

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 77, Fall 2019

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A scene from the puppet play "Twiggy" (see page 23)

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Plans are funny things. Whenever we anticipate something—teaching in some capacity, going on a trip, attending a meeting, and so on—we create a plan based on our intentions and imagine the steps of how things will work out. Meanwhile, the people whom we will meet in the course of this event have their own plans, their own expectations and hopes.

Then we all come together. Often, if we are attentive to the whimsy of life and the intentions of the spiritual world, we then discover that there is THE PLAN whose edge our own thoughts have just glanced upon, that has been ripening and deepening somewhere in the cosmos and now comes to light. When THE PLAN has revealed itself, we always find that it is much better than what could have been brought by a single person.

In a sad, deep heart-and-soul moving, and inspiring way, this issue of *Gateways* has been formed by the life and passing of Joan Almon. This was not the original plan for this issue, but it is certainly the right one now. This issue is dedicated to Joan as one of the first and most dauntless, energetic, courageous, and challenging American initiators of Waldorf early childhood education in North America.

You will read about her professional life and biography from childhood in the next few pages, a story we think you will find tantalizing—even a bit outrageous in some places. This article is followed by a personal remembrance by Laurie Clark, who, as a young Waldorf teacher, first heard Joan speak at a conference decades ago.

Joan was fiercely devoted to protecting young children, to giving them a fair and healthy start into life. She fought to allow them the opportunities to discover and awaken to the world through imaginative, freely developed play and through doing real, practical work. She spoke and wrote about the developmental

dangers to healthy incarnation, to soul development, and to vitality of spirit from the press to impose early academics on younger and younger children. She explained why children should not be enrolled in the grade school until they showed consolidated signs of readiness. In so many ways, she urged us to “let the children be children” for as long as the developmental mandate from the spiritual world has intended.

We did not know that THE PLAN for this issue was to honor Joan’s life and work until the event of her crossing the threshold, just a couple of months before going to press. But when that became clear, many other connections began to show themselves. The wealth of articles submitted for this issue had seemed an odd potpourri of unrelated bits and pieces, challenging to fit together in some cohesive way. But in the light of Joan’s passing, the themes of the articles began to shine through. In one way or another, each piece touches upon aspects of education and human development that were especially dear to Joan in her work on behalf of children and families. As we read, we may feel the urgency of these topics for our times.

This feeling of urgency was not unique to Joan. But her fire and leadership was—and continues to be—unique. In this mood of her calling out, “The time is at hand!”¹ you are invited into the following pages.

First, we take on the topic of writing reports in the early childhood setting. Writing reports is standard practice in some schools, a WECAN survey revealed. In others it is thought to be inappropriate and intentionally avoided. In some areas local regulations require a written report for these young children. Should we? Should we not? And if a report is required, how do we find our way along this path? Ruth Ker has taken on the big task of considering different ways to look at this practice. She suggests that there are ways

to honor the individuality of children without locking them into a static picture, and that an objective but warmly written report can build positive relationships with parents.

Movement, play, and practical work are the focus of the next three articles. Kathy Rinden became inspired to enrich the opportunities for movement in her classroom, to give support to healthy sensory development. Her journey of creating an inexpensive, highly versatile, compact indoor “gym” displays a resourcefulness that is impressive and exciting.

Next is a description by Bronwen David of how a “jungle gym” is created anew each day for the nursery class out of milk crates and planks. This has helped to awaken the children’s joy in their growing bodies and to build their confidence in the sensory-motor realm.

Barbara Kloczek takes on the topic of work in the kindergarten. For children to incarnate well in healthy ways, they want and need to see real, purposeful work done with joy. But Barbara questions whether we may be using “work” as a hidden code word for punishment. Her description of how she cultivated the joy of work with her classes can help us to claim work as a satisfying, social activity that only human beings can do.

Storytelling provides another realm where the children’s imagination can work all the way into the physical world. Christy Field shares how her classes typically “act out” or dramatize a story in simple ways after it has been told numerous times. She tells one example of how the children imaginatively carried the inside classroom experience of “The Snowmaiden” out into the wintry forest of upstate New York.

For the Classroom takes us into a topic of our very current times—gender diversity and inclusivity. The early childhood teachers of the Maine Coast

Waldorf School share with us an adaptation of the story “Twiggy.” They describe how they presented this story as a puppet play to honor a class family with same-sex parents and to step away from stereotyped gender representations—an example of how we each may use stories, with appropriate adaptation, to acknowledge and bless the diversity we are meeting in our classrooms.

We cannot have enough finger plays with engaging and ear-catching language to invite our children’s listening, especially in transition moments. We are delighted to share two original finger plays by Rachel Cruz that are notable for their playfulness and amusing little twists.

The Signs of the Times begins with an apology to Astrid Lackner whose article in the last issue on literacy development in early childhood was misattributed to another author. We are republishing this article with the correct author credited in order to redeem this mistake, and because Astrid’s introduction to this topic is the anticipated focus of a future newsletter. Thank you, Astrid.

Another offering from Kathy Rinden concerns self-care for the teacher. This article would be important for us to read seriously and reflect upon earnestly no matter when it was published. But when read with Joan Almon in mind, it took on more potency. Joan’s motto was “Will Act.” Kathy’s consideration of self-care—which she pondered for two years before this article took form—speaks to that same enthusiastic resolve.

International News takes us to Dornach, Switzerland and the International Early Childhood Conference held at the Goetheanum last spring. For those lucky enough to attend, this was a blessed and privileged time. In an effort to share a flavor of the mood, the interactions, and the inspiring content

of the conference, four reminiscences are offered. We wish there were space to print many, many more impressions of this unique gathering. As more memories come toward *Gateways*, we will look for a way to share them.

Book Reviews features our most recent WECAN publications: *Beginning Well*, a beautiful addition to the birth-to-three resources and *Supporting the Sense of Life*, a compilation of three years of keynote addresses given at the 2014-16 WECAN East Coast February conferences. Also newly available are *Young Children's Drawings*, which offers an anthroposophic physician's insights as to how children's drawings mirror and reveal their development; and a new, revised edition of *Education—Health for Life*, the classic collection of materials shared in the 2006 world-wide Kolisko conferences.

The Picture Language of Folktales by Friedel Lenz, recently translated by Clopper Almon, is also reviewed. This is a very important addition to the English-language resources that help Waldorf teachers to deepen their understanding and appreciation of fairy tales.

Reviewing Clopper Almon's translation was planned long before most of us knew of Joan's serious illness, and this book would have found praise here no matter when it was shared. Fairy tales are pictures of human development in body, soul, and spirit, tales of journeying to unknown or forgotten destinations. They are stories of courage and challenge and of ultimately finding one's way to of the royal kingdom, providing pictures of transformation and metamorphosis. Every one of these fairy-tale motifs seems very poignant at this time. So it seems most fitting to end this fall *Gateways* on this note.

We offer thanks for the plans that have drawn us together into this community of Waldorf education, with especial gratitude to Joan Almon for inspiring us, encouraging us, and pushing us to realize her motto—"Will Act!" ♦

~ Nancy Blanning

Note:

- 1 This phrase is prominently spoken in Goethe's fairy tale of "The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily," an important story to Joan Almon; she initiated a large-scale marionette presentation of this tale shown in nine different venues. For more details, see the article about Joan's biography.

FOCUS: “Will Act”

Joan Almon—Recollection of Her Life and Legacy



Joan Almon—Waldorf early childhood pioneer in North America, champion of children, visionary, protector of humanity, and much more—passed the threshold of death into the spiritual world on July 14, 2019. Her biography, her initiative in so many domains, and her legacy stand as a source of encouragement and inspiration for all. In this spirit, it is a privilege for Gateways to honor her dauntless energy and dedication to the welfare of children in the following remembrances. The portrait of her life and deeds which follows comes primarily from Susan Howard, Joan’s decades-long colleague and friend; Joan’s husband, Clopper Almon; and Christian Community priest, Cynthia Hindes, who delivered Joan’s eulogy.

Joan Evelyn Wolfsheimer Almon was born on August 6, 1944 in Wilmington, Delaware to Jewish immigrants Karl and Frances Hirsch Wolfsheimer. Her parents had already obtained their exit visas from Nazi Germany when Karl, a merchant, was arrested on the morning after Kristallnacht and sent to Dachau in 1938. By a stroke of destiny, the Nazi employee they had been required to hire directed Frances exactly where to go and with whom to speak to get Karl released so they could leave Europe. After the couple settled in

Wilmington, Joan and her older brother, Philip, were born. In time, German reparations enabled them to open a clothing shop. Unfortunately, the BRCA gene, that would later plague Joan, ran through her father’s family. Karl died of a brain tumor when Joan was twelve. Her mother continued the business.

Joan attended public schools including Pierre Dupont High School, class of 1962, where she edited the yearbook and was voted “most intellectual.” After graduating from the University of Michigan with a

bachelor's degree in sociology, she worked in the non-profit sector for an anti-poverty organization and for two years as a secretary for the civil rights activist, Bayard Rustin, where she took calls from such people as Martin Luther King, Jr.

Wanting to be even closer to life in the sixties, she took a job in San Francisco, intrigued by the hippie scene. Accounts of her escapades shocked adult relatives to silence at a Passover seder.

She returned to the East Coast and worked for the City of Baltimore. She joined the Savitria communal living center where, at twenty-seven, she picked up the threads of her life calling. She co-founded the New Morning School, with an eclectic approach to early childhood education, in 1971. Her school co-founder attended a lecture by Werner Glas, who connected them with the Washington Waldorf School, where Clopper Almon and his wife, Shirley, were founders. As greeter for a lecture by Alan Howard, Clopper was approached by a bespectacled young woman—namely Joan—with a large tape recorder. When told that no recording was allowed, she protested. But, as Clopper says, she obeyed him for the first and last time.

A dinner invitation led to friendship with Clopper and Shirley. Sadly, Shirley died of cancer in the fall of 1975. Meanwhile Joan took education courses in Maryland and at the Waldorf Institute in Detroit. She further studied anthroposophy at the Rudolf Steiner Institute summer intensives.

Recognizing a mutual connection after Shirley's death, Joan and Clopper were married on October 10, 1976.

In 1978, Joan and her husband went to Austria for a year in connection with his work. Joan apprenticed herself to one of the great Waldorf early childhood teachers in Vienna and visited the kindergartens of others in Germany and Switzerland. What we think of as standard Waldorf early childhood practices—painting, stories, songs, play stands, puppetry—derives from inspirations Joan brought back from

Europe. After her return to the United States the following year, she became a kindergarten teacher at Acorn Hill in Silver Spring, Maryland, where she remained for the next ten years.

In 1983 Joan founded the Waldorf Kindergarten Association (today known as WECAN—the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America) in order to provide resources and support to the growing number of Waldorf early childhood educators in North America. She launched the *Gateways* newsletter, edited a number of publications, and organized the first North American Waldorf early childhood conferences. Joan also travelled internationally as a lecturer and advisor to countless kindergartens on several continents. Though soft-spoken, she had a gift for speaking in a way that held everyone's attention. She could explain anthroposophical ideas and ideals clearly and objectively in ordinary, understandable language. She was also active in the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association (IASWECE). She became so much in demand that she gave up her teaching position in 1989. In addition to all of this, she was for a time also co-general secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in America.

But her interests and influence were not limited to Waldorf circles. In 1999 she co-founded the Alliance for Childhood. This organization works as a collaboration of professionals in education, health, business, child welfare and other areas to identify and advocate for the most important issues in the lives of children. Joan worked tirelessly to restore play and play-based learning for children and youth. She was the author of *Fool's Gold - A Critical Look at Computers in Childhood*, and co-author of *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School*.

