

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 78, Spring 2020

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285 Hungry Hollow Road
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(845) 352-1690 / Fax (845) 352-1695
info@waldorfearlychildhood.org
www.waldorfearlychildhood.org

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Editor Nancy Blanning
Editorial Advisor Susan Howard
Administrator Melissa Lyons
Publications Coordinator Donna Miele
Copy Editing Lory Widmer
Layout Jennifer Siegrist/Calliope Creative
Cover Art Angela Koconda

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About the Cover Artist:

Angela Koconda grew up in Switzerland. She attended the Rudolf Steiner School in Basel, was a eurythmist at the Goetheanum, and remains active in training. Since childhood she was fascinated by colors and shapes. Her illustrations have been beloved for many years among Waldorf educators, children, and parents.





Drawing by Jack Voss

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Waldorf education is approaching the culmination of its one-hundredth anniversary. Events have been held around the globe, celebrating the spread of this deeply rich, humane education to far corners of the earth. Our mandate as educators is to support each individual child's development in wholeness of body, soul, and spirit. Doing so benefits not only the individual, but the whole of society by bringing us toward creating a healthy social life. There is truly much to celebrate.

Waldorf education also stands at a threshold upon entering into its second century. We have before us an exciting—and daunting—task of considering where we have come from, evaluating what we have solidly developed as a foundation to carry into the future, and discerning what needs to change in order for us to be responsive to the signs of the times.

For us in early childhood work, this threshold invites us to take stock of the life “curriculum” of **what we do** in our nurseries, kindergartens, and care settings. A starter list could include play; artistic activities; stories and exposure to language; circles or ring-times; movement indoors and out; practical work; rhythmic daily tasks of cooking, cleaning, tidying; experiences with nature; birthday celebrations; and festivals.

Next comes the conversation around **why we do these things**. What stands behind what we do? How does each activity “foster and tend” healthy physical, emotional, and social life for the children? What is the benefit of doing each of these activities today? How are the children supported for their future development in body, soul, and spirit in both obvious and subtle ways?

Waldorf education is sometimes characterized as “old-fashioned, sweet, and quaint” but lacking relevance for our times. A next step called for is to ask ourselves if this is true. Are there practices that have become Waldorf-isms? *We do what we do because this is what we do. We do it this way because this is how we have always done it.* Where do we see the essentials embodied in what we do? Are the practices basically sound but “dusty,” or, more seriously, not penetrated with our understanding of what the goal is for our children? Is the way we are offering experiences to the children inviting and engaging, meeting their needs, and honoring the multiplicity of diverse family, racial,

ethnic, religious, and gender expressions in our world?

What needs to be re-thought and renewed? What should we consider, study, and discuss in order to find the right path into the future?

Finally come the action steps, through which we affirm what is good and solid, see what needs changing, and take steps to change it. This and future issues of *Gateways* will be working with this process of ongoing evaluation and transformation.

The lead article you will read is a letter distributed by the WECAN board describing the dedicated work the board has undertaken to recognize blockages to inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) in Waldorf early childhood education in North America. The question stands as to what it means to offer a universally relevant education to all human beings regardless of geography, language, religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, and gender. Our children and families are rightly insisting that these matters stand at the forefront as we step toward into the next 100 years and beyond.

After this huge and serious call into the future, the main articles gathered for this issue are both seriously pedagogical and practical and carry us back into the familiar territory of the classroom. Each article looks at Waldorf practices we value and hold dear, but which individual teachers have felt called to evaluate and modify.

The first offering begins with a consideration of language and images in traditional (fairy) tales. The Rocky Mountain/Southwest Region invited Nancy Mellon—teacher, storytelling expert, author, and therapist—to speak on how we can find relationship to the traditional Grimm's and other tales while we live in our times of “genderism, sexism, racism and other -isms.” She discusses language and archetypal, spiritual pictures that stand behind words and images that have become stereotypes, stirring legitimate questioning about these stories. This is not a stone-walling defense but a discussion of how we can think about these questions and take new steps into the future.

The needs of families with infants and children under three are calling to us with an ever-increasing insistence that leads us towards the future. Heather

Church, Canadian WECAN board member and coordinator for Birth-to-Three work in North America, shares content from the CARE I colloquium held in Dornach last June. How pregnancy, birth experience, and the early years for both child and parents can be supported was the theme of this conference attended by teachers and doctors, along with caregivers from many other vocations. Birth-to-three activity has thankfully been carried on by valiant pioneers in the last decades. This conference (and others to come) marks a commitment to carry consciousness and structural support for this critical developmental time.

Homelessness and poverty are growing, a social ill of our times. An article from Ilana Jakubowski, graduate of Eugene Waldorf early childhood teacher training, tells us about a free, drop-in Waldorf-inspired children's program for homeless families in the northwest. Here stands a model of new initiative to reach toward inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

More time in nature is something everyone is striving to provide in our programs. Forest kindergartens are happily proliferating. The Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork in Colorado followed this impulse to create a new model—what they call a “hybrid” program that blends the advantages of both outdoor and indoor activities. A description of this innovation is provided by Baruch Simon, one of the two lead teachers in this program.

The next article gives us pure celebration. In excerpts from her final research project for her Sunbridge teacher training, Julie Anne Voss warms and enlightens us with an understanding of the use of modeling beeswax, beeswax candles, and honey in our classrooms and homes. The social structure of the hive offers a model for cooperative social life as well.

The next section, *Transitions*, calls us to a different sort of celebration. Rena Osmer, beloved teacher and colleague, crossed the threshold into the spiritual world in October. Tributes to her are shared by Cynthia Aldinger and teaching colleague, Charissa Johnson-Routhier. If you knew Rena, you will smile at these remembrances. If you did not have that good fortune, you will wish that you had shared some of your life with her.

