird's ball.
Tra la la la la la la la. Tra la la la la.
Tra la la la la la la la. Tra la la la la.

And off they flew to the meadow to sleep
Near the shepherd who cares for his dear little sheep
And the birds and the butterflies joined in for a rest
Huddled and cuddled in their cozy little nests.

Sing:

D G G E D G G E
Little boy blue, come blow your horn,

D D G A B A G B A G D'
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.

D G G E D G G E
Where is the boy who tends the sheep?

D D G B D'-B G E-A B G
He's under the haystack fast asleep.

Children dance either together in a ring or with one partner, skipping around together to "tra la la" sections. Gestures for each verse invite large and small movements, up and down movements and side-to-side gestures always ending in the skipping dance

Bow to the right and then left.

Large eurythmy "bah" and small "bah"

Standing up make gesture of beak with straight arms, then scoot low and make beak with hands
Stand up and face partner holding hands to dance around

Repeat same tune for next two verses

Partners hold hands
Partners stand close beside each other
Put right palm on right cheek, then left palm on left cheek

Return to circle, make round gesture above head
Move round circle from above head to below
Gesture arms like wings
Make large then small beak with arms and hands
Fly together in circle
End with partner dance

Fly to ground and fold wings around front

Come to a sitting position to rest with palms together and head leaning against side of closed palms

Children might lie down on their tummies and rest or rest in a sitting position. Both are lovely.

The Mud Muffins

— Betsi McGuigan

One day Peter and Polly ran outside to play. The snow still made a patchy blanket across the ground, for Mrs. Thaw had been in the neighborhood and swept away whole patches of snow leaving the brown earth showing through. Father Sun shone down brightly and made the days long and warm.

But Peter and Polly were hoping to go sliding a few more times before Mrs. Thaw came and swept all of the snow away. They ran to their favorite hillside and flopped on their bellies. “Whee!” cried the children. “This is fun!”

Up the hill they ran and down again. “Whee!” cried Polly. “Oh, Peter!” Polly began to laugh. Mrs. Thaw had been to their favorite field already and Peter had discovered just where she had come and swept the snow away. Peter had landed in a big mud puddle. But both of the children were laughing. After the long, cold winter they were happy to see the brown earth again. But suddenly Peter cried, “Polly! Look!”

The children stared at the little brown creature standing near the edge of the puddle.

“What is it?” whispered Polly.

“I don’t know,” Peter replied.

The creature did not seem afraid, so Polly spoke up. “Excuse me, hello. . . but. . . who are you?”

“Oh!” said the little creature with a start.

He had been so busy that he had not noticed the children. “Oh my, hello, children! Who am I? Polly dear, can it be true that you are already six years old and have never before noticed me? Oh dear me. . . no . . . well. . . I suppose not. Every year, Polly, here I am, as busy as can be while you sled and play. Why, you’ve helped me before—don’t you know? You too, Peter. But, you ask—who am I? My dear Peter and Polly, I am a Mud Muffin. This is my busy time of year as you can see. I must stir up all of the mud in all of the mud puddles. I count on the children to help me. Come now, find a stick.

“We must stir and stir. Mrs. Thaw is busy too, sweeping and sweeping. . . she sweeps and sweeps all day long. She must sweep away all of this snow and then we Mud Muffins must stir up all of the mud—with the children’s help, of course. We depend on the children’s help. Yes, good Peter, you have found a stick. Yes, Polly, that is right. There is so much mud to stir. . .

*The sun has called to the frozen earth
Awake for Spring is near
And everywhere there was ice and snow
The squishy mud appears!
Yesterday it was white and slushy
Now my garden is brown and mushy
I feel the earth begin to sing
Thanks, Mr. Sun, for it’s almost Spring!*

“Oh, wonderful, children! You are doing a wonderful job! Do you hear? Tee hee! Tee hee! Our friends the chickadees are laughing! That means the sap in the maple trees is rising and tickling their toes! When we stir the mud it tickles the trees’ toes and makes the trees laugh. And when the trees laugh, that tickles the chickadees’ toes. Then they stop singing chickadee-dee-dee and they start to laugh—tee hee! Tee hee!