Joan was a big-picture person, a visionary. But her vision did not remain just ideas. She was, in terms familiar to Waldorf educators, the quintessential choleric. Her motto was "will act."

Her love of puppetry resulted in an ambitious production of Goethe's fairytale, "The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily," which played in nine cities, including New York. (A video recording of this marionette play can be viewed online at Vimeo 134996053.) She expanded the repertory of Waldorf kindergarten stories to include world folk and wisdom tales so that North Americans could be a part of the global community.

Joan was first and foremost a teacher. She loved to share resources and to enable others to develop their own. She was compassionate and kind. She could see the best in others. Someone said they had never heard her say anything negative about another person. And Joan was a supportive friend, direct, objective, unsentimental. And humorous—if you were looking for her at a big gathering, you could find her in the middle of the group that was laughing.

In 2002, at age 58, she began a battle with breast cancer in advancing forms that would last seventeen years. She held them all at bay. All the while, few people knew, because she kept working continually. At the end of the summer of 2018, the breast cancer, which had spread to her bone marrow, was advancing. Then a new drug, Lynparza, designed specifically for patients with the mutated BRCA gene, worked another miracle, and she and her husband were able to take a southern road trip to attend a conference of the Play Coalition in Clemson, visit family and friends in Texas, Florida and Georgia, and then visit their beloved Beersheba Springs where Joan had helped create a local history museum.

On the way home, she began to notice a pain in her upper abdomen. Pancreatic cancer was determined to be the cause. Though further tests and treatment were still a consideration, puzzling complications put these on hold and Joan accepted hospice care. Many friends and relatives visited, but Joan declined rapidly. During the predawn hours she passed away peacefully in her sleep on Sunday, July 14.

Joan was in the process of writing a book with the working title, "Learning with Children." Although

unfinished, this volume will be published. In this way, her life's work and her tremendous legacy will shine into the future.

Joan was a warrior with an enormous heart, powerful will forces, and a deep understanding of the needs of the young child. Our hearts are heavy, but we are inspired by her initiative and tireless good will on behalf of children everywhere.

This tribute to Joan ends with the verse from Rudolf Steiner's *Calendar of the Soul* for the week Joan died, Week 15 (14-20 July). Interestingly, this was the only verse Joan had reworked for herself from the German.

I feel the Spirit's weaving

As if enchanted by the world's phenomena;

And my true self has now been wrapped

In the dimness of the senses,

Giving to me at last the strength

Which I myself, confined and bound,

Lack the power to achieve alone.

Joan was honored as a "Waldorf pioneer" in *Gateways*, Issue 69, Fall 2015. This article can be accessed online by going to www.waldorflibrary.org. Click on "Journals," click on "Gateways" and scroll down to the Fall 2015 issue. Readers of this article, which came directly out of a three-hour interview with Joan, can experience Joan's personal voice, humor, power, and "will act" determination as she describes the journey to her destiny path of work with and for young children. ♦

Joan Almon: The Origin of My Inspiration

— Laurie Clark

After four decades of teaching and five years of procrastinating, I recently resolved to sort through the huge stacks of papers that had accumulated. What treasures awaited me that had been buried for so long! Among the best finds were a few very old, yellowed papers in my handwriting, with the heading: “Children with Special Needs.” I realized that these notes came from one of the very first conferences I attended as a new Waldorf teacher, with Joan Almon as presenter at Rudolf Steiner College. At the time of the conference, Joan was still teaching in the classroom, and as a brand-new teacher I was full of admiration for her. She was crystal clear in her speech and radiated strength and empathy. I wanted to be just like her! I don’t have a date on my notes, but it was certainly a long time ago.

As I read these notes from Joan’s presentation on two crumpled sheets, I realized that it was her inspiring words at this very conference that led me towards therapeutic research and the determination to create ways to approach the “profoundly interesting” children in my care. I would like to honor her and bless her in light of her recent passing on to the spiritual world, as I share a few of her profound thoughts.

Joan said that she always welcomed a few children with special needs into her classroom. These, she said, are the children who make teachers out of us. They test the core of our being, even though it sometimes feels as though this testing will be our undoing. These are the very children who carve out new areas of depth in us so that we can carry other children who will come our way. Though we might wish that there were some authority to tell us just what to do, there are no formulas that we can use in these situations. The response must come out of the teacher as she wrestles with questions of human destiny. Joan also said that if she was going to turn herself inside out for the child, she needed the full cooperation of the parents.

She felt that many children were being woken up too soon and that we, as teachers, needed to find ways to restore them to their dream world. She spoke about putting these “awakened” children back to sleep by “weaving a lullaby atmosphere around them, even singing many lullabies.” This is a beautiful way to remind us to deepen our interactions with the children

through pictorial, “lullaby” language, through stories and, really, through everything we do. It is more important than ever now, to renew our efforts to accompany the children in our care and help “dream” them back into themselves so that they can experience a sense of well-being.

For the child who cannot imitate, Joan recommended that the teacher invite the child to join her in an activity for ten minutes every day, such as dishwashing, sweeping, or other daily work that needs to be done. What a brilliant idea; all children love to have the teacher to themselves. Through the activity, she was giving them an intimate “taste” of how to imitate, as she embraced the child with interest and attention.

As I reflected upon Joan’s insights, I realized how fortunate I was to be in her presence at the very beginning of my lifelong work and how deeply these thoughts have penetrated my being as a Waldorf teacher. Somehow, even though these buried papers only recently resurfaced, I realized that the ideas Joan brought to birth became my motivation for creating therapeutic modalities to meet the children who have come to my classroom.

Joan has always lived in my heart as one of the great origins of my inspiration. The word “origin” comes from the Latin *originem* which means “to appear over the horizon, to set into motion, to become visible and to receive life.” Joan helped the teacher inside of me to appear over the horizon, unfolding my destiny as it became more and more visible. This has set me into motion to receive the many children that have sanctified my life. Thank you, dearest Joan, for the blessings that you have bestowed upon countless teachers and for standing so courageously for children. ♦

Laurie Clark *has been a Waldorf Kindergarten teacher for over forty years and is a lead teacher at The Denver Waldorf School. She is a WECAN Regional Rep and a member of the Early Childhood Teacher Training Committee. Laurie is a mentor to teachers across the country, conference presenter, and teacher trainer. She has co-authored two books with Nancy Blanning on therapeutic movement for children entitled Movement Journeys and Circle Adventures.*

Report Writing: Challenges and Opportunities

— Ruth Ker

In September 2018, WECAN sent out a survey to member schools asking questions of early childhood educators about report writing. This topic is alive in the Waldorf early childhood movement these days and can be somewhat controversial. Assessment and report writing have potential benefits and disadvantages, both for practitioners and for the children and families they serve.

Wishing for further understanding myself, I prepared for the writing of this article by interviewing some of our beloved mentors and some experienced Waldorf educators who are currently in the field. Along with concerns about something drifting into early childhood which is more relevant to the grades, and questions about how report writing can be brought in such a way that it supports healthy child development, I heard “We all need each other. Report writing could become a way of participating in a healing conversation.”

It is this last comment that I would like to take up in this article, recognizing that while there are valid arguments on the side of not writing reports, we can also look at it as an opportunity.

Where does the impulse toward writing reports come from? In the small cross-section represented by the responses to the recent survey (56 responses from 178 WECAN Full and Associate Member Programs), a majority of educators replied that report writing was requested in their schools by the school faculty or college of teachers first, then by school administration, then by parents, and finally by local, state or provincial regulations. While it is not possible to draw generalized conclusions from this small sample, it is interesting to look at what comes first and last on the list. One colleague suggested, “Perhaps the faculty or administrators think parents want the reports.” Other colleagues reported that they rarely get feedback from the parents, and some said that the parents are more interested in conferences with teachers than written reports.

In any case, when schools are asking for reports or assessments within the culture of their specific communities, then how can we make these reports as health-promoting, helpful, and harmless as

possible? What has been done already to take up this opportunity in the best possible way?

In my research, I learned that although it might be the choice of some educators to refrain from report writing, many experienced teachers have enjoyed it as a way to create a bridge with the parent and/or the child’s next teacher. For them, it has become a self-education opportunity, a chance to cultivate flexibility of thinking, positivity, and objectivity. Surprised by this joyful recognition, some educators have reported a spiritual aliveness inherent in the process and find report writing a way of doing ongoing child study that welcomes the participation of other beings.

End-of-the-year report writing or check-ins with parents during the year can become opportunities for the educator to home in on the essence of the child and develop a closer working relationship with those who accompany the child in earthly life and in the spiritual worlds. One teacher reported, “My end-of-year report was my last, loving embrace before the family left for the summer!”

Even when compelled by an outer authority, report writing can offer significant benefits. In the Canadian province where I live, most of the Waldorf schools are significantly subsidized by government grants. The writing of reports is necessary to this agreement, and the teachers with whom I spoke have found this to be an arduous task that has required learning new skills and language to attempt to communicate the wealth of Waldorf education within narrower parameters that do not quite fit the totality of its shape. But while difficult, it has been extremely valuable to learn this new language, to interact with other Waldorf kindergarten colleagues, and have conversations with the licensing bodies. The Waldorf educators have learned that play-based kindergartens are promoted by the provincial ministry of education, and the ministry has learned that Waldorf schools have insights and do a stellar job at this. As one Waldorf educator expressed, “We really don’t have to see ourselves as separate from that world.”

Some comments from the WECAN survey express concern that some types of reports based on child observations are “fixed pictures” or “snapshots” of

specific points in time, when the truth is that children tend to go through many growth spurts and rapid changes from birth to seven. One said, “We find that written reports fixate the parents on a point in time and make the conversation between parents and the teacher less fluid.” Others said that by the time the parent reads the report, the child could have passed through the stage described and be on to some other developmental manifestation. Parents may then feel the need to respond to something the report describes but that the child has outgrown. Many schools reported a lack of consensus as to whether it is appropriate at all to write reports for children under age seven!

Fortunately, much work has already been done to describe what kind of assessment is appropriate for early childhood settings. In a document published by ECSWE, the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, called “Assessment: Friend or Foe of Learning,” it is suggested that “individual-centred education,” such as Waldorf education, “needs to be accompanied by forms of assessment that take the unpredictable development of individuality into account.” This report goes on to say: “Assessment practices should reflect the social nature of learning and therefore foster relationships between learners and teachers instead of alienating them. This requires an atmosphere of trust and esteem.”²

And the International Waldorf Early Childhood Association, IASWECE, has created a position statement on “Non-judgemental Assessment in Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Settings” to support early childhood educators who find themselves required by regulatory bodies to write evaluative reports on each child in their care. This document, which is important reading for Waldorf early childhood educators, urges teachers to refrain from “reaching diagnostic and specific conclusions,” and to ensure that “all observations are conducted in a spirit of caring, loving attention” with a “gesture of gentle inquiry” in order “to deepen the relationship with the child.” We can heed their caution, “The early years of childhood need special protection to guard the child’s unfolding forces against premature expectations.”³ So,

what is it we should consider if we find ourselves in the position of being a report writer? Here, we may take counsel from Rudolf Steiner, who says, “The teacher must feel that he or she should perceive each child as a question posed by the super-sensible world to the sense world.”⁴

We can ask ourselves, “What is the gesture behind the report? What is my intention or motivation for taking up this task?” If it is a judgment that we want to prove to others, then we are probably striving in the wrong direction. If it is to build a picture that allows the child’s essence to shine through so it can be recognized by the parents, our colleagues, and even spiritual beings who want to contribute and inspire us further, then we are probably on the right track.