The birthday celebration in the kindergarten is one of our mainstays. These are celebrated similarly and quite differently, depending upon the teacher,

the age of the children, and school tradition. Two teachers, Jessi Lisell of City of Lakes Waldorf School in Minnesota and Lori Daniels of the Denver Waldorf School in Colorado, both saw a need to modify their celebrations. They describe what they appreciated in their previous celebrations and how they felt the need to create a different emphasis for the children and families. This is likely to inspire (and perhaps provoke) some interesting conversations.

The International Early Childhood Conference at the Goetheanum last Easter was the first event to usher in the Waldorf 100 celebration. The full conference of 1100 attendees brought together teachers from all around the globe. Encounters among teachers from different countries grew into links of connection that extended beyond the conference itself. Such a link was formed for Stephanie Hoelscher, teacher from Vermont, and two programs in Asia—one in China and another in Myanmar, where she journeyed last summer as a mentor. She brought her expertise and experience to help these programs and came away with riches and insights of her own, which she shares with us in two vignettes.

Our *Book Reviews and News* section begins with a review of Sharifa Oppenheimer's *With Stars in Their Eyes*, a valuable new resource. Written primarily for parents, the book is also a compilation of mainstream neurological research that scientifically confirms that what we do in the kindergartens builds the brain.

Featured books from WECAN include *Tell Me Another Story*—see the For the Classroom section for a sample of its wonderful contents—and new editions of the keynotes from the *Transitions* conference at the Goetheanum and *Education—Health for Life*.

I am very excited to share the news that *Understanding Child Development*, a long-awaited translation from the German original, is now available. It provides a broad, thoughtful, and in-depth compendium of essential Steiner references in the areas most relevant to our work as early childhood educators. Thoroughly researched and updated, and citing modern research studies, this volume is an absolute must-have for our libraries.

I wish everyone renewed inspiration, commitment, and courage to carry Waldorf education into the next 100 years. With sincere intention and “the ever-present help of the spiritual world,” we can do it. ♦

Focus—Looking into the Future

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access in Waldorf Education

— Letter from the WECAN Board

Last fall, the WECAN board made an ongoing commitment to work consciously and intentionally with the themes of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) in Waldorf early childhood education. Many colleagues have been working for decades as individuals and small groups to deepen how Waldorf education can truly be an education towards freedom for all people. The WECAN board recognizes that as a leadership body, we must work to support these individuals and groups and examine our board practices to realize an ever-evolving form of education that puts our ideals into practice. As a collaborative organization made up of members, we want to share what that work is looking like for the board and invite you to share your own learning with us.

In October 2018, the board met in Massachusetts and received a professional development training from Collaborative for Educational Services on race and bias in early childhood education. Together we looked at the impact of unconscious bias on children and how early in the child's life those biases affect a child's experience of themselves and others. This was an introductory workshop intended to give the board a common experience from which we could go forward. During this meeting we agreed to look through the lens of IDEA in our teacher education work, explore how to support our members in classrooms and care centers, and examine WECAN's own practices and publications.

In May 2019, the board met with Rebecca Ossorio, PhD, who facilitated the first of two professional development sessions using collaborative inquiry, a form of contemplative, descriptive, group reflection based on practices developed by the Prospect Center in Bennington, Vermont. Similar to an anthroposophical child study, collaborative inquiry invites the lived experience of the educator to reveal what needs to be seen and what next right steps might be. In both our spring and fall 2019 sessions we were guided by the question: How can we, as the WECAN board, see what obstacles are in the way of diversity, equity and

inclusion in Waldorf early childhood education and take steps to help remove these?

During the inquiry we were asked to describe an experience or encounter that brought us to believe that diversity, equity and inclusion are important for the WECAN board to examine. We described moments when we felt an awareness of the limitations of our practice around race, ethnicity, gender, economic status or sexual orientation. Through a series of inquiry rounds, the board members explored these recollections, allowing insights to emerge and impact the group. These reflections were intrinsically entwined with the board's envisioning work and influenced the way we see the board's future function. At the end of the May meeting, the board affirmed the mandate for a new IDEA committee to continue to support and develop this work for the WECAN board.

In October 2019, we met again with Rebecca, this time for two three-hour sessions, using the guiding question written above. We were asked to reflect on the following question; In what ways do we experience our impulses to “protect the dignity of childhood” and our awareness about “awakening” children at the developmentally appropriate time, coming up against our efforts towards diversity, inclusion and equity or our “striving for diversity in racial, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds of children coming to our schools”? (The quotations are from the WECAN mission statement and WECAN Shared Principles.) These questions offered the opportunity for potent reflections on the themes.

We worked together to sense what intelligent action steps were being asked of the board as a result of our inquiry. Board members made a commitment at the end of the meeting to participate as we are able as individuals in Undoing Racism training (see pisab.org, “Programs” page), read and reflect together on a collection of documents shared by Rebecca on White Supremacist culture, develop WECAN's diversity/inclusion statement, look to support our teacher

education committee on further exploration of these themes, and host another collaborative inquiry session with Rebecca in the spring of 2020. During the fall meeting we also studied and wrestled with Steiner's lecture, *The Universal Human*, lecture 4, January 9, 1916.