“Well, Polly and Peter, I am very glad that you came by. For now the sap is rising. Soon Farmer Brown will come and tap the maple trees. The chickadees will laugh and you, my dear children, will have pancakes with syrup!” ♦

Betsi McGuigan is the cook and charitable giving coordinator at W.S. Badger Company in New Hampshire. She taught children for 25 years and is an adjunct in early childhood education at Antioch University, as well as a consultant to Waldorf kindergartens and a WECAN Regional Representative for the Northeast. She contributed three stories to the new WECAN collection *Tell Me a Story*, including this one.

Little Birds and Big Birds

— Betty Jane Enno

This is a transition story for mixed-age kindergartens when the first graders leave to go to the grade school.

It was now springtime in the land and the Mother and Father Bird were busy each day making sure their fledgling birds were becoming stronger and ready to fly on to their new nesting grounds. They practiced flying high and flying low, how to take off and how to land on even the highest and slimmest branches. Mother and Father Bird showed them the places where the best meals could be found among the insects and the berries and the seeds and ways to find water even when it didn't rain.

Some of the very youngest birds just watched and tried to do some of the things they saw the bigger birds doing. They loved these older birds very much and were always happy when the older ones would help them learn to fly, too. But the younger birds were a little sad when they thought about the older ones flying away one day.

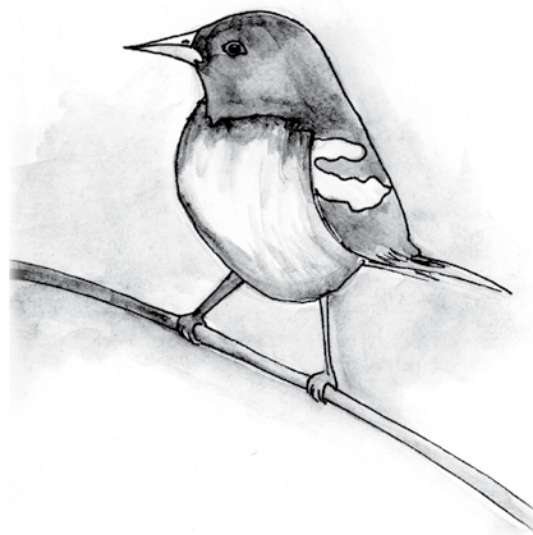
One day Mother Bird and Father Bird told the little ones that even though their older bird friends would soon be leaving they would still be able to see them. Their friends were not going far. They could see them when they flew across the sky and joined even older birds in their big nest across the meadow where they lived and worked and learned every day. The little ones were happy when Mother and Father Bird told them that one day they, too, would fly across the meadow and join their friends. So, in the meantime, the little birds practiced a song they would sing when the older birds flew away. And it goes like this:

*Go forward safely, go forward safely,
Our love will go with you, our love will go with you.*

So, on the last day, as the older birds flew away, they waved their wings and did tricks in the air for the younger birds and their hearts were filled with joy when they heard the beautiful song that the younger birds sang for them.

And today, even across the meadow, they can see the older birds busy at their work and play and they can hear the sweet songs they are singing in their new nest. ♦

Betty Jane Enno teaches kindergarten at the Austin Waldorf School in Austin, Texas, where she has been on the faculty since 1984. She serves as WECAN Regional Representative for the Southwest. This story is one of her contributions to the new WECAN collection Tell Me a Story.



Drawing by Deborah Grieder from Tell Me a Story

And the Little One Said. . .

— Meg Fisher

When I was a child, my mother read a story about a little chick who said Caduckit! That line is the only one I remember from that story, and I decided to make a puppet play based on that line. The puppet I use for this story is a wonderful Mama Hen with two wing-pockets that contain four yellow chicks. The verses may be sung to your own tune.

Mama Hen sat with her chicks in the hay
On a bright and sunny spring time day.
Let's take a walk in this fine weather.
Now remember little chicks let's all stay together.

First little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep."
Second little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep."
Third little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep,"
But the little one said, "Caduckit!"

Out she came from the cozy barn
Out into the sunshine breezy and warm.
Out behind her the chicks did go
Following, following in a row.

First little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep."
Second little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep."
Third little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep,"
But the little one said, "Caduckit!"

Now here's some nice grain for you to eat,
Fresh from the farmer and oh so sweet,
Peck a little here and peck a little there,
Peck a little, peck a little, everywhere!

First little chick said, "Peck, peck, peck."
Second little chick said, "Peck, peck, peck."
Third little chick said, "Peck, peck, peck."
But the little one said, "Caduckit!"