Some teachers approach this task by giving a recap of what happens in the yearly programming and then adding some positive information about the uniqueness of each individual child. This allows the teacher to provide a deepened picture of the child’s qualities that the parents might not see or understand. It can be an opportunity for the educator to relay insights that have occurred, perhaps in connection with what the child’s angel would want to be recognized, and ultimately what the child unconsciously wants us to understand and share with the parents. Oh, the joy of being truly seen!

Parents can sometimes have preconceived ideas about their child based on previously-encountered behaviors. The child may have grown out of these manifestations, but the parent may still be attached to a former pattern that the child has outgrown. Reports can be a vehicle for transforming ideas and removing attitudes that limit the child’s greatness.

Reports can also be a vehicle for cultivating more conversation through which parents can share their insights into their child. As a parent myself, I remember looking for the indication that the teacher really saw and recognized the spirit of my child.

Some educators value the importance of developing report-writing skills as a preparation for practicing *right speech*—an aid to knowing how to speak about the child in Parent/Teacher conferences. While writing the report, we can imagine how it will be for

the parents to read it. We want to walk a path together as a loving deed which can expand into a greater healing for the parent and the child. Developing trust by working actively on warm connection and integrity in relationship with the parents is the prerequisite to being effective in these communications.

For some educators, report writing has been a path of consciousness to develop clarity about what they actually see in the child. Sometimes we realize we have to look to the child again because we don't have a full picture. This becomes obvious when we imagine the child in our evening practice. We can realize that we don't really "see" the child fully enough to offer up a worthy picture to the spiritual worlds as we seek guidance and support. Sometimes we realize that other children are invisible to us, perhaps because they require so little attention. These often calm and complacent children may also be unconsciously calling to be seen.

Reports can also be opportunities to recommend professional support for the child. These types of reports must be written with the greatest care *after* the educator has spoken already to the parent about the recommendation or whatever will be the sensitive issue in the report. It is essential to always speak to the parent first if you have any concern or delicate words you will need to write in the child's report. Developing a resource list of specialists and therapists who are compatible with Waldorf practices is a must nowadays.

Reports also allow us to impart the deeper attributes of the children to the upcoming first grade teacher. It can be helpful as well to share with the first grade teacher something about your working relationship with the parents. The interactions between the children and how they operate as a "rising first grader" group is also important information for their new teacher. It can be difficult to absorb everything given verbally in a meeting; a written report gives the opportunity to glance back at the kindergarten teacher's words later as needed.

Of course there is the side of reporting that can deteriorate into checklists and core competencies, describing the child in unnatural forms. Some of our Waldorf educators are having to rise to the task of learning this new language and bringing meaning to it in order to find authenticity in their report writing. Endeavoring to have truthful conversations with school authorities who don't speak our common language is an important task of our time. Those who

can cultivate this skill are the current pioneer warriors. This is important work if Waldorf education is to share its gift with the world.

As one teacher said, "These reports will continue to be my dragon until I find the way to authentically assess the children." How do we accomplish this with the minimum of compromises? This is not a new question; Rudolf Steiner in *Discussions with Teachers* tells us of many situations in the first Waldorf School where compromises had to happen.⁵

In closing, I express my admiration and gratitude to those who are pioneering these conversations for us in a world where competencies, core curriculum and proficiencies define young children. Thank you for your innovative striving, extra work, flexibility, and courage. Every day many of us experience the gift Waldorf education has to give. We have a responsibility to share these understandings as well. It's my deepest hope that the children of our time will find protection from and perhaps even be served by this "dragon." ♦

Notes:

- 1 *Survey on Assessment and Report Writing*, WECAN, September, 2018
- 2 *Assessment: Friend of Foe of Learning*, ECSWE, Brussels, Aug. 26, 2016, pages 1 and 6
- 3 *Non-judgemental Assessment in Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Settings: Seeing the Child*, IASWECE position statement, 2018, page 2 and 3
- 4 *Education as a Force for Social Change*, Rudolf Steiner, pg 56-57, Anthroposophic Press, 1997
- 5 *Discussions with Teachers*, Rudolf Steiner, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1967, London

After over 40 years in the classroom, Ruth Ker retired from the kindergarten at Sunrise Waldorf School in British Columbia, where she was the founding teacher. She now serves as the EC Program Director for West Coast Institute teacher training. A WECAN board member, she is membership coordinator for the WECAN Teacher Education Committee. She also mentors with schools and educators in North America. Ruth has edited several WECAN publications, most recently, "Please, Can We Play Games?"

Sensory-motor Enhancement on a Budget

— Kathy Rinden



After participating in the “Nurturing the Roots” Early Childhood Therapeutic Professional Deepening course,¹ I felt the need to look with fresh eyes upon my classroom’s physical space and how I could bring more healthy movement opportunities to the children in my care. One of the realities that I had to consider was that my classroom budget was tight. I knew that this perceived obstacle could be overcome. With some time, research, and imagination, I have been able to make some wise purchases to reach my goal and stay within my budget.

I had seen a lovely water/sand table in a catalog for about \$500. It was very well made, sturdy, and quite large. This was certainly not a choice for my classroom at this price, however. One day as I was shopping in a home improvement store for some storage bins, I happened to see a shallow, clear bin, which sent a picture into my imagination. If I were to set this bin on my table during free play time, children would be able to reach in to have access to a wide variety of sensory experiences. Over the past two years, I have used it



successfully, filling it with water, sand, birdseed, and a mixture of beans in various shapes, sizes, textures, and colors.

This kind of sensory bin cost \$18, and the various contents about another \$20. I also purchased a few bowls, spoons, funnels, and sieves from a dollar store for about \$10. So all in all, I invested \$40. I put this bin out often, changing the contents about every two to three months. No child has become ill from using this bin, as I keep it tightly closed with its locking lid, bringing it out about twice a week. The best part is that the children love it!

My most useful find of all came when I was looking online at a home décor and renovation website. I came across a picture of a standing C-frame with a chair hammock attached. The cost was \$129. I looked closely at the depth of the C-frame to make sure that there would be plenty of room for young children to sit in the hammock and swing back and forth safely. This range of motion would provide the children with vestibular stimulation in a fun and free way. I put the



C-frame together easily, placed two heavy sand bags on opposite sides of the x-shaped bottom legs, laid down a thick, heavy cushion on top of the iron legs and sand bags, and then covered it all with a quilt. It looked lovely and the children were overjoyed and enthusiastic to try this new apparatus.

After a while, I noticed that if I could find a swiveling carabiner (between \$10-\$30), the hammock would not only go back and forth, but would twist 360 degrees, allowing the children to twirl! This gave the flexibility to provide deeper experiences if children wished for them. Once I saw the benefits of the hammock chair, I began to add other possibilities. I purchased a wooden ladder for \$25, a monkey bar for \$25, a swing that I made for free from a rope and a smooth stick, and a hanging pod for \$30. All of these additional pieces of equipment, I simply attached with other carabiners to the swivel carabiner, which always remained on the C-frame. Now we had a wide variety of sensory-motor stimulating equipment from which

to choose each day.

These pieces of equipment are stored away and come out during free play time and during the first half-hour of our day when we also create "obstacle courses." The obstacle courses are constructed using benches, balance beams, chairs, boards, a small (donated) trampoline, and curvy boards. My early-arriving students love to be the ones to help to set up the course each morning. Within those first thirty minutes of the day, the children have time to connect with friends and teachers, say goodbye to parents, and become engaged in a variety of playful opportunities that offer sensory-motor experiences.

So, for \$300, which I spent over the course of a year, I was able to bring many more sensory integration experiences to the children in my care. Such a reasonable investment has given me the chance to better support all of the children, especially those in need. Because the obstacle courses, sensory bin, and the C-frame apparatus give everyone the ability to



enjoy such opportunities in a playful way, the children are unaware of how much good work they are doing for their bodies and their growing brains. No one is ever singled out for needing to do extra work. The items are always there for their daily enjoyment. During the past two years, I have observed that the children who are in greatest need of such sensory input are the ones who gravitate most often to these opportunities.

Proprioceptive input—feeling where your body is in space, which comes from strong touch and input to the joints in the body—is another experience that helps children feel confident in their bodies and in movement. I have been able to add these experiences in very simple ways. Allowing children the freedom to jump off of objects, such as chairs, benches, and stairs or a small trampoline, is not only fun but also gives a wonderful opportunity to feel their bodies fully, especially in their lower limbs.

These sensory-motor integration activities have also been of great help to me as I observe which children are gravitating to these experiences and which are avoiding them. Because they are offered daily, I can allow the tentative children time to observe others and eventually join in with friends in an emotionally safe way.

It has been such a gift to create these experiences for the children in my kindergarten. It has helped to fulfill my goal of supporting all forms of growth, including

sensory-motor integration. Nurturing the four lower senses is key for the early childhood teacher, especially when the children are in great need of such support in our day and age.

Simple, strategic investments in our classroom materials can be achieved when we challenge ourselves to think “outside of the box.” I encourage everyone to take a close look at our classroom spaces to see where we might be able to create and provide sensory-motor integration opportunities to meet the ever-widening needs of the children who are coming to us today.

We all do the very best we can for our children and families, given the various constraints

that we face in our individual schools, in-home programs, and care facilities. I offer my personal journey on this path as mere suggestions for you to consider. You, too, may be doing or thinking of doing other things for the children in your care. If so, consider sharing them with others. Our collective inspirations will expand this work for the health and benefit of the young child. ♦

Note:

- 1 This course occurs in Denver, CO. Description and information can be found at the website nurturingtheroots.com.

Kathleen Rinden *has been a Waldorf kindergarten teacher for over twenty years, currently teaching at Maple Village Waldorf School in southern California. With a background in Child Development and Family and Child Therapy, she also offers parent and family coaching. She is drawn to the art of storytelling and writing, with great interest in honoring multicultural stories. Bringing healthy movement that supports sensory integration into the classroom is also on the top of her list.*

Building the Jungle Gym

— Bronwen David

One little boy with big round eyes seemed to pointedly exemplify the dilemma he faced. He was three years old, stocky, standing in the sand, and he could not move. As I observed him I could almost see the thoughts swirling around his head. He was just beginning to realize that he had knees and hands and feet. But he also lived in the world of “why” and his parents dutifully answered his many questions. His parents were often lovingly concerned about his emotions, giving them names, even colors, and were always helping him to cope with these feelings. At transitions in the morning, it was really hard when the mommies and the daddies had to leave.

Some mornings in the Nursery he just couldn't get his feet to move; in fact, this was little Freddy's dilemma nearly every morning. And if by chance he *could* get his feet to move, then he might trip or fall. If someone came too close, then he really might be in danger and have to move his arms, push someone away, or hit, no matter what.

That's what I observed with my student, Freddy, in my capacity as the Nursery teacher assistant at the San Francisco Waldorf School. Three mornings a week we started out the day in the school's playground—at an urban school with a play space of only 1900 square feet. All the other children in the school began inside with main lesson or play in the kindergarten. How was I going to help Freddy and other children who were



fearful of moving their bodies on their own? How could we help them get over their fears of being off-balance and having their space invaded? Some would literally get stuck in one place and not want to move up-or-down, backwards-or-forwards, side-to-side and certainly not around-and-around. Nope, they were not going to take any risks.



How was I going to help them? I decided to focus first on balance and looked around the play yard. I remembered loving to do obstacle courses as a child. It was also a favorite activity of our founding Nursery teacher. I also remembered that my lead teacher constantly reminded me, "The important part of a child gaining mastery over his or her body is that they do what is needed for themselves."