The WECAN board recognizes that in order to fulfill the mission of Waldorf education in the next century, we must develop in an ongoing way our understanding of bias in race, class and gender. In order to educate our children in freedom we must understand not only the developmental needs of children but the context of the society and structure that influences them and us. This is potent, painful, powerful, essential work. With collaborative, sensitive and honest activity, we can go forward together. ♦

On behalf of the WECAN board,
Magdalena Toran, Laura Mason, Nancy Blanning, Adrienne Doucette
IDEA Committee

Searching for the Golden Ball

— Nancy Mellon, presenter, remarks edited by Nancy Blanning

Nancy Mellon—storyteller, researcher, Waldorf teacher, therapist, and humanist—addressed the 2019 Rocky Mountain area WECAN conference in March 2019 on the topic of “How can we find our relationship to traditional tales in our times of genderism, racism, sexism, and other biases?” Following are selected points from her presentation.

Nancy also spoke about the term “fairy tale” as it relates to the elemental world. A shorter article about traditional tales and elementals will appear in a future issue of Gateways. References mentioned during the workshop for deeper research on traditional tales are listed at the end of this article.

Nancy Mellon opened the conference by drawing attention to a beautiful, black, embroidered jacket she was wearing. It was given as a gift to her by a wonderful friend, yet she was feeling self-conscious wearing it and thought she would give it away. She had the freedom to remove her beautiful jacket, yet what of our human skin, which cannot be removed? We are all captured in our own, indelible skins to live in for our lifetimes. This is a reality that cannot be changed.

Today Waldorf education lives and grows in many lands. In the Waldorf world we often tend to hunker within our own comfort zones of skin color and cultural identity. We may, thus, be floating in “airy castles,” defending ourselves against unfamiliar aspects of others. Waldorf teachers strive to spiritually embody the full spectrum of humanity. One of our most profound goals is to embrace all children of all races and cultural loyalties, and to grow our hearts and minds along with the children's.

Nancy's storytelling mentors for many years were an African-American couple: Hugh Morgan Hill, better known as “Brother Blue,” and his wife Ruth Hill, a curator of women's stories from around the world. Nancy heard Brother Blue say a thousand times: *We Human Beings are a Rainbow Race*. We can affirm this as a mantra as we uncover the shadows in our conscious and unconscious biases and pre-judgments toward race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual identification, and so on.

Nancy shared an experience of shock when she was the one being excluded and judged. She sat one cold, winter day, alone in a steam bath, enjoying her solitude. A feisty woman with golden brown skin burst through the door, sized her up, scoffed, “White weed!” and stomped triumphantly past her.

How do we feel in the presence of someone who surprises us with a different identity? Possible

responses may include: curious, shy, uncertain, awkward, humble, self-conscious, ashamed, overly-respectful, having a bad conscience, feeling the weight of history that has affirmed white supremacy and white privilege, muddled, and uncomfortable.

Some fairytales commonly shared in Waldorf school classrooms are questioned these days by teachers, parents, and other caretakers of children. Among these is "The Frog Prince," the keynote story of this conference. In this strange and wise old tale, the princess makes a profound commitment to accept the unfamiliar being who retrieved her golden ball and then crept into her life. She lives with "the frog" in her dreams. Finally, having gathered new wisdom and strength, maturing will-forces within her feel: "Enough of fear!" With more than visceral courage her eyes and heart open.

Thoroughly disenchanting fears is our task today. The golden ball eventually leads the princess to an astonished new realization of love. Is this not a very real picture for each of us? Within the solar plexus, a mysterious ball of warmth and light can hide in murky depths. Throughout the world, the human heart is associated with gold, a sublimely malleable element. Rudolf Steiner said the human heart is the youngest of our spiritual/physical organs and the one that possesses the most potential to grow. As storytellers, we can breathe the etheric golden warmth that circulates throughout the atmosphere of our whole earth. If we feel that our heart is lost at the bottom of the well for a while, we can remember that fairy tales are full of metaphors of wisdom. When the heart of the princess is awakened and her vision clears, a noble prince who was cruelly enchanted as "frog" is now released and joins her in joyous new celebration of human love; as his servant, too, bursts constricting bands of sorrow from around his heart.

We convey greater depth and symbolic meaning in the stories we tell to the children in our care whenever we experience great old fairy tales as paths for our own self-development. We can look for new ways to present stories, perhaps adjusting some of the images and language, as did the Brothers Grimm, exercising an editorial license, so we do not confuse or denigrate others. When traditional tales present stark polarities in "full spectrum," we are moving between radiant light and what Dylan Thomas named "the close and holy darkness." We realize the "black pitch"

punishment image in the tale of "Mother Holle" can be offensive, especially to dark-skinned peoples. Even if the teller of the tale has worked deeply to penetrate the wisdom of this image, we can understand that our own intellectual understanding does not change gut-level feelings. Perhaps "pitch" becomes more real and acceptable as "mud" in the re-telling of this tale to children today, without losing any of the moral, pictorial significance.

The children in our early childhood programs today are members of diverse families that have migrated throughout the world. Everyone is everywhere today! Can we find and tell stories from other cultures that carry the same morality and archetypes that are accessible and vivid to children, as well as include the deeply wise stories collected by the Brothers Grimm in early nineteenth-century Germany?

As we find our way into the deeper meaning of the stories, we may be surprised to discover that the Grimm's tales have a long prior evolution. There are up to a thousand catalogued versions of "Cinderella." In classrooms today, we are tasked to find the universality in stories from cultures that are living in the souls and daily lives of the children in our classrooms, cultures other than European, white and Christian. To meet today's children (and their parents) with appropriate wisdom and care, every teacher is obliged to exercise sensitive judgment about troubling, unhelpful concepts and words for their listeners. Can other descriptive words be found that convey the intent but honor the diversity of our audiences? What language can include and honor all human peoples, irrespective of race, gender identity, ethnicity, or religion?