Then over the bridge Mama Hen did go,
Little ones following all in a row,
Over went the bigger chicks, one, two, three,
But the little one said, "Please carry me!"

Mama comes back and carries the little one in her wing-pocket over the bridge, then he hops out & joins the others. I sing the syllables "Bum, ba-ba-bum-bum, Bum-bum-bum. . ."

Down she went to the shallow pool
Down where the grass grew tall and cool.
Down behind her the chicks did go
Following, following in a row.
Down came the bigger chicks one, two, three,
But the little one said, "Please carry me!"

Again Mama Hen returns and carries him down to the water where he joins the others.

All of a sudden the sky grew dark,
Rain fell down and the wind blew hard.
Come, little chicks, Mama Hen did say,
Under this bush 'til the storm blows away.

Up came the bigger chicks one, two, three. . .
But the little one splashed in the puddles.

The chicks were tired and began to cheep.
Come now, little ones, it's time to sleep.
Three chicks snuggled in her feathers so warm,
But the little one stayed up to watch the storm.

At this point, all three bigger chicks are in the wing-pockets. Purple storm silk blows back and forth on a stick, while I sing "Bum ba-ba-bum-bum. . ."

When at last the storm blew away,
Home we go, Mama Hen did say.
Come, little chick, jump up on top
But the littlest chick went hop, hop, hop. . .
Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop-hop-hop. . .

He hops all the way back home, over the bridge, with his Mama following.

Now wasn't that a nice walk said Mama Hen
When all of her children were home again.
First little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep."
Second little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep."
Third little chick said, "Cheep, cheep, cheep,"
But the littlest chick was fast a-sleep! ♦

Meg Fisher is a nursery teacher at the Hartsbrook School in Hadley, MA. This story is one of her contributions to the new WE CAN collection Tell Me a Story.

Book Reviews

Cosmic Child: Inspired Writings from the Threshold of Birth Selected and Arranged by Eve Olive (Wrightwood Press, 2013; available from WECAN)



When a child is born, what enters the world? Merely a new combination of genetic material, a small package of blood and bone and flesh? Or is there something more behind this wonder, something we cannot see but that yet moves us with its immense and mysterious power?

In our present age, we have gone deeply into that state that William Word-

sworth speaks of as “a sleep and a forgetting,” losing awareness of where we came from into birth and thus forfeiting our birthright, the ability to work consciously with those creative, formative impulses that make earthly existence possible. The privilege of being present at a birth often brings with it a “lighting up” of this awareness again. When my own child was born, I experienced a strong sense of the living force that he brought with him, a force that in fact keeps the world alive. Yet even after such awakenings we can easily be dulled into drowsiness by the cares of daily life. How can we wake up and remember again?

In this small but mighty book, Eve Olive has gathered poetry, prose, prayers and meditations that awaken us to the reality of the world before birth, from those who have not forgotten. There are the voices of poets from many nations and many centuries: Langston Hughes, Rumi, Robert Hamerling, Mary Oliver, Olav Nygaard, Thomas Traherne, Christian Morgenstern, to name only a few. There are words from the religious traditions of the world, which universally find a gateway to the divine in birth. There are anecdotes about many young children (and even some adults) who show awareness of their own origins and of siblings on the way. There is a brief section of prayers, three for parents and one for a child, which can be taken up in daily practice, strengthening the connection between worlds.

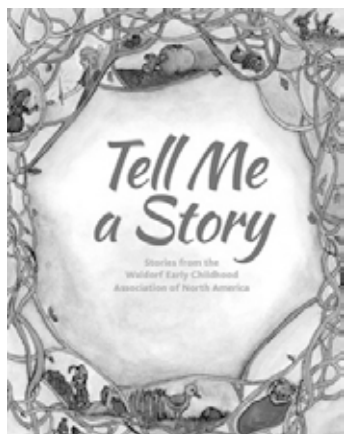
The vision that comes to us through these words is not always gentle, painted in soft pastel colors. In birth there is also roughness, upheaval, fear; there is the sadness of mourning something lost in the transition to earthly life, and the knowledge that suffering lies ahead. But throughout this book shines the conviction expressed in Rudolf Steiner’s words: “Life after death—/Life before birth;/Only in knowing both/Do we know eternity.” For expectant parents, for teachers and caregivers, for anyone seeking the creative well-springs of life, this book is truly a gift. Many thanks to Eve Olive for gathering these treasures—the work of three decades—and for offering them to us. ♦