In the schoolyard were about two dozen plastic milk crates stacked against the wall, and several wooden boards of all widths, thicknesses, and lengths. The grade school children would create structures with them during recess. I picked up four boards and three crates and made a ramp with a board going to the top of the thirteen-inch-high crate. Then I placed another board between this crate and another one, made a right turn, placed another crate and board, then another ramp going back into the sand.

I gently directed Freddy and placed him in front of the ramp. At first he refused to try it. But holding his hand, I helped him walk up the ramp, across the gang-plank between the two crates, turn right across the plank again, then down the ramp. Poor Freddy was quivering all the way, but with my help he did it and it was fun!

And so began a movement adventure. Freddy enjoyed it so much that he wanted to do it again, and so did his fifteen Nursery friends. Some needed hands held, some not, but each one enjoyed the challenge. We even made up a name for it: the jungle gym. After all had walked the last plank back to earth, we took the plank away. Now they had to jump down—a new challenge! Once that had been established for about two weeks, all the children were walking the jungle gym, most of them without holding the teacher's hand. Then we made it two crates high.

Each time we were in the schoolyard we made the jungle gym. At first I would build it, first out of simple plastic milk crates (these can be bought at an office supply store), then adding wooden pieces in varied sizes and thickness of wood that were bought from a lumber supply. But soon the children wanted to build it too. This was ideal. They wanted to do it themselves! Of course, we worked with images—the spider web, the pirate’s boat—and each day each structure was different, with new challenges.

I began to work with dynamics as well as design. Some parts were good for running up and down, while other parts called for slow movement, as on a narrow bridge. Sometimes we crawled, at other times we jumped. Sometimes we had to observe and wait for a friend who might be coming from the opposite direction. This helped the children to notice the other and to practice impulse control. At the end of every morning, we all cleaned it up together, stacking the milk crates and the boards against the wall for the grade school children to use. The most important thing was that there was always a lot of laughter and joy.

Within a month or two the children were moving again! My lead teacher and I began to notice that in the morning the transitions with the parents were getting easier because the children couldn’t wait to go off and build the jungle gym. The children were taking hold of their physical bodies as a natural process; and there was less tripping or bumping into each other. They didn’t step on things, but noticed them

and stepped over. They didn’t need a hand when they went down stairs. On the other two days of the week when we went into the “forest” (Presidio National Park, six blocks away from our campus), the children joyfully ran from the teacher’s hands, balancing on logs, climbing trees, taking risks. When we returned to the classroom, we noticed less clumsiness, and the children could carry food and water without spilling. They could take their jackets on and off more easily and put on their own shoes.

When we focused on balance, our work with the other senses of self-movement and touch was also strengthened. More importantly, the children’s sense of life, the joy of being in their bodies, of sensing who they were, grew as well. Once confidence in the body took hold, the children were less in their heads and they could move forward to their next step in learning. The dilemma of whether or not to move was no longer a dilemma. Freedom and joy were what we saw on the children’s faces. ♦

Bronwen David, *herself a Waldorf graduate, is an early childhood teacher at the urban San Francisco Waldorf School. After assisting in the Kindergarten for seven years, she has now finished her second year of teaching in the Nursery. She wants to encourage free play that is creative and ever-changing and has discovered that you don’t need many materials to accomplish this.*

Children Learning to Work: Privilege or Punishment?

— Barbara Kloeck

As Waldorf kindergarten teachers, we strive to imbue our work in the classroom with reverence and meaning. Even simple tasks, such as washing off the tables, can be done in a loving, gentle manner or in a rough hurry. Through these tasks, we provide a model for the children as they learn to care for their world.

However, in my visits to many kindergartens as a mentor, I have sometimes found that when the children misbehave, work is given as a punishment. On the one hand, doing meaningful, purposeful, physical tasks has a centering and calming effect on both children and adults. However, when it is given to the children as a consequence of misbehaving, it takes on the quality of punishment and becomes something to be avoided. In one kindergarten, several of the children had grown to love the day that they “got” to help clean up after snack and help with the dishes. When some of the rowdy boys were kept in to help as punishment, their rebellious attitude spilled into the clean up and the experience of “chores” then became one that all the children wanted to avoid. Is work something to embrace with enthusiasm or is it punishment?

How can we bring work into the kindergarten that engenders the mood of cooperation and the joy of working together for a common good? We can begin with warm enthusiasm for the work itself and for the opportunity to learn new skills. The young child has a natural inclination to imitate, to want to help, and to learn about caring for the world. By providing opportunities for them to practice, with a friend or the group, as part of the daily rhythm, they develop skills and confidence in their part in creating a lovely space. For the younger children self-care, such as learning how to put on shoes, zipping up coats, and hanging up their hats is their first work. In September, one of my new students who had just turned five, put out her foot and proclaimed loudly, “Put on my shoes!” I told her that in kindergarten she gets to put on her own shoes, and took the time and opportunity to help her learn the steps. Within a short time she was quite proud of this new skill.

How can we bring the many tasks of caring for the kindergarten into a form in which the children willingly participate? Once again, the wise advice from

Rudolf Steiner that “rhythm replaces strength” comes to our aid. By placing into our rhythm designated times and ways of caring for the classroom, the children rotate through the tasks with a friend or two and learn the joy and satisfaction of working together.

The temptation is often to just do it ourselves. Initially this may be easier, but in the long run we are not teaching the children but doing for them. One of my main goals was not to do for the children what they could do for themselves. I wanted to teach them many skills that would be helpful, as well as build habits that would support them. This included putting on and tying shoes (the more skilled children can help the ones who can’t yet manage). It could also include pouring and carrying water, washing dishes, tidying up things, and washing and drying the tables. I also wanted them to practice overcoming their resistance to following the teacher’s direction. We know that this resistance is a part of a developmental stage, of being six years old and wanting to be the “boss.” It is very important to practice being part of a group, learning to listen to an adult’s directions and to go with the “flow.”

In the nursery and preschool, the flow of cleanup time can carry the children in an organic way. Often they can easily imitate the teacher’s gesture and participate in a dreamy manner. As the children move from five-and-a-half to seven, there may be a need to bring a different gesture of leading with enthusiasm and firmness. This “adolescence of childhood” engenders a sense of individuality that usually manifests as saying “no.” We know that this resistance is a part of being a six-year-old and wanting to be the “boss,” and we need to meet it with warmth and sometimes clear consequences.

How does this look in practice?

Every Monday morning after circle, I would sit at the table with all of the older children and we would fold the laundry for the week. This was a calming activity and allowed the younger children time to enter into play at their own pace. Other days, after circle, some children (who I could see needed some holding) were chosen to be bakers or to chop vegetables. Perhaps it was their turn to work on their sanding, finger knitting, or sewing.

During free play it is helpful to have tasks that are easily accessible, to bring a calming gesture to chaotic play. One classroom has several little bags filled with cloths to clean crayons, or polishing cloths for the chairs and tables. Perhaps the napkins need to be counted and folded or bowls brought to the table. One little boy had a hard time sustaining his play but he would be happy to spend a little time “dusting” as a time for him to calm down and focus. To be redirected in this way, when the chaos is first noticed, can defuse tense situations. Of course, the teacher also would help to resolve issues between children.

The most important quality with which to surround work is warmth: the warmth of our love for the children, the warmth of enthusiasm for the task as well as for teaching the skills to accomplish it, the warmth of our words.

Before cleanup time started, every day, I sang, “Six-year-olds.” The six-year-olds were all expected to come out of play and help carry the bowls, cups, spoons, napkins, spill towels, and pitchers of water to the table. This eased the transition out of play into cleanup time. Often the six-year-olds bring a resistance that needs to be consciously worked with rhythmically within the day, acknowledging their status as the “older children.” After the six-year-olds had done the “carrying for setting the table,” we gathered as I sat on a chair at the story rug and had our “house elves” or the “little ones” tell a little story about their adventures around the kindergarten when no one was there. This was a wonderful opportunity for spontaneous “pedagogical” stories. It created a pause in the day, when everyone was seated near me on the floor, which then led into cleanup time. Initially when I was teaching, this was the most chaotic time, with me urging the children to clean up wherever they were. Calling the children out of play to gather for a little story made the transition into helping to clean up much smoother.

My daily cleanup time was an integral part of learning to work together. I found that it worked best for me if everyone had a certain job they did for three to four weeks. I had chores for all of the children, often pairing an older and younger child, or two children I hoped would become friends. In this way I could help create a wonderful social weaving between the children.

Cleanup time included the chores of: putting away blocks (2 children), folding silks (2), folding big cloths/sheets (2), sweeping out the cubbies (2), filling the dish washing dish tubs (a great job for restless children to

help them learn to focus), tidying up the puppets (1-2), putting away the marble run (2), tidying up the children’s kitchen area (2), cleaning the indoor sand box (1-2), tidy the loft (1), tidy under the loft (2), other corners to tidy (2), pouring water from a pitcher into cups wjth another helper to carry the cups to each place (2). These last two would then both wipe up the drips and put a napkin at each place. I also had two cleaners who each day asked what was to be cleaned. In this way we rotated through the room and cleaned all the various areas: the loft, under the loft, the nature table, etc. One can create one’s own way of forming cleanup time, but often it is easiest if there is a consistency in how it is done.

When the children had finished their jobs, I had taught them to ask what they could do next. The younger children who finished their chores were sent to wash their hands and rest on the rug for a bit of quiet time. Some of the older children would help others or would ask to be scouts. They loved to “scout” the room for something out of place. This was a cherished job.

As we finished snack, a few children at a time were excused to wash their dishes using a dish tub, then a rinse tub and a tub for holding the bowls. A little song helped them remember the task, “Swish, swish and round about. Swish, swish and round about. Dip it once, dip it twice, turn it upside down, that’s nice.” This was a first wash, but it served as a daily practice of cleaning.

After snack we went out to recess. Two children were chosen to help wash the dishes again and two washed and dried the tables and set up the chairs for the next activity. This gave me an opportunity to work with a very small group, to encourage friendships between them or to keep them constructively involved while the other children were in the cubbies or finding their way into outside play. These helpers would then love to help with the setting up of the story time, the puppet show or the play. Again this gave me time to work in a more intimate way to develop my relationships with and between the children.

We had lunch after story time. Often some of the children would ask if they could help clean up the puppet show or play after they had finished eating. They were delighted to have this opportunity and in a few minutes, everything was back in its place. After lunch, several children would be chosen to help wash off the tables and put up the chairs. How quickly and easily the work could be done!

I realized, after many years of doing it myself, that the children could help pack away the classroom for the summer. They loved to be part of this process. I spent the last two weeks of school, having the children help me to pack up the kindergarten. We oiled all the wooden objects and carefully put them in boxes. We washed the windows and floor and all enjoyed shaking out the rugs and washing the baby doll clothes. It was music to my ears to hear them say enthusiastically, "I love to help." ♦

Barbara Kloczek taught kindergarten for 24 years at Sacramento Waldorf School. Since retiring, her passion for Waldorf education has found expression through teacher training, presenting workshops nationally and internationally, and through mentoring teachers on the West Coast. Coming to anthroposophy through Bio-dynamics, she continues to garden as well as follow her path as an artist and enjoy grand-mothering the children of her three Waldorf-educated sons.

Dancing with the Snowmaiden

— Christy Field

While attending a Waldorf Early Childhood Educational Conference in January of 2019, I spoke with a fellow educator who is working on her dissertation about the Boston Public School System. She is studying the use of dramatization of children's stories for advancing literacy in early childhood classrooms. This reminded me of a time in my life, years ago, when, as a teacher in a progressive private school, we put on class plays each year. The preparation for the plays took place over many weeks, involving set creation, costume design, memorization, and repetition. The final product was always breathtaking, but its biggest impact lay in the process of community building and learning that happened along the way. Particularly notable for me were those remarkable moments when some of the first or second graders, who had struggled to make sense of print, began to decipher their script as they acted out their lines.