"The golden ball of wisdom" is an image of an all-inclusive love we can share as storytellers. As a Waldorf teacher in the 1980s, Nancy was inspired to delve deeply with other storytellers into fairytale wisdom. At the same time a storytelling renaissance was burgeoning in the Boston area where she was teaching, a counterbalance to the computers that were beginning to become so readily available at that time. She knew Waldorf wisdom had much to offer others who were committed to sharing stories without screens and recording devices. These storyteller-researchers often turned to Rudolf Meyer's *The Wisdom of Fairy Tales*, to more fully commune with the spiritual depth that lives in the fairy tales. They also looked at other books with widely contrasting perspectives,

such as Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalytic *The Uses of Enchantment*. Many original stories inspired by fundamental fairy tale archetypes were created in these story circles and are included in Nancy Mellon's *Storytelling and the Art of Imagination*, (now revised and published as *Healing Storytelling*).

If we choose a Grimm's story to tell, we are customarily asked to tell it as it was written down. Yet we must always work to penetrate to the essence of each story as it evolves in our inner life, not just speak the precise words. Taking "The Frog Prince" as an example, we can look up previous versions of the story, as in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* by Maria Tatar, which is full of fascinating historical information. We can realize that "the golden ball" is a personal sun, which wants to shine as our moral compass. As teachers we use our own "golden ball" to discern what images are right and true for our groups.

As we are looking for stories in other traditions that echo our familiar Grimm's tales, we can make a story map of a tale with its essential pictures and storyline leading to the amazing moment of transformation and resolution. For example, if we look at a "Snow White and Rose Red"-type story to tell in Africa, we can look for African stories about two devoted, loving sisters and an enchanted bear (or other appropriate animal) that convey the same archetype in more culturally familiar language and images. We can do this wherever we live.

Princes and princesses are other images that are frequently questioned today. Research, however, points to the existence of thousands of stories which portray a prince or princess who has been enchanted into some animal form and then disenchanting through the love of others. This is what folklorists call a *motif*, meaning pattern of commonly held images, characters, actions, and events that appear in many stories and many cultures. These *motifs* seen in the Grimm's tales were in the world long before the brothers collected them. Many of the stories the Grimm brothers collected migrated into Germany and Europe through the trade

routes. Jack Zipes is a brilliantly reliable resource to learn how many of these tales migrated into Germany from other cultures.

Children coming to the earth today carry a worldly soul that is less captured in one gender or nationality. What motifs are most nourishing for the very present children we find in our classrooms? Nancy recommends we read many, many traditional tales to discover the wide-ranging gender archetypes found in them. "The Twelve Huntsmen" in the Grimm's fairy tales tells of twelve feisty young women who band together for true love. Kathleen Regan's *Fearless Girls, Wise Women and Beloved Sisters: Heroines in Folktales from around the World*; and Jack Zipes' *Don't Bet on the Prince* deal refreshingly with gender stereotypes. Especially recommended is reading Isabel Wyatt stories aloud (i.e. *The Seven-Year-Old Wonder Book*, *The Book of Fairy Princes*) to see how this creative storyteller created new fairy tales out of old—with skillfully compassionate spiritual perception in each word.

We are all invited to collaborate together with the souls of children to create the stories they need today to meet future times. Nancy has often created special stories with parents for birthday celebrations. A parent asked for her help because she was concerned about her daughter, who was turning six years old and was longing to be a prince. Nancy suggested that they seek an imagination of the prince. This imagining, as always when a child is held with great love, became a meditative, spiritual activity. The mother, who was a skillful seamstress, pictured a fine prince wearing a rainbow cape, each color accentuated as it came to a point at the hem. With the child's need at heart, this cape became the seed of a story which they wrote up together. In the story the magical cape was given by a gnarly old beggar. Whenever the prince put it on, he was able to fly and do beautiful, powerful deeds. The cape was presented to the girl after the story was told during the party. She wore the cape for months, even when she was sleeping, and became a more integrated and contented six-year-old child.

When we have questions about gender roles in stories, might we sometimes shift the gender roles in a story to see how it feels? What if Goldilocks were a little boy? What if feminine and masculine pigs build three houses? Let us keep the old classics intact, yet learn from them to create new stories that contain similar patterns and rhythms. As we play and work with the freeing of gender roles today, we can open to the cosmic gestures of masculine and feminine that live in all of us all the time. Our logical, more linear, left-brain thinking tends to attach neatly to one gender; it likes tidy, materialistic logic. Yet gender is spiritually alive. The masculine is very alive within the feminine life body and can resonate with masculine qualities and vice versa. How does the masculine accompany me in my feminine life? How does the feminine accompany the masculine? These are always part of one another. Do our storytelling and puppet plays move fluently between gender roles?

Many possibilities are open to our creativity and spiritually-inspired insight. Every child, teacher, parent and grandparent today needs wise stories. Classic treasures from the past with archetypal wisdom serve us as a foundation. We must enter the future with moral and creative courage to listen attentively to our wise inner voices for new stories for the future. ♦

Nancy Mellon is a counselor, mentor, and former Waldorf teacher whose courses and workshops brim with creativity! She has taught therapeutic writing and storytelling worldwide for many years. More information about her numerous creativity-inspiring books and offerings, as well as several podcasts, are available at www.healingstory.com. Nancy is now living in Harlemville, New York.

Resources:

A workshop attendee working actively with issues of racism recommended a workbook which can be downloaded at: meandwhitesupremacybook.com. Part education, part activation, the *Me and White Supremacy Workbook* is a tool to examine and dismantle unconscious white-supremacy biases.