—Lory Widmer

*The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are moving back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.*

RUMI
from *Cosmic Child*

**Tell Me a Story: Stories from the
Waldorf Early Childhood Association
of North America** edited by Louise deForest
(WECAN, 2013)



Treasures of a different kind are to be found in the new WECAN collection, *Tell Me a Story*. Following the successful publication of *For the Children of the World*, stories and recipes gathered from the member associations of IASWECE (the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early

Childhood Education), editor Louise deForest and WECAN managing editor Lory Widmer envisioned a similar gathering of stories from within our own North American association.

Waldorf early childhood educators from far and wide enthusiastically responded to their invitation, and from their contributions have been selected over 80 stories to enrich our story time, whether in the classroom or at home. They have been organized into seven sections titled *Simple Stories to Start With*, *Nature Tales*, *Stories for Seasons and Festivals*, *Working and Helping*, *Journeys and Wonders*, *Healing Stories for Special Situations*, and *Ending with Laughter*. The stories are short—most no longer than two pages—and give simple, sweet pictures of honest human life, goodness, and harmony. There is lots of humor as well, just the right kind to tickle the children's fancy.

When I began reading these stories, I, of course, expected to like them. But I had no idea how I would become captivated and carried away myself into a protected land of childhood imaginations where good, generous, and moral qualities of human living would be affirmed and renewed. I didn't know these needed renewing, but found myself refreshed and uplifted after each story.

In recent conversation with others studying the use of stories in our early childhood classes, we observed that stories that just tell about life and nature and thus give a wholesome introduction to life are missing for

our children. Our mechanized, technological times have divorced us from these cultural roots and left the children in a void, desperately hungry for simple tales that tell about the practical, human life and relationships that people have always valued. These are richly represented in *Tell Me a Story* through tales old and new. The children also need imaginations from nature so they can know the birds and flowers, the brooks and trees, the hot sun, stones, wind, and rain. In this book we are given many pictures of these as well, in uncomplicated but rich depiction.

Dr. Renate Long-Breipohl spoke about the “education of the feeling life” of young children at the recent WECAN East Coast conference. A goal in this education is to help the child along the path toward wanting to outwardly contribute to the world without being trapped inwardly by self-centered desires and emotions. Story can be our best friend in encouraging this constructive turning outward to the world. Fairy tales for the older children picture these soul elements, as through their images they portray “the I learning to make the right judgment through trials and dangers, achieving a state of harmony in the end.” (See “The Education of Feeling in Early Childhood,” in this issue.) The tales in *Tell Me a Story* offer the same elements in quiet, sometimes serious, sometimes humorous but always warm, humane voices to the children.

This book will provide weeks, perhaps even years, of enriched, delightful storytelling. Thanks to all who contributed their original creations and favorite stories from the past. What a treasure you have shared. ♦

—Nancy Blanning



Drawing by Jo Valens from Tell Me a Story

Calendar of Events

A selection of events coming up in the spring and summer months are listed here. For more events, view our web calendar at www.waldorfearlychildhood.org. To submit or update an event, contact publications@waldorfearlychildhood.org.

Events listed are sponsored by WECAN, our member schools and training centers, and our affiliated organizations, AWSNA and IASWECE. A limited number of other events of wide interest may be included at WECAN's discretion (mainly major conferences). Non-member organizations and individuals are welcome to submit advertisements of interest to Waldorf early childhood educators. Advertisers are not necessarily endorsed by or affiliated with WECAN.

Personal and Professional Development Courses and Workshops

April 27, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Creative Discipline: Reframing Discipline Using Sensory Strategies**, with Jane Swain. Contact 603 357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org

May 11, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Exploring the Social Development of Children from Birth to Four**, with Susan Weber. Contact 603 357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org

May 15, Antioch New England, Keene, NH: **In Bloom: Promising Practices in Nature-Based Early Childhood**. Contact 603-283-2301, MSmeltz@antioch.edu

June 17–21, East Bay Waldorf School, El Sobrante, CA: **Rhythms of the Home**, a class for parents of young children, with Marianne Alsop and Christine Margetic. Contact info@bacwtt.org / 415-479-4400 / bacwtt.org