Now, as a Waldorf early childhood educator, I use story dramatization in a different way, though it is equally transformative. In our classroom, the children watch the story being acted out by puppets over several days' time. Once they are very familiar with the story, we act it out during our storytelling time. The story is simply told and the children join in with the dialogue as they are able. Each day they play different characters, having opportunities to try on many roles in the story as well as to be audience members.

A recent experience with the Russian fairy tale, "The Snowmaiden," illustrated just how great an

impact this process can make on the children. The fairy tale is a complex story in which an old man and an old woman desperately wish for a child. They create a child out of snow, and the good god hears their desire and makes her alive. They love and care for the child to the best of their abilities, preparing ice porridge for her meals, allowing her to dance in the snowy yard all night and play with the village children during the day. As winter comes to an end, the Snowmaiden goes to the forest, still deep with snow, to play a game of hide and seek along with her friends. She does not want to return to the village with her friends when dusk arrives. During the night, she becomes sad and weeps bitterly for her dear little friends and longs to return home to her good mother and good father. The weeping child receives offers from three animals to take her home and she finally trusts and accepts the offer of the fox.

Once she returns home, she asks her mother and father (who are very pleased to have her back) to provide a meal for the fox, who asks for a fat hen. Here they do something "not very nice." They put a fat hen in the bag with a big black dog. As the fox goes to chase the hen, the dog chases the fox back to the forest. The old people are well-pleased with their trickery, for it enabled them to keep both their dear little Snowmaiden and their fat hen. But they find the Snowmaiden dancing very close to the fire and sadly singing, "Ah, you love me not I see; Love a chicken more than me; Back to heaven I will go; Little daughter

of the snow.” Then she floats up the chimney to the land of snow and ice. The old people grieve and wish for another chance to behave better. In our version, she does return to them next winter with her Snowmaiden friends. The children in the classroom always delight in her return.

Over many days, the children watched as I moved puppets to play out the story. After a few days, they began singing the Snowmaiden Song with me and eventually recited many of the story lines in unison. This story resonated in the hearts of everyone in the classroom. We have each desperately desired something, held on a bit too tightly, and eventually lost our treasures. The children asked for and looked forward to the story each day, expressing disappointment on days we did not share it. One day we headed out into the snowy day without telling the story in order to have more time to play in the forest. On our walk the children stopped to play, throwing clumps of snow into the rushing water below, gathering piles of snow and skating on the icy path. One child handed me a baby-sized chunk of snow. Whether he whispered it, I made it up, or the good god heard his desire and smiled down on us, I am not sure, but suddenly, this chunk of ice was our little Snowmaiden, our little white dove.

Right then and there the children brought her ice porridge and we all danced and sang her song, proceeding in a living experience right into the story. When we arrived at the part of the story where winter is coming to an end, we headed further down the path, with children singing her song along the way. We ducked into the forest near a big pine tree and began playing hide and seek just as the Sashas, Mashas, Petrushkas, and Mashutras in the story had done. Soon it was nighttime and the Snowmaiden found herself quite alone. One child held our Snowmaiden high on a rock and began to weep while a second child pretending to be a bear offered her a ride home. Only minimally prompted, the children used the exact words of dialogue from the story. A third child played the wolf. As the fox, I carried the child to her parents, who were also played by children from the class. The dog and the hen were also acted. The sad ending left us all a bit deflated until the little Snowmaiden returned with all of her friends. In the end we each held a small piece of ice and danced and sang her song, happy to be reunited.

This story can certainly be enjoyed in a single telling, but by taking our time with the story, sharing

it several times over three weeks, the children are able to absorb and integrate so much more than the basic images of the fairy tale. They have the opportunity to grasp the vocabulary and language, the order of events, the emotions of the characters, the environment in which the story takes place, and cause and effect. By dramatizing the story, they have the opportunity to take it into their very being in a holistic way. One mother shared that her daughter sang the Snowmaiden’s song to her parents at night as a bedtime song.

It is common to act our stories out within the classroom using silks and simple props to support the imaginative process. I find that this facilitates the children’s grasp of the story, and they enjoy the process. It supports their imaginative play as they are guided into the playful transformation of objects in the room, and they may surprise us with their ability to carry out a role. Acting the story out in an environment akin to that which the story takes place helps us to embrace our own environment. We notice the landscape, we see it anew through fairy-tale eyes. This lifts our gaze, helping us to notice the beauty and magic of our world. It whets our appetite for engaging in the nature around us. ♦

Resources:

- “The Snowmaiden” is included in the “Plays for Puppets and Marionettes,” by Bronja Zahlingen, available as a free ebook from the Waldorf Online Library. To download, visit waldorflibrary.org, click on “Ebooks” in the side menu, and do a title search. The story can also be found in *A Lifetime of Joy* (WECAN, 2005), an expanded version of this small booklet.

Christy Field operates her home-based RiverNorth Kindergarten in Rochester, New York. The children, ages 2-6, regularly explore the adjacent forest, which inspires their seasonal curriculum. She has studied Waldorf therapeutic support for early childhood, which she brings playfully to the children. Christy loves to spend time in nature and strives to incorporate the beauty of the natural world into her life and work.

For the Classroom

Age-Appropriate Inclusivity in Early Childhood Stories

— Jess Moore & Carolyn Harrison

Our school, Maine Coast Waldorf School, has been working on ways to be more inclusive while still upholding a developmentally appropriate curriculum. In our community we have gender-fluid children as well as many children from same-sex parents. So that they could see themselves reflected in stories, we looked for some that seemed to lend themselves to a more inclusive adaptation. In working with stories in this way, we can be sure that we are meeting the children and families of today, while penetrating the material enough to bring it in an age-appropriate way.

This spring we reworked the story of “Twiggy” to be about a gender-fluid child within a family of same-sex

parents. We questioned whether the children would be awakened by the images in the story, presented as a puppet show. Twiggy had two mothers and was a boy who wore pink and had long hair. None of the children in all of our classes had any reaction; they dreamed into the stories and characters just as we would hope.

Children are accepting of human beings that identify with different genders, sexualities and orientations. We share this story with the Early Childhood community so that you can see how we adapted this tale and can start looking at ways stories can reflect inclusivity in your classrooms.

Twiggy

— A Ukrainian Folktale, adapted by Carolyn Harrison & Jess Moore

Once upon a time there lived a woman and her wife. They were getting old and had no children of their own, so they were sad and thought “Who will look after us as we grow old?” The woman said to her wife, “Go along to the forest, my dear, fetch me a little branch, a little twig, make it fine and smooth and shape a cradle for it too. I will put the little twig in the cradle and rock it and that shall be our joy!”

At first her wife did not want to go, but the old woman kept begging, so in the end the wife agreed and went off to the woods to cut a little twig and make a cradle for it too. Then the old woman put the little twig in the cradle and sang it a song:

*Sleep my baby sleep
Soo soo soo
I shall make some soup for you
I shall make a little stew
Sleep my baby sleep
Soo soo soo*

She cradled it till the evening and when they got up the next morning, lo, the little twig had come to life and was a little child. The two old women were so pleased and, as the child was so small, they called him Twiggy.

Little Twiggy grew and prospered, and was so pretty that they never tired of looking at him.

As Twiggy was growing up he said, “Mother dears, will you make for me a golden boat, please? I shall go out on the stream and catch some fish and thereby nourish you.” The old mothers made for him a golden boat and together they carried it to the riverside.

Twiggy got into the boat and went rowing along and singing:

*Rowing in my little boat
On the shining waves afloat,
Catching fish from water clear,
For my Mothers old and dear.*



When he had caught some fish, he brought them home and then went out rowing again.

The old woman used to bring him food and said, "Listen to me, Twiggy: whenever I call you, come to the bank, but should a stranger call, just keep rowing."

So the time passed; the old woman cooked the dinner, she carried it to the riverbank and called: "Come to the bank, my Twiggy dear. Come, for dinner time is here."

Twiggy heard her and spoke to his little boat, "Swim, little boat, swim to the bank, for mother has brought my mid-day meal." He rowed to the bank and ate and drank. Then he pushed his little boat into the water again and went on fishing.

One day, however, a snake heard his mother calling, and it slid down to the riverbank and called with a full voice:

"Come to the bank, my Twiggy dear, Come, for dinner time is here."

Twiggy lifted his head and listened. "That is not my dear mother's voice; swim little boat, swim on." He went on rowing in his golden boat.

But the snake went along to the blacksmith and said, "Smith, take a hammer and make my voice as fine as Twiggy's mother's voice." This the blacksmith did and the snake slid back to the riverbank and called:

"Come to the bank, my Twiggy dear. Come, for dinner time is here."

When Twiggy heard the fine voice he thought it was really his mother, and he turned his boat round

calling, "Swim, swim to the bank, my golden boat, for my mother dear has brought my dinner."

So he landed his boat and the snake pulled him out of the boat and wanted to swallow him. But Twiggy was very quick and climbed up into a tree. The snake tried to gnaw through the stem of the tree and with its sharp teeth gnawed and gnawed. Now the tree was nearly falling over with Twiggy on it! But just then a goose was flying past and Twiggy called up to it:

*Goose, oh help me please, I pray,
Quickly carry me away,
Through the storms and through the clouds
Home into my mother's house!*

And lo and behold the goose, who had hardly any breath left herself, took Twiggy along. He sat on her back and his heart was beating, for she was flying very low. The snake stretched and wanted to snatch Twiggy, but the snake could not get hold of him. He was saved.

The goose carried him and seated him on the garden wall, while she herself rested awhile in the yard. Twiggy on the garden wall heard everything that was going on inside the house. Mother was baking little cookies; she took them out of the oven and said, "Here my good old wife, one cookie for you and one for me." So Twiggy called from outside, "And what about me?"

"There's someone else wants a cookie," the old mother said. She went to the window and whom did she see but their Twiggy, sitting on the garden wall.

So both the old women ran outside, took their Twiggy by the hands and were ever so pleased.

Then the old woman saw the goose in the yard and called out, "What a splendid goose—I will take and roast it!"

"Oh no, dear mother, don't do that; rather give her some food, for, but for this goose, I would not be with you now."

He told all that had happened, and they gave the goose good food and drink, so she could get her strength back and could fly away.

As for Twiggy, he lived with his Mothers, went fishing in his golden boat, and never again would listen to a false voice. ♦

Resources:

- The original version of "Twiggy" can be found in *Let Us Form a Ring* (Acorn Hill Waldorf Nursery and Kindergarten; available from WECAN).

Jess Moore has been grades and early childhood teacher, board member and College chair at both Maine Coast Waldorf School and Seacoast Waldorf School. This year marks her twelfth as Lead teacher in the Sunflower Kindergarten. Her professional interests include studying and innovating the Waldorf Curriculum and meeting the changing needs of today's children and their families.

Carolyn Harrison has been a part of the White Mountain Waldorf community for the past seventeen years as a parent, board member and kindergarten teacher. While teaching for a year at the Maine Coast Waldorf School, she had the privilege of working with her early childhood colleagues, investing deep interest in studying and developing a curriculum which focused upon diversity and inclusion.

Two Fingerplays

— Rachel Lee Cruz

These can be especially useful whenever a group of children needs settling.

There once was a little piggy

Hold up one finger and push up nose on the word "piggy"

Who was very, very fat!

Hold arms out in front, touch fingers together

He liked to waddle down the street

Keep arms out in front and move side-so-side

Going this way and then that

Point across chest in one direction and then use other hand to point in the other direction

He came upon a little frog

Hold one hand with palm open and put other closed hand on top

Who when sitting, just sat

Startled by the hefty pig

Froggy jumped and went splat!