The historical background of the traditional European tales is explored in Jack Zipes' *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, a social history of the fairy tale, and in Maria Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Brothers Grimm*. These researchers and many others show how writers adapted oral folk tales in the eighteenth century to the mores, values, and manners of their time.

The Master and His Emissary, a book by Iain McGilchrist, is highly recommended to Waldorf teachers. This study describes the right hemisphere of the brain as the flexible part that seeks to deeply nourish imagination, inspiration, and intuition. This book is grounded in over 20 years of mainstream research.

Multitudes of folk and fairy tale motifs were systematized by Stith Thompson, who devoted much of his life to creating the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. A condensed version of this index is available in paperback with the title *The Folktale*. Stith Thompson included stories from around the world to revise the research of Antti Aarne, who in 1910 first published a systematic index of European tale-types.

Report from the CARE I Colloquium: Pregnancy, Birth, and Early Childhood

— Heather Church

When I was a kindergarten teacher, I observed that the children who arrived in our classes were already behind in their development. I also saw that, even with our healing education, they could not catch up with development that had not happened in the first three years of their lives. Since that time, I have been on a journey, looking for new forms and processes to support parents and children in pregnancy and during the first three years of life. This is a search for ways to strengthen those that care for the youngest children.

In June, 2019 I was privileged to attend the CARE I interdisciplinary colloquium at the Goetheanum in Switzerland, together with my colleague from the Birth to Three Advisory Circle, Liz Hagermann. The colloquium had been planned by the CARE I Group of the Medical Section to bring together multiple disciplines working on the same theme: Pregnancy, Birth and Early Childhood. CARE I is one of five interprofessional collaborative groups that work together on five specific areas of health, chosen out of the challenges we currently face with patient care in our times.

Michaela Glockler initiated this work with the idea that taking care of someone is not or should not be doctor-dominated. The old ways are not working any longer. We are now in a phase of inclusiveness, social development, and curative healing. We need to ask ourselves the question, **“Is what we do in anthroposophy understandable for those who are in need of and seeking care?”**

The participants in the colloquium consisted of general practitioners, nurses, midwives, art therapists, eurythmists, educators, gynecologists, neonatologists, pediatricians, psychotherapists, therapists, social workers, and parents. Representatives from several of these realms shared aspects of their research and experiences over the three days of the conference. What follows is my story of what we learned, along with new questions for all of us to live with.

First and foremost, patients' trust in the caregiver is no longer a given. Caregivers now have to learn to be open, creative, flexible, empathetic, and collaborative with those seeking healthcare. We

must agree that health is the most important aspect of being human. Therefore the gesture, attitude, and language caregivers use needs to be open, accessible, and understandable. In our times, parents have been traumatized. Analogous to the iceberg, what we see above the water is small in comparison to what is living below the surface. **How will we re-create trust in our time?**

The birth story was described thus: we start with an egg that is filled with etheric qualities, one that began its journey two generations ago, when the mother of the child was in utero. Then along comes a very young, astral-infused sperm. These two opposites come together in a kind of gold process to allow a child to incarnate.

Then in utero, the four aspects of the human body begin to form. The etheric, astral, and ego begin from outside the fetus to grow and become. Physical building of the organism began with conception.

From which organ does a child come?

The impulse for birth comes from the organ of the child—the placenta. The warmth of the embryo is in the placenta and regulates warmth and the heart. The placenta has a building quality. The child is being incarnated in the placenta and connects physically through the umbilical cord, bladder, circulation, and excretion of nitrogen. The placenta takes care of poisons.

The etheric is in the amniotic fluid. Here is a floating quality; the brain also has a similar fluid around it. Within the yolk sac comes the development of heart and blood in this fluid realm. The astral lives in the umbilical cord and is connected to the lower pole. The spiritual being of the child is building the “I”. These four processes, reflected in the placenta, amniotic fluid, umbilical cord, and yolk, are threshold crossings for the child entering into the physical earthly world.

The next question is **who decides when it is time for a birth?** It is the child who makes this decision, who makes the first move, unless intervention is decided upon. Then we must ask the question, **is the child ready?** Usually they are. But when they are not,

complications can arise and much more care must be taken to support the child's development into the earthly world. So many factors play into the increase of Caesarian sections—fear, stress, technology. Statistics show that only 35% of pregnancies are “at-risk,” yet the percentage of C-sections is much greater.

Before the 1800s, midwives delivered babies, then doctors came into the picture to make birth safer. Birth, however, became clinical. Now, in our time, pregnancy and birth have become an emergency; we no longer are able to live into and trust the miracle of birth. There are three possible experiences for mothers: a healthy birth, mother-led with no complications; a birth guided by medical care; or a birth experienced as critical care or emergency.

When a child comes early, there are three substances that can be of immense support to premature babies as anthroposophical remedies: Amnion, which enlivens soul substance; Athanasian, enlivening to etheric substance; and Argentum which enlivens the physical substance. These contain healing qualities to lower the use of antibiotics, build up the immune system, and support the maturation of the bodies.

Premature babies can also be supported by music therapy with the kinderharp (lyre or child harp). Playing the lyre without rhythm in the space around the child builds a pathway to the earth. Cradle songs can be taught to new mothers to sing to their babies. The mother's voice creates space for healing and bonding and gives the child courage that is so needed. Singing when caring for twins can help the child who is waiting to feel held in the envelope of the mother.