June 17–21, Arcturus Rudolf Steiner Education, Chicago, IL: **The Singing Spirit, The Sounding Soul: An Artistic Journey Through Human Consciousness**. Morning lectures by Jeff Spade; afternoon workshop choices include Music in the Kindergarten with Elizabeth Swisher. 773-761-3026, arcturus@arcturus.info, www.arcturus.info

June 17–22, Rudolf Steiner College, Fair Oaks, CA: **The Art of Teaching Kindergarten**. Advanced Session will be held July 14–19. Contact: Lauren Hickman at 916-961-8727 x 117, lauren.hickman@steinercollege.edu

June 23–28, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Leading Parent-Child Classes**, with Nancy Macalaster and Carol Nasr. Contact Ayla Dunn, 845-425-0055, summer@sunbridge.edu

June 24–28, Waldorf School of San Diego, CA: **Circle Time: A Healing Resource for Early Childhood**, with Stephen Spitalny and Dean Pollard. Contact 760-451-2139, sandiego@waldorfteaching.org, www.waldorfteaching.org

June 23–28, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Farm and Forest Kindergartens**. Contact Ayla Dunn, 845-425-0055, summer@sunbridge.edu

June 24–28, Bright Water School, Seattle, WA: **Sound Circle Summer Intensive**. Morning Course: *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path* with Michael D'Aleo. Afternoon workshops in Week 1 include *Outdoor and Practical Life Activities* with Louise deForest; in Week 2, *The Mood of the Fifth* with Jana Hawley. Information: www.soundcircle.org

June 30–July 5, Center for Anthroposophy, Wilton, NH: **Peacemaker Spirit: Honoring Native American Image Through Puppetry Arts**. centerforanthroposophy.org

July 1–12, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Advanced Studies in Child Development** with Susan Weber, Jane Swain, and others. Contact 603 357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org

July 1–19, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **The Child and Family in the First Three Years, Levels I and II** first session of 13-month professional development courses (Level I and Level II both have tracks starting this summer). Contact 603 357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org

July 1–19, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **One-Week Courses at Sophia's Hearth Summer Institute**. One-week courses during the three-week Summer Institute include *Festival Life for Young Children and Their Families* with Helle Heckmann, *Dancing Hands and Frolicking Voices* with Lynn St. Pierre, *The Human Being As Embryo Between Heavens and Earth* with Jaap Van Der Wal, *Child Development I and II* with Susan Weber, and *Working with the Young Child and Her Parents* with Birgit Krohmer. For complete details and online registration visit www.sophiashearth.org, or contact 603 357-3755, info@sophiashearth.org

July 8–12, East Bay Waldorf School, El Sobrante, CA: **Speech Intensive for the Waldorf Teacher**, with Sybille Eichstaedt. info@bacwtt.org / 415-479-4400 / bacwtt.org

July 8–12, Highland Hall Waldorf School, Los Angeles, CA: **Threefold Social Ideals and Spirituality in Waldorf Education**, with Patrice Maynard. Contact 877-394-1444, office@waldorfteaching.org, www.waldorfteaching.org

July 8–26, 2013, Rudolf Steiner Centre Toronto, ON, Canada: **Summer Festival of Arts and Waldorf Education**. www.rsct.ca / info@rsct.ca / 905.764.7570

July 15–19, Highland Hall Waldorf School, Los Angeles, CA: **Rhythm: The Golden Thread of Early Childhood** with Holly Koteen-Soule. Contact 877-394-1444, office@waldorfteaching.org, www.waldorfteaching.org

July 15–19, Sunrise Waldorf School, Duncan, BC, Canada: **Meeting the Mysterious Children of Today**, with Nancy Blanning and Adola McWilliam. For information contact Ruth Ker, 250-748-7791, info@westcoastinstitute.org

July 15–19, 2013, Rudolf Steiner Centre Toronto, ON, Canada: **Meeting Karma in the Early Childhood Classroom**. Early Childhood week with Rachel Ross. For information visit www.rsct.ca or info@rsct.ca, 905.764.7570

July 21–26, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Introduction to Waldorf Early Childhood Education**, with Connie Manson, Lisa Miccio, and Patricia Rubano. Contact Ayla Dunn, 845-425-0055, summer@sunbridge.edu

Conferences

May 18, Marin Waldorf School, San Rafael, CA: **Creating a Joyful Life with Children**, Conference with Cynthia Aldinger, Suzanne Down, and Faith Baldwin Collins. Contact 530-448-9328, lifewaysconference@gmail.com.