Take both hands and slap them on your lap

Off he swam to a lily pad

Use two fingers like kicking legs of a frog and move them towards open-palm hand

And hopped up on his mat.

"Jump" closed frog hand onto open-palm hand

And there he sits, to this day

Because when sitting, he just sat.

Settling for snack/lunch time—

First was the rice,

Hot and ready.

Then came the soup.

Hold the bowl steady.

Where are the buns?

In my tummy

Warm and chewy

Oh, so yummy.

Now for the beans

With cheese and chips.

Here comes the spoon

Straight to my lips.

Last is the porridge with apples divine.

Please, a little syrup, to be so kind.

With all this food

What should I do?

I'd like to share it

Now with you.

Hold up one finger

Fan hand for "hot" and nod head for "ready"

Cup both hands together like a bowl

Hold hands out like buns and shrug shoulders

Point to tummy with two fingers

Rub hands together

Circle hands over tummy

Hold up one finger on "now"

Clap hand together, clap lap

Motion spoon to lips

Motion eating out of bowl

Motion pouring syrup

Spread hands out with palms up

Shrug shoulders

Cross hands over heart on "I"

Keep hands together and offer them out

Rachel Lee Cruz is a student in the Sound Circle Early childhood teacher training in Washington state and works at the Wind Song Waldorf School in Spokane, WA. She shared these original verses at a recent training session to the delight of all listeners and watchers.

Reading the Signs of the Times

Literacy Learning in the Waldorf Early Childhood Classroom

— Astrid Lackner

Note from the Editor—This article by Astrid Lackner is being reprinted from the previous issue of Gateways, Issue 76, with sincere apology. The authorship was misattributed and we wish to thank and honor Astrid for this contribution and for the gracious and generous way she responded to this editorial error.

In Waldorf education, as teachers we continuously seek to find ways to bridge our knowledge practices of education with the language of mainstream education. Recently, I attended a Waldorf early childhood conference and had many good conversations with colleagues and friends. During a lunch debate, I overheard a well-seasoned Waldorf educator respond to an enquiry coming from a curious mainstream kindergarten teacher: “What do you do about reading and writing in kindergarten?” was her question. My colleague answered: “Oh, not much. We leave that up to the grades.”

I was taken aback. It astonished me to hear a Waldorf educator not proclaim the important work we undertake. Too often I hear, “All you do in early childhood is bake and sweep.” I believe it is time that we stand up and learn to express ourselves eloquently when speaking about our curriculum.

Literacy education, which is practiced so richly in Waldorf kindergartens, is one concrete place where we can start. I was fortunate enough to attend a mainstream “emergent literacy” course this past spring that really helped me put into words what we already know and do. I would like now to share what I have learned.

Literacy taught in a Waldorf kindergarten is based on the emergent literacy model. This means that children are always learning language in many different ways. Embraced in a warm, loving kindergarten environment, children experience, among many other things, a language-arts rich program. We offer oral stories, rhymes, riddles and songs that teach

syntax, structure, and word order. All these language offerings also teach phonological awareness, the term used to indicate exploring language and sounds. Through phonological awareness we can identify and manipulate units of sounds and whole words.

Literacy learning in Waldorf Schools is also intertwined with other experiences, such as gesture and movement as means for self-expression and for a wide variety of sensory encounters. Therefore, we are able to meet children in the many different styles in which they learn. In imaginative ways children manipulate and explore symbols, thus gaining insight into the meaning of diverse signs (i.e. a picture in place of a name tag, a pinecone whose absence tells us that someone is in the bathroom, and much more). We offer opportunities for three-dimensional presentations while working with bread dough, beeswax and sand. In our weekly rhythms, children are engaged in artistic experiences, such as drawing and painting. These countless “multimodal ways” of learning literature are the source of creativity and joy and are fundamental to later reading and writing abilities.

In a Waldorf early childhood classroom, children not only learn literacy and language arts in multimodal ways but also the social contexts of a Waldorf School. We are especially fortunate to have strong school communities, which provide cultural context for our children. Families, administrators and teachers take part in community life through picnics, dinners, school celebrations, craft circles, work parties, and much more. Through these activities we share in meaningful, common experiences and build relationships and cultural contexts in which our children are firmly rooted. As teachers, being sensitive to the manifold families from diverse cultures and backgrounds enables us to teach a culturally relevant curriculum.

One of the greatest gifts to our children is that we tell stories. When a story is told, rather than read, the narrative is not necessarily culturally

bound. Therefore, a story that is told will offer the possibility to all children to identify themselves with the main characters. In children's imagination, the characters in the narrative can be of any skin shade or culture and can be experienced as all-inclusive if our picturing of the scenes we describe is universal and inclusive in our own minds. We see, therefore, that by paying attention to the current terminology that is used in the mainstream, we are able to meet and exceed the expectations of literacy learning taught in public schools.

This outline of our literacy education describes only a small portion of what stands behind our curriculum. We need to deepen our own understanding of what stands behind the well-known activities in Waldorf

early childhood. We are professionals in the field of early childhood. We need to be able to articulate all facets of our work in a competent manner. Learning this mainstream vocabulary and expanding our own consciousness of the great substance that stands behind our work is our present and future task. ♦

Astrid Lackner *has been teaching preschool and parent/child classes at the Squamish Waldorf School for many years. She is passionate about storytelling and inspired by the manifold imaginations with which children try to make sense of the world. She is also a WECAN Regional Representative from British Columbia.*

Teacher Self-care

— Kathy Rinden

Waldorf early childhood teachers take on a special role in the lives of young children and their families. Great attention and effort is given to many areas within the role of teacher. The rooms to which we invite children and families are designed to be imbued with warmth, love, and beauty. Classroom materials are chosen and often made with great care as to how such items will affect the development of the young child. The rhythm of the day, week, and seasons comes into our consciousness in a deep way, so as to result in routines that will promote health and provide support.

In our daily work with the children, we spend time and careful thought in bringing activities that we hope will serve the children in the best way possible, and in telling stories and performing puppet shows to bolster the children's soul life. Teachers work diligently to make the right choices within the curriculum for each constellation of children in their care, year after year.

Parent work is of great importance in these early years, and educators in early childhood programs not only work to "hold" the children during the school day, but to find thoughtful ways to bring basic aspects of child development in the light of anthroposophy to

the parents through conferences, parent meetings, and individual conversations.

As Rudolf Steiner developed the first Waldorf School, one hundred years ago, he envisioned the need for teachers to be involved in every aspect of school life, helping with administrative duties. While this is a great honor and responsibility, extra meetings and committee work take much additional time, which can result in a further taxing of one's etheric forces.

While there is indeed a great deal of reward in doing this work to the best of our abilities each day, we need to become aware of how this earnest striving to serve young children, their families, colleagues, and the school takes a toll on our own personal lives and health. How can we refresh ourselves on a regular basis so as to sustain longevity for this work? Where can we find guidance in strategies to rejuvenate ourselves, thus preserving our love for and ability to participate in this educational movement?

Luckily, Rudolf Steiner has given us some very valuable insights to consider in his description of the Pedagogical Law within his book, *Education for Special Needs* (also known as "The Curative

Course”), and his lectures on “Faith, Love, and Hope: The Third Revelation,” given December 2-3 1911 in Nuremberg. Both of these sources provide fundamental anthroposophical information that confirms the importance of teacher self-care.

In the Pedagogical Law, Steiner shares his insight into how the teacher’s ego, astral, and etheric bodies work to support and develop the four bodies (physical, etheric, astral, and ego) of the child.

Any one member of the being of man is influenced by the next higher member (from whatever quarter it approaches) and only under such influence can that member develop satisfactorily. Thus, whatever is to be effective for the development of the physical body must be living in the Etheric body – in an Etheric body. Whatever is to be effective for the development of an Etheric body must be living in an astral body. Whatever is to be effective for the development of an astral body must be living in an ego; and an ego can be influenced only by what is living in a spirit-self.

A diagram is added to further clarify what the Pedagogical Law is expressing.

Child	Teacher
Physical Body	Etheric Body
Etheric Body	Astral Body
Astral Body	Ego
Ego	Spirit-self

Thus it can be seen how the teacher works to influence the proper and healthy development of the child through his or her own forces. But how does this come into play as a guide to a teacher’s own need for self-care?

The Pedagogical Law helps us to see how we can work in the realm of our own personal self-development. Parents and teachers understand how much young children under the age of seven pull on the adult’s etheric forces each day, while they are creating and defining their own physical bodies. Children at this stage require caregivers who can provide regular and consistent rhythms, health-giving nutrition, and plenty of opportunities for vital sleep in order to grow and thrive. As the providers of these

forces, we must continually focus on maintaining these capacities within ourselves. When our own strength is compromised, we have little to provide to the child. How can we expect to give to others when we have not replenished our wells? If what we have to offer the child is not rich with life forces, we then become withered and dry.

Thus it is imperative for us to commit to taking the time to make sure that our own etheric forces are full of nourishment. This becomes a path of self-development and discovery to learn what will restore and maintain us. Steiner suggests the importance of the gift of humor to sustain our personal etheric capacities. He is quick to clarify that humor is not that of cynicism or sarcasm, but true humor that lifts, lightens, and comforts. We need next to bring our efforts of self-development into the area of our astral and ego bodies. Our astral bodies can be further developed through the practice of balancing our antipathies and sympathies, creating greater empathy for what the child is going through. This is accomplished by developing a real interest in the child and through learning to truly observe, in equanimity, what the children are showing the teacher in their movements, speech, and actions. When a teacher can see, with balanced compassion, what a child is expressing, then there develops the capacity within the teacher for greater understanding and knowledge of the child. This interest living within the astral body can then be warmed by our ego, leading to vigorous enthusiasm for our work with the child and family.

In 1911, Rudolf Steiner gave a lecture entitled, “Faith, Love, and Hope: The Third Revelation,” in which he provides a picture of the crucial value of these three forces in every human being’s earthly life.

Faith, love, hope, constitute three stages in the essential being of man; they are necessary for health and for life as a whole, for without them we cannot exist. Just as work cannot be done in a dark room until light is obtained, it is equally impossible for a human being to carry on in his threefold nature if his three sheaths are not permeated, warmed through, and strengthened by faith, love, and hope.

How can we work to bring faith, love, and hope into our daily lives, thus enlivening our astral, etheric, and physical bodies?

I suggest that we can make a concerted effort to think in terms of how and what we choose to believe and practice. Do we choose to walk towards an attitude of hope each morning as we awaken to a new day? How can we truly thrive in our day-to-day existence if we do not choose to bring a feeling of hope into our vision for the future? Because we have free will, I believe that we also have the ability to choose our thoughts and actions. We are capable of filling ourselves with positivity, joy, and openness to possibilities in our daily outlook. Humor, warmth, and comfort can color our point of view. It is very important that we see that this practice is not selfish, but rather giving first to ourselves those qualities we wish to share with others. Find out what nourishes you.

We can then extend ourselves outward in love by showing deep interest in others and in the world around us. How can we accomplish this? Find something that interests you that is beyond yourself. Open yourself to travel or study beyond your own culture and nation. Become involved, on some level, with an organization that you feel is doing important work. Learn a new skill, such as a language, craft, art, music, cooking. Create and care for a garden, or become involved in a local community organization. Find out what it is in you that sparks interest outside of yourself.

Now we come to the quality and practice of faith. As we move through dark and difficult times, can we maintain our values and beliefs in the face of cynicism, doubt, and despair? Each time we practice such faithfulness, we defy negativity, skepticism,

and despondency. Instead we choose to imbue our thinking, feeling, and willing with sustained resolve. Find clarity in what you value, believe, and hold true. In his article, "Working with the Pedagogical Law," Cornelius Pietzner describes faithfulness as a conscious daily activity.