In a healthy birth, there is a threshold experience. The mother has to go to the threshold, to the edge of life, to get her child and then return. Where in our lives do we get to practice this? How can we find the courage to do this? Mothers today are given the illusion that they could have a pain-free birth experience. **How can we build resilience, courage, and faith in mothers and their children?**

For the newborn child, there are three places where they must feel at home to become citizens of the earth. They must feel at home in their bodies, in their family

home, and in their social community. **How can we support and care for this with the child and parents?**

When children come to this earthly life, they come wanting to bring the world closer, to embrace it, not just see it. They want to make it useful, create from it, and become the master of it. Creating a bond with the mother is key to a long and healthy life. **How do we create a chalice for the child to come into being and fulfill one's mission in life? Who are the people who will take up this important work?**

Midwives are the companions of mothers. They keep mother and baby healthy for their future. The midwife is a shepherd who laughs and cries with a mother. Midwives accompany the mother in the threshold space and have an opportunity to train and empower new parents.

Nurses are responsible for “everything and nothing.” They are balancers holding the space between structure and flexibility. They are the first to touch and care for children when they arrive in the physical world.

The conference shared important insights from the research of Emmi Pikler at the Pikler Haus in Budapest. The Pikler Institute educates caregivers in healthy ways to touch and care for the incarnating child through relationship, kindness and respect.

As part of the Colloquium, eurythmy therapy for pregnancy and birth started each day. Eurythmy means “good rhythm,” and pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum recovery are rhythmic processes. I personally resonated deeply with the eurythmy, which brought me back to my own experience with birth. We were brought an image of mothers needing to step back and out of their bodies to carry a child, as there is only room for one ego in a physical body. We actually experienced that eurythmy can support pregnancy and birth, helping the mother to come out of her head and into her body. The body that is carrying the child has great wisdom.

Watercolor painting can be utilized in beginning the bond between mother and child long before the birth, using head, hands, and heart to manifest the mother's relationship to pregnancy. It is also a possibility to use

painting when issues arise during pregnancy, and can support the incarnation of the child.

Doctors are working to develop a new artistic attitude warmed by empathy, encouraging parent participation, trying to stay in the question and to trust the child. The medical section has worked hard to create new resources for colleagues and parents, including a CARE web site, a fever app and media fast web site.

My thoughts about the children in our classrooms were echoed by the teachers who spoke at the colloquium. The portal of birth sets the stage for development. The birth event is the beginning of the child's story and the teacher of later years is able to see this in the child's movement ability and in the body. Many children come through C-section in our time and miss their first and most important experience of touch. It is touch which creates a healthy sense of boundaries. Children who dump toys during play may be suffering from a poor sense of boundaries.

What do parents need? How can we support parents in pregnancy, birth and the care of the child in the first three years? Several surveys have been done to try to understand what is needed by the parents of today. The needs of parents ranged from "How do I calm my child?" to wanting answers that respect diversity of parenting styles and cultural differences, but which can apply universally to child development and parenting. Today's parents do not very often have family support and use apps and technology for support. They are a generation that wants clarity and likes to have things delivered straightforwardly. Parents want to know how they can learn to identify what their child needs, how to protect their children, and how to overcome their own fears, and they want the responses to be practical and not too esoteric. **How do I prepare my child for what is to come? How do I develop capacities within myself to be able to support my child?**

UNESCO has identified that children have the following needs:

- to be able to be in a multicultural community
- to be able to relate to and encounter others in new ways
- to be able to take risks and be brave and have a strong inner spiritual core

Anthroposophical care can provide all of this to the child with love, joy, and goodness.

In the first thousand days or three years, the child is formed by the surroundings. And for the first two or three days of parenting, parents are open to learning. Who is there to help? Very quickly the door closes to learning as a parent. After that, a habit body is formed which is then very hard to change. The more attention we give to supporting parents in the early days, the more we can make a difference. Who can support parents in the first days of a child's life and beyond? Professionals are needed who can meet eye-to-eye with the parents as partners. How can we create a prevention chain? Where is the network between disciplines? Where are we creating a chalice for the child?

Fathers want to feel that they are a part of the process. Those who are there when the baby arrives and attend classes with the mother will be there for the long haul. Fathers need men's groups or networks to build trust and grow familiar with parenting. They need to feel that they have a role in the family. In Europe, there are centers, such as the Filderklinik, that offer support for mothers, fathers and families. Individual and group work with multidisciplinary professionals focuses on developing parenting skills.

There are three key windows to deepening work with parents. The first and foremost is to work to develop trust between caregivers and parents. The second is to support balance in a parent's life, creating a breathing wisdom that balances the needs of the parent as an individual, the child, and the parent as a professional. The last key is for parents and supporting professionals to realize that developing as a parent is a process, not a conclusion to be reached. Through pregnancy, birth and early childhood, we go on a journey together with acceptance and working together with questions rather than giving answers. What do we as professionals need to develop in ourselves to grow these three capacities?

Hartmut Rosa has written about "Resonance," the ability to evoke or suggest images, memories, and emotions. He says that we are called to the world by relationship and that answers come to life in the conversation between us. Our experiences create reactions that open the door to our own transformation. We need to develop processes that will create an openness to the future. Can we find new ways and create new platforms? Old ways are dying

away and new forms need to arrive, forms that take us through processes together.

Resources from the Colloquim continue to grow out of the work being done in this field, with many resources available through the Anthromedics web site (anthromedics.org). In June 10-13, 2020 CARE I will come together again in Dornach for the “Dignity of the Child” Conference. We hope that others from across North America are able to join as we deepen this vital study of pregnancy, birth and the young child. ♦

Heather Church has worked in Waldorf early childhood education for nearly twenty years. Her many roles include mixed-age kindergarten teaching, parent education, teacher mentoring, school leadership, and inner development for both parents and teachers. Heather trained in Birth-to-Seven education at Sunbridge Institute and Birth-to-Three at Sophia's Hearth. She is also one of two WECAN board members representing Canada, Regional Representative for her region, and is serving as the Birth-to-Three coordinator for WECAN.