May 18–21, Hannover, Germany: **I Will: The Art of Education in the Space Between**. International conference sponsored by the Vereinigung der Waldorfindergärten and IASWECE. Contact: +49 (0)6321 95 828 65, info@waldorfindergarten.de, www.pfinsttagung.info

June 20–23, Dornach, Switzerland: **Healthy Development and Prevention in Pregnancy and Early Childhood**. International Birth to Three Conference, sponsored by the Medical Section at the Goetheanum. www.iaswece.org

June 23–28, Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School, Ghent, NY: **The Twelve Senses: Gateways of the Soul**, Conference with Stephen Steen and others. www.alkioncenter.org

June 24–27, Austin Waldorf School, Austin, TX: **Practical Life, Meditation and the Waldorf School**, 2013 AWSNA summer conference. Information: contact Connie Stokes at (518) 392-0613 or cstokes@awsna.org

July 1–5, Waldorf School of San Diego, CA: **A Musical Journey from Early Childhood Through the Grades**, 14th Annual AWME Music Conference. Contact 760-451-2139, sandiego@waldorfteaching.org, www.waldorfteaching.org. (Held in two locations; see below for the NC dates and contact information.)

July 15–19, Emerson Waldorf School, Chapel Hill, NC: **A Musical Journey from Early Childhood Through the Grades** Contact 208-265-2200, themusicpainter@gmail.com, www.waldorfmusic.org. (Held in two locations; see above for the CA dates and contact information.)

Trainings

New WECAN-recognized trainings and trainings that do not enroll a new group every year are included here. For other WECAN member trainings, visit the “Options for Training” page on our website, www.waldorfearlychildhood.org

June 17–July 5, 2013, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Completion Track for Experienced Waldorf Early Childhood Educators** First session of a new 14-month program for those with substantial experience in a Waldorf early childhood setting as well as prior relevant coursework and training. Application deadline May 17. Contact Ayla Dunn, 845-425-0055, summer@sunbridge.edu

July 2013, West Coast Institute, Duncan, BC, Canada: New cycle of **Two-year Waldorf Early Childhood Educator Training** begins. Contact 604-740-0539, info@westcoastinstitute.org, www.westcoastinstitute.org



Drawing by Deborah Grieder from Tell Me a Story

NEW FROM WECAN BOOKS



Our newest publications:

The Journey of the I into Life: A Final Destination or a Path Toward Freedom **\$12**

Lectures from the 2012 International Waldorf Early Childhood Conference in Dornach, Switzerland.

On the Play of the Child/Playing, Learning, Meeting the Other **\$14**

This new combined edition incorporates two essential resources for early childhood educators: A compilation of Rudolf Steiner's words on children's play, and the lectures from the 2005 International Waldorf Early Childhood Conference.

The Rainbow Puppet Theatre Book *AVAILABLE APRIL 20* **\$22**

Fourteen classic puppet plays by Estelle Bryer, creator of the famous Rainbow Puppet Theatre in Cape Town, South Africa. Preface by Janene Ping

Tell Me a Story: Stories from the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America **\$25**

This collection of over 80 stories from the members and friends of WECAN is for anyone who has ever heard the words "Tell me a story!" Full of wonderful tales for all ages and all occasions, it is a true gift for our movement and for the world.

New in our store:

Cosmic Child: Inspired Writings from the Threshold of Birth **\$20**

Selected and Arranged by Eve Olive, a beautiful collection of prose and poetry.

Juegos de Gesto de Mano **\$25**

A Spanish translation of selected gesture games by Wilma Ellersiek, produced in cooperation with Editorial El Liceo, Spain.

Simply Sourdough: Baking Great Whole-Grain Breads and More **\$10**

Enrich your bread baking repertoire with instructions, advice and recipes for making nutritious, delicious whole-grain breads, pancakes, muffins, crackers, and more.

What Is a Waldorf Kindergarten? **\$15**

A collection of classic articles from the Waldorf Kindergarten Association Newsletter, now in a new edition from SteinerBooks with color photographs and introductions by Sharifa Oppenheimer.

To order, visit

store.waldorfearlychildhood.org

Or contact Melissa Lyons, info@waldorfearlychildhood.org, 845-352-1690

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