This aspect of faith has an active quality of steadfastness and perseverance. It is a conscious willing effort, and has the character of 'wrestling' to hold onto the higher image in moments of darkness. Faithfulness is a striving. How many times can the apparent vicissitudes of a budding and boisterous astrality call on us to hold this higher image, and, from the balancing force of ego, wrestle for serenity, peace, and clarity? This is a wonderful picture for us, yet one we must practice ever and again!

Thus we can now clearly see that the health and development of others lies first in our own self-development and transformation. Self-care and our sense of wellbeing are crucial components in fully maintaining our own ego, astral, etheric, and physical bodies. Receiving and giving go hand in hand to promote balance in healthy living. Perhaps now, we can reframe the need for self-care as not a selfish activity, but rather a necessary part of our teacher preparation. Through the knowledge of the Pedagogical Law and the practice of faith, love, and hope, we can begin to create better balance for ourselves, thereby enriching the lives of our own families, and of those to whom we dedicate our work. ♦



Waldorf 100 International Waldorf Early Childhood Conference

— Nancy Blanning

In mid-April 2019, 1100 Waldorf early childhood educators from more than sixty countries met joyfully at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland for an international educators' gathering. It was a privilege to be a part of the first major event in a year-long series of large, international gatherings and local events celebrating 100 years of Waldorf education in school communities across the globe. Teachers were truly radiant as they encountered colleagues from around the world who work in dramatically different geographies, climates, cultures, religions, and economies. Each attendee could hardly believe the

good fortune of being one of the lucky teachers who got to participate in this gathering and feel this kinship.

The conference was not only a looking-back to acknowledge the accomplishments of 100 years. This anniversary is also seen as a threshold moment leading into the next century for our educational movement. Questions abound. What is essential to Waldorf education that calls to be carried forward? What has become custom and habit that needs re-evaluation and renewal? What are the universal threads that are applicable to every setting, culture, ethnicity, and religion? Where must there be acceptance of different



forms and flexibility to support and honor all of our global Waldorf communities?

At the forefront of all these questions, the major theme of the keynote presentations and discussion groups was building healthy social life within our communities. It is clear that the world has rifts of discord and strife between governments, nations, and racial and ethnic groups. In our schools, we are not immune to disagreements and differing points of view. It is normal and healthy to have affinities for certain people and ideas, but we want to be vigilant that we do not split into factions that cannot tolerate each other's thinking.

To find space within ourselves to tolerate and honor each other's differences takes conscious self-development. Here is where gratitude needs to be mentioned. In *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, lecture six, part of the preparatory reading for this conference, Rudolf Steiner mentions several fundamental virtues that "must be seen against the background of society in general." The first and foremost of these virtues is gratitude.

Feeling thankful to the natural world for its freshness, beauty, and renewing energies is relatively easy. This can be a first step toward building a

"thankfulness muscle" within ourselves to feel gratitude toward other people as well. Everyone is striving to contribute to life in different ways, but it can be challenging to look with enough warmed interest toward others to honor their contributions with our gratitude. Experiencing our gratitude toward the contributions of others is the foundation of a healthy social life in any community. This must occur first before steps toward more subtle virtues can be taken.

This theme was explored by collaborative teams of two speakers with each keynote, one a female Waldorf early childhood educator and the other a male speaker from Waldorf upper school teaching or a related anthroposophic vocation. They all presented different pictures of experiencing gratitude toward and honoring others for their contribution to our work with and on behalf of children.

Parents, the sun and moon of the children's lives, were brought to our attention in every presentation. Life is so busy, and we become so concentrated in our work with the children each day, that we can develop unintentional blinders that interfere with seeing the blessedness which surrounds the children through the care, sacrifice, and loving concern of their parents. Life-style differences encouraged by our fast-paced,

technological age can become points of contention if we are not conscious of the gratitude we owe to one another. Rather than contention, we should strive for conversation and openness to other points of view.

All children—and especially young children—learn through what they see and feel the adults around them do. They learn respect by seeing adults act with sincere respect toward others. They learn kindness by seeing acts of generosity bestowed on others. They learn gratitude by seeing and feeling appreciation bestowed toward what each person is contributing to the whole. Gratitude, as Steiner explains, is the first

step toward developing all the other virtues that build a healthy social life.

These thoughts were the gifts of this remarkable conference. It was expressed again and again—both by teachers for whom this was the first visit to the Goetheanum and by those fortunate enough to have made previous visits—that this conference felt particularly blessed. The sense of warmth, richness, and dedication to working with young children filled and surrounded the global community who had come together to unite “with single purpose” on behalf of the children of the world. ♦

Reflections on the conference by participants

— Adrienne Doucette, Wendy Weinrich & Anke Scheinfeld

It was an honor and a privilege to attend the International Early Childhood Conference this past spring. I “bunked” on the floor of a classroom in the high school science and math wing of the Rudolf Steiner School with a room full of colleagues from around the world. This arrangement allowed many opportunities to meet and share stories with my fellow colleagues while riding the shuttle bus daily to and from the conference and during morning chats over coffee in the cafeteria. Surprisingly, this turned out to be one of the highlights of my experience!

Other highlights were the opening and closing events of the conference. Susan Howard, Philipp Reubke, and Stephanie Alon stood at the podium in the colorful main hall of the Goetheanum and conducted the international roll call of participants. This exciting and joyful experience reminded me of the opening ceremony at the Olympics, with smiling, cheering and waving. The country flags were missing, though there were plenty of scarves.

The final evening was presentation of artistic offerings from many countries. As well as beauty and artistry, much humor and laughter were shared. A raffle of traditionally-dressed, hand-made dolls from around the world was held, and the dolls bestowed upon lucky winners who would carry them to new homes across the globe. The evening ended with everyone processing around the outside of

the Goetheanum with lit tea candles in hand while quietly reflecting on our 100-year Waldorf history and envisioning the next hundred years to come. Beautiful song began wafting through the crowd of over a thousand people.

The conference content of collaborative keynote presentations, workshops and discussion groups were inspiring and nourishing. One theme focused on working respectfully and collaboratively with parents. How can we work toward a mutual understanding between teachers and parents on the child’s behalf?

A second theme emphasized was the urgent need to protect free play for children. The recent passing of Joan Almon, devoted advocate for the young child’s right to play, calls forth the question of how we can carry this torch and protect play in early childhood. I ask myself: how much time do I give to uninterrupted, free play, how much time outdoors or in nature? Where can I simplify and provide more open-ended and raw materials for play?

This conference served as a reminder that we are never alone. Though we came from different corners of the world with varied settings and unique challenges, the conference allowed us to experience how much we share, united in our love and care for the children of the world. Human beings want to do good deeds and bring goodness into the world. May it be so! ♦

~ Adrienne Doucette



My first view of the Goetheanum was after 24 hours of travel. We accepted a ride from our airbnb host, and as we arrived at the west door he said, “The Temple!” And there it was on top of the hill in the middle of Dornach where he had grown up. It was always there for him, but this was my first glimpse of the building that I had only heard about and seen in photographs. Those pictures did not convey the power of the architecture, nor the size of the building. We found our way to registration, but were too late for the first lecture of the conference. We were not too late for dinner! After dinner we walked around the outside of the building just as the full moon was rising. What a sight to behold.

I did a lot of beholding in the next five days as I wandered around the quaint neighborhoods and gardens, with a twenty-minute hike up the hill each morning. I did a lot of beholding as I listened to the lectures and then processed them in the discussion groups, which I found very meaningful and helpful. I felt both instantly at home and also in a very foreign land, where many, many other languages were being spoken. So many countries were represented, so many early childhood teachers who shared many of the same values and views on the needs of young children. I met a teacher from New York City, just 100 miles from where I live. I met another from Prague, one from Nairobi, and Russia, and Israel, and so many others.

The pace was manageable as the days flowed one into the other. I found myself connecting with old friends and meeting new friends, all the time aware of the theme of “Social Responsibility: Finding Ways into a Human Future.” We are doing this by building communities worldwide.

When the last night’s talent show moved me to tears I knew that I had come home. I had found my tribe and celebrated with my sisters and brothers as we, all 1100 of us, walked around the Goetheanum carrying candles to commemorate the one-hundredth birthday of Waldorf Education.

I feel so grateful to have had this experience and to be able to carry it to my community in my little school here in upstate New York. My work with my colleagues, with my staff, and with my parent body has been greatly enriched. My destiny has become clearer than ever. ♦

*The wishes of the soul are springing,
The deeds of the will are thriving,
The fruits of life are maturing.
I feel my destiny,
My destiny finds me.
I feel my star,
My star finds me.
I feel my goals in life,
My goals in life are finding me.*

My soul and the great world are one.

*Life grows more radiant about me,
Life grows more arduous for me,
Life grows more abundant within me.*

— Rudolf Steiner, *Verses and Meditations*

~ Wendy Weinrich



Everything was new, yet intimately familiar. Meeting so many others from all over the world who also have a deep interest in the work with young children and in the questions and struggles of our time was reassuring. In the “Sozialwerkstatt” (social laboratory) of this conference, language no longer appeared to be a hindrance, as nonverbal communication and a way of “knowing” the other took over. And there was always someone present to translate what could not be said without words. Taking part in a workshop where five different languages were spoken at the same time opened a new dimension. Differences in opinions and cultural backgrounds clearly revealed themselves as forces for creative encounters and possibilities for evolution.

The inner work found its reflection in the outer environment. Even the natural forces aligned themselves with the progression of the conference. A cool and misty weather gave gradually way to a clear blue sky and the warming sun. Nature awakened and unfolded, as did the creative impulses in lectures, workshops, conversations and celebrations. Each day was filled with innumerable meaningful meetings facilitated by the space itself. ♦

~ Anke Schienfeld

Adrienne Doucette is a long-time early childhood educator currently teaching preschool and parent/child classes in Bellingham, WA at the Whatcom Hills Waldorf School. She is a member of the WECAN Board. Adrienne is interested in and inspired to work toward building healthy, respectful relationships with children, their parents, and with colleagues.

Wendy Weinrich is founder and director of Mountaintop Waldorf School in Saugerties, NY where she teaches a mixed-age kindergarten (3-6 years) and a weekly Parent/Child class. Using her Waldorf therapeutic EC training and elements of Dance/Movement Therapy, she offers healthy movement opportunities for the children. She is continually striving to expand ways to support young children and their parents.

Anke Schienfeld is a lead kindergarten teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City. She has particular interest in deeply penetrating to the essences of Waldorf education and representing these in the classroom. Working warmly and honorably with parents is also a priority.

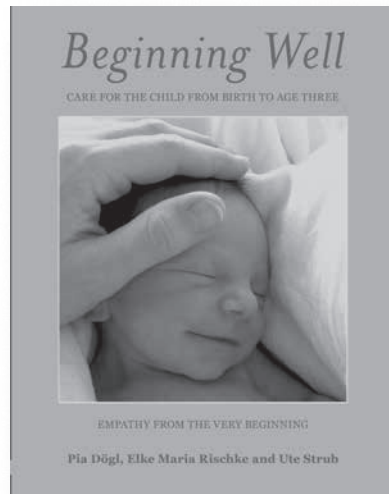
Book Reviews

Beginning Well

**By Pia Dogel, Elke Maria Rischke
and Ute Strub (WECAN, 2018)
Reviewed by Magdalena Toran**

Beginning Well is the resource that parents and others who care for children from birth to three have long needed. With warmth and clarity, the authors give essential insights into the needs and care of the very young child. The insights they share have been gained in their practice of working with the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and the developmental theories of Dr. Emmi Pikler. The authors founded and worked together in a home for neglected children in Berlin, Germany.