Soothing the Effects of Homelessness in Early Childhood: A Waldorf Inspired Approach

— Ilana Jakubowski

Visitors who come through the doors of First Place Kids Preschool are greeted with the harmonious hum of children at play. A group of children build a playhouse in the corner, while others help prepare the vegetables for tomorrow's lunch. In the adjoining classroom, toddlers crawl and take wobbly steps, babies stretch out on the soft rug and squeal with delight. The lighting is low and gentle. The teacher quietly sings. All is good in the world.

On the other side of the doors, there is a cacophony; the clamor of many adults moving about, trying to meet their family's basic needs under the roof of one building. First Place Kids Preschool is housed within First Place Family Center, a day shelter in Eugene, Oregon that serves families who are experiencing homelessness.

First Place Kids Preschool started in 2010, when local early childhood specialists recognized a gap in services being provided to young children within our community whose families were experiencing homelessness. What began as a weekly “playgroup” has now blossomed into a Waldorf-inspired preschool for children from birth to five, which runs five-half-days per week. Each day, First Place Kids Preschool

serves up to twenty children with free drop-in access to the therapeutic space which they so desperately need.

When a family becomes homeless, this often brings about a total disruption of routine, loss of familiar possessions, and a shift in community. The stress of these changes can lead to anxiety, depression, and aggression in homeless children at a rate of three times higher than their housed peers. Additionally, children whose families are experiencing homelessness are more likely to witness abuse, violence, and erratic adult behavior.¹ When the stressful events that accompany homelessness in early childhood continually overwhelm children's ability to process these experiences, they can be adversely affected for their entire lives.²

First Place Kids Preschool has become a beacon of safety, security, and refuge, giving children an opportunity to process their outer experiences while feeding them with the nourishment they need to heal the wounds of homelessness.

Six years ago, First Place Kids Preschool's original Program Director, Eileen Chanti, brought the first impulse to intertwine First Place Kids Preschool with Waldorf pedagogy. Over the years, we have found

that Waldorf early childhood pedagogy continues to provide the ideal framework for a therapeutic structure in which child self-healing can take place.

The wonderful article “Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education” by Susan Howard³ distills the Waldorf early childhood approach into the following elemental parts: love and warmth; care for environment and nourishment for the senses; creative, artistic experience; meaningful adult activity; protection for the forces of childhood; gratitude, reverence and wonder; joy, humor, and happiness; and adult caregivers on a path of inner development.

At First Place Kids Preschool, we strive to consciously incorporate each of these elements into a Waldorf-inspired healing experience for the children that we serve.

Love and warmth

Three on-staff teachers welcome the children each morning and lead them through the half-day program. Children who are homeless are at high risk of suffering from a broken relationship with a caregiver,⁴ which often results in developmental delays and mental health issues later in life.⁵ Thus the dependable consistency of love and warmth embodied by our preschool staff become a crucially stabilizing factor in the development of the children within the preschool.

Care for the environment and nourishment for the senses

Life in a shelter is often chaotic, with high-volume, adult-content conversations, intense fluorescent lighting, and heavily-processed food; this sensory experience is intensified for children with heightened sensitivity to their sensory environment as a result of the stress of homelessness.⁶

Within the preschool walls, the physical environment strives to soothe the senses. The lighting is gentle, the colors are soft, and the classroom is tidy. We work with the tone of our voices, both in speech and song, to create soothing and melodious sounds. Essential oils with calming properties are diffused into the rooms. Our toys and equipment are made



of natural materials that offer rich sensations to the touch. Snacks and meals are prepared with organic ingredients, often in the children’s presence and with their help, bringing the nourishment of enticing smells and wholesome ingredients.

Creative, artistic experience

Children who may not be able to process their challenging experiences through talk or play often find an open door in the nonverbal, tactile act of creating art. Research backs the use of art therapy for children who have experienced trauma.⁷ Each day, we offer the children an artistic activity such as watercolor painting, drawing with beeswax crayons, sewing, or clay modeling. The children often become absorbed in this creative activity, sinking into it as an expressive outlet.

Meaningful adult activity as an example for the child’s imitation

Opportunities to practice simple homemaking tasks are few and far between for children without a home. Thus, the children are purposely invited to engage in much of the work of tending to the preschool space. They help prepare meals by rolling out bread dough, chopping vegetables, and stirring the soup. Cleaning is done in the presence of the children, who are often eager to help, jumping up to reach for the child-sized brooms and sponges. In the outdoor play yard, fun chores abound, from tending organic flowers and



vegetables in raised garden beds to toting pails of sand to the sandbox after a delivery. Caring for the physical environment seems to bring a sense of order to the children's inner worlds.

Free, imaginative play

Preschool mornings begin with a burst of free play. The classroom is designed to be as inviting as possible, with open-ended toys and objects from the natural world. Many of the children seem to have little experience engaging in imaginative play. Tragically, often their free play is spent reenacting challenging real-life situations, as the children attempt to process their daily realities. As teachers, we strive to create ample opportunities for free play and offer sparks of suggestions until the children can begin to tend their own fire of imaginative life.

Infants in homeless families have unique challenges. If the family lives in their car, babies likely spend most of their time in a car seat, with little access to clean, open floor space, and thus are often behind on basic motor development skills. Within the safe and inviting environment of the preschool, infants are able to practice rolling over, pushing themselves up, or crawling for the first time.