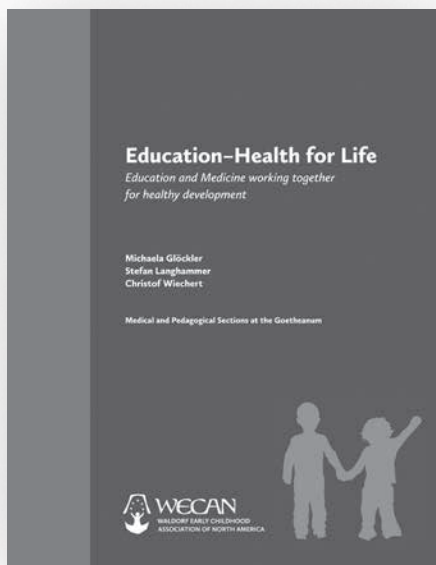
Beginning Well begins, as all parenting resources should, with an acknowledgment that there is no one “right way” to raise a child. It goes on to say, “It is important that you feel and act authentically so you can develop a good relationship with your child.” It is well known that the most important thing you can do in working with parents is to help them feel joy and confidence in their parenting. When parents feel secure, their child thrives. Meeting adults with openness, trust,



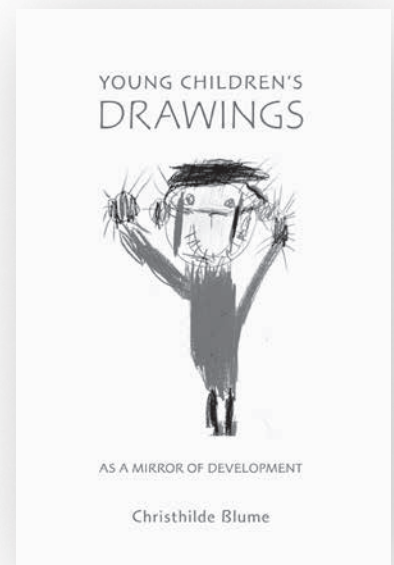
and warmth is the first step in being able to share the insights gained as an educator.

Beginning Well is divided into chapters by age of the child—the newborn, the first year, second year, and third year. It covers essential topics including preparing for a baby’s arrival, developing a relationship with the baby, weaning, baby wearing, sleep, feeding baby, and self-awareness of the adult. Many topics are addressed in very

clear ways: motor development, development of free-play, social behavior, development of the will, physical care as the foundation for healthy attachment, play materials, conflict with children, aggression, throwing, and talking with your child. Each chapter is full of beautiful color photographs depicting the text. These photos are very helpful in conveying the mood of the young child, the joy and confidence that emerges from freedom of movement within a loving care relationship. ♦



More new books from WECAN



Supporting the Sense of Life: Nurturing well-being in children and the adults who care for them

Edited by Nancy Blanning
(WECAN, 2019)

Reviewed by Laura Mason

In February 2014, WECAN began a three-year series of East Coast conferences on the sense of life (also referred to as the sense of well-being). The keynote lectures from these conferences are published here in one book. Those of us focusing on the four lower senses as we work in early childhood settings know how difficult it can be to grasp the sense of life. This compilation of lectures from five speakers, as well as Nancy Blanning's introduction tying them all together, is a gift for educators who are trying to better understand how to support children in developing a healthy life sense as we also nurture our own sense of well-being.

The book begins with Nancy Blanning's introduction, which gives a brief overview of the senses and summarizes the lectures, beautifully tying them all together in easily understandable language. We then dive into the 2014 lectures, given by three different speakers.

First, Susan Weber imagines early childhood educators to be "guardians of the elixirs of life." The four elixirs she describes are: the life forces of growth and development, the seven life processes, the life sense, and finally, the Christ impulse. Susan beautifully conveys the sacred quality of our work with very young children and the opportunity we have to humanize and spiritualize everything we do. She describes how taking deep interest in the other, being truly present, and imbuing our actions with intention, love and joy, support the child's sense of life.

The following lecture by Ruth Ker is peppered with delightful anecdotes of children in her class and family and is accompanied by photos of children at work and play. These stories and images bring the sense of well-being to life, making the topic much more accessible to practicing educators, who surely have many similar stories of their own. Ruth also provides practical examples of how to support the life sense and describes how the nervous system acts as an organ for this sense.



In the final 2014 lecture, Patricia Rubano very effectively uses humor to convey the importance of self-development. Sharing her thoughts about the fairy tale "The Donkey," she helps us to see how we can work with archetypes in stories to better understand our own biographies. Her practical thoughts on biography work and her description of Steiner's basic exercises inspire us to do our own inner work and through finding ourselves, find others.

The 2015 keynote speaker was Dr. Adam Blanning. His lectures explore how we use our other senses to tap into,

connect with, and balance the sense of life. Dr. Blanning considers the example of infants to demonstrate a progression through other senses first—taste, smell, touch, balance, and self-movement—that leads to a sense of well-being. We then see how as children grow older they develop a variety of healthy pathways through the senses to this place of security and contentment. In his final lecture, Dr. Blanning explains how we can bring this understanding into our work with children and what we can do to support them.

Finally, Barbara Baldwin's 2016 lectures help us understand the life sense through the theme of Point and Periphery. Barbara's depth of knowledge of Steiner's work on this topic is evident in her lectures. She makes clear our role as educators is to "hold" the periphery for young children as they learn how to move from themselves to the other (the world outside themselves) and back again with less support. She shares examples of children who struggle and suggests ways to help them come into balance. The resources provided with Barbara's lectures are rich and include Steiner's meditations on point and periphery, as well as diagrams of the twelve senses and the nervous system. Barbara closes emphasizing the importance of caring for ourselves as caregivers and provides a description of Raphael's masterpiece depicting the Transfiguration of Christ as a beautiful image of point and periphery to inspire us.

The sense of life is perhaps the most mysterious of the senses. This book contains several unique perspectives that together bring clarity to a complicated topic. One is sure to find something new and inspiring to work with in its pages. ♦

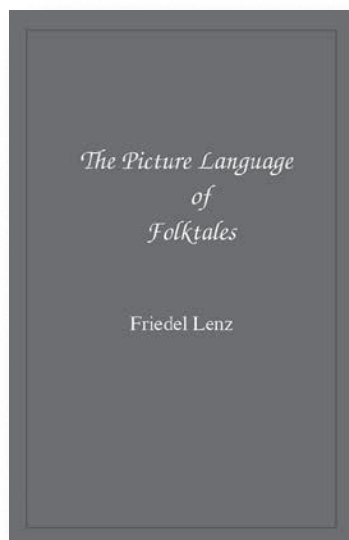
The Picture Language of Folktales

**By Friedel Lenz,
translated from
the German by
Clopper Almon
Reviewed by
Nancy Blanning**

Many excellent resources are available to Waldorf teachers regarding folk and fairy tales. We tell these traditional stories in our classes because research (both anthroposophical and mainstream) confirms that there are important, symbolic pictures in these stories that illuminate mysteries of human development. Young children live in a picture consciousness, carried with them as they come from the spiritual world. Their souls resonate with the images these tales describe, which reassure children that their human journey upon the earth is divinely guided and purposeful. Achieving wholeness of the different aspects of their being is the task before them. The princess and prince—the soul and spirit of the single individual—will be united in marriage and will reign in the royal kingdom.

A quotation from Wilhelm Grimm, included in the preface to *The Picture Language of Folktales*, states this poetically: “All folktales have in common that they ... speak of supersensible things in pictures. These pictures are like fragments of a shattered jewel that lie strewn on the ground overgrown with grass and flowers. Only the sharpest eye can discover them. Their meaning is long lost but can still be felt and gives the folktales their substance. At the same time, these stories satisfy the natural longing for the Wonderful...” Friedel Lenz was one who was able to see the jewels and share understanding of them with others.

Who was she? Born in 1897 in Bavaria, she became part of the back-to-nature youth movement



in the first part of the century. After her marriage in 1920, she and her husband became acquainted with Waldorf education and anthroposophy. They became increasingly involved in anthroposophical endeavors, her husband becoming a Christian Community priest. The rise of Nazism and the events of the Second World War brought tragedy to Friedel with the death of her husband and two daughters. (The tender and sad details are explained in the book's introduction.) She and two sons survived, and she had to create a new life and a means of supporting herself and her children. She had a life-long love for traditional tales, from Russia all the way to Ireland. Through the insights gleaned from anthroposophy, she became a highly regarded

interpreter of European folk and fairy tales, a noted lecturer, and a teller of tales internationally. She died in 1970, working on this book up to her last days.

The book includes consideration of twenty-five traditional tales from the Grimms' collection. Many are familiar from the telling of tales in our kindergartens, such as “Little Red Cap,” “The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids,” “The Donkey,” and “Sweet Porridge.” Each tale receives separate consideration. The story is told in segments, with pauses for commentary and elucidation. Though we know these tales well on some levels, Friedel Lenz's commentary opens up new appreciation for the beauty, subtlety of the images, and the unfolding journey toward wholeness that these stories picture. After reading this book, the stories now resonate within me in an expanded way. The capacity to tell these stories with deepened conviction of their truthfulness has been made possible through Friedel Lenz's guidance.

With all the many other folktale resources that are available, this book deserves serious consideration for your research pile. Thank you to Clopper Almon for his dedication to making it available at last in English.

This self-published volume can be found by searching on the internet. ♦

Calendar of Events

Personal and Professional Development

October 19, 2019, Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor, MI. Great Lakes Regional Conference: "Soothing Anxiety and Fear in Childhood." Guest Speaker: Kim John Payne. For more information contact gladstoneangela@gmail.com

November 8-9, 2019, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY. 2019 Teachers Conference: "Addressing Sensory Development in the School-Age Child: Approaching the Twelve Senses as an Essential Tool for Teachers." Keynote speaker: Adam Blanning, MD. For educators and anyone interested in children and Waldorf Education. For more information, visit www.sunbridge.edu or contact Barbara Vitale at info@sunbridge.edu / 845-425-0055 x20.

Saturday, November 16, 2019, Tamarack Waldorf School, Milwaukee, WI. Great Lakes Regional Conference: Wilma Ellersiek's Hand Gesture Games and exploring the foundational senses with Lynn St. Pierre. For further information contact martha.flores@tamarackwaldorf.org and jane.danner@tamarackwaldorf.org

January 24-25, 2020, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY. Experiential workshop on the foundations and fundamentals of Waldorf Education from early childhood through high school. For more information, visit www.sunbridge.edu or contact Barbara Vitale at info@sunbridge.edu / 845-425-0055 x20.

February 7-9, 2020, Green Meadow Waldorf School, Spring Valley, NY. WECAN East Coast Early Childhood Educators Conference with Lisa Romero on "The Art of Educating – Individuality and Community." Visit www.waldorfearlychildhood.org for more information

February 14-16, 2020, Cedarwood Waldorf School, Portland, OR. WECAN Pacific Northwest Early Childhood Educators Conference with Dr. Adam Blanning on Understanding the Developmental Unfolding of a Child. Visit www.waldorfearlychildhood.org for more information

June 22-26, 2020, Chicago Waldorf School, Chicago, IL. Waldorf 100 Conference: "Learn to Change the World." The conference is the culmination of the year-long festivities celebrating 100 years of Waldorf education worldwide. Keynote speakers Orland Bishop, Monique Marshall, Florian Osswald. AWSNA, WECAN and APWE invite you and your colleagues to join us in celebrating our past and planning for the future. For more information, contact Connie Stokes, cstokes@awsna.org