Protection for the forces of childhood

First Place Kids Preschool provides a world attuned to the unique physical, emotional, and intellectual processes of the young child. We rely on repetition, modeling, and a consistent rhythm to carry us throughout our day. A circle time that is rich in seasonal songs, stories, and imagery gives the children a felt experience of the earth's cycles.

Safeguarding the innocence of early childhood is at the foundation of our work. Children in our program often step into adult roles at a young age, tending to younger siblings and absorbing the anxieties of their caregivers.⁸ For them, the preschool is an oasis from the jangling, confusing adult world; they thrive in the preschool, where they can play, explore, and just be kids.

Gratitude, reverence, and wonder

The dreamy consciousness of early childhood lends itself to a sense of reverence for the natural world. There is no place quite like the garden to get lost in nature's magic. Each school day, rain or shine, the children pour out into our play yard and are immersed in the beauty of our flower and vegetable garden. Whether it is searching for worms under logs, watching birds build a nest, or planting seeds, children and teachers alike marvel in the processes of the earth.

Joy, humor, and happiness

The most common remark that new preschool volunteers make is surprise at the amount of joy expressed by these children navigating such challenging life circumstances. Whether it be witnessing a baby's first babblings, or seeing a seed sprout, or sharing in a warm hug and a joke, the children continually gift the teachers with many moments of shared happiness.

Adult caregivers on a path of inner development

One of the key factors in building resilience in young children is the presence of caring, attentive adults.⁹ By comprehensively training our staff, interns, and volunteers in trauma-informed care, Poverty 101, and

Positive Discipline, we offer children the support of informed and self-aware adults, laying the foundation for life-long resiliency.

It is a challenging reality that the children we serve are making their way in the world amongst a myriad of unjust and oppressive societal structures. As caregivers, we must accept that we often have minimal ability to change a child's external life circumstances. But we can rest assured that within the protective walls of First Place Kids Preschool, there is the opportunity to weave threads of nourishment and support into these children's lives. Our great and fervent hope is that the children we serve may blossom forth into their full, free selves. ♦

First Place Kids Preschool is interested in connecting with others bringing Waldorf impulses to children living in poverty or homelessness. If this applies to you, please contact us at: ilana.jakubowski@svdp.us.

Ilana Jakubowski is the current Director of First Place Kids; a program of St. Vincent DePaul of Lane County. Ilana holds a certificate in Early Childhood Education from the Waldorf Teacher Education Eugene program. She has long been interested in the cross section of therapeutic education and social justice issues and is deeply grateful to work and play at First Place Kids Preschool.

Resources:

- 1 Child Homelessness and Trauma," www.first5la.org/files/ChildHomelessnessTrauma.pdf.
- 2 "Complex PTSD," www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/essentials/complex_ptsd.asp.
- 3 "Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education," www.waldorfearlychildhood.org/uploads/Howard%20Article.pdf.
- 4 "The Cycle of Homelessness," <http://beyondhousing.icphusa.org/filelibrary/Zlotnickpresentation2010.pdf>.
- 5 "Taken Away: The Prevalence of Homeless Children in Foster Care," <https://www.icphusa.org/reports/taken-away-2/>.
- 6 "Considering sensory processing issues in trauma affected children" www.celcis.org/files/6114/6054/8502/002._2016_Vol_15_1_Robinson_Considering_Sensory_Processing.pdf.
- 7 "Art Therapy for Children: How It Leads to Change," <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1359104506061419>.
- 8 "Growing Up Before Their Time: The Early Adultification Experiences of Homeless Young People," ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4797323/.
- 9 "InBrief: Resilience Series - Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University," <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-resilience-series/>.

A Hybrid Without Batteries

The Evolution of a Hybrid Outdoor Kindergarten

— Baruch J. Simon

Growing up, I went to a school that calls itself a wild school. This concept, somewhat radical, rests on the premise that mother nature is and always has been a primary teacher. Access to nature and the exploration therein is of primary importance, and “sky time” is valued as much as any academic learning. Upland Hills School, in the forests of southeast Michigan, sits surrounded by hundreds of acres of national forest, swamps and hills. The school is located inland of the sweet seas, between the suburbs and farmland of Michigan. Growing up as a student at this wild school showed me aspects of myself that were previously dormant and taught me firsthand the fragile, yet resilient relationship we foster with the earth and sky, and the interconnectedness of all beings. It shaped me in ways that are still revealing themselves as gifts throughout my life. At the school, classes are offered such as theatre play shop, maple syrup collecting, all-school capture the flag, and animal tracking. Our wintry mornings included daily sledding on a nearby toboggan hill and skating on a forest pond down a trail. From these roots, and from these teachers, I knew that I wanted to become a teacher myself, in order to align my life’s purpose fully with the mission of Upland Hills school: to preserve, protect and nurture the innocence of children.

I became a Waldorf early childhood educator to uphold the mission of Upland Hills school. I knew that I wished somehow to honor and carry forth the gifts that were given to me from my childhood. Being



a student at the school had instilled in me a passion for learning, a love for the arts, and deep reverence for the natural world. Eventually, our family moved to the mountains of western Colorado, and I joined the faculty of the Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork as a Kindergarten teacher. The evolution of a



forest hybrid Kindergarten at the Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork emerged over the course of several years. We saw the need to evolve the curriculum to meet the changing developmental needs of young children in our time.

From the time I came to the Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork, we hiked to the wetlands each Friday morning. The children bundle up in all of their layers, and, no matter the season, venture outdoors through a system of trails to the wetlands for the morning. The pathway crosses through the back of the school's campus, down a hill, and along a series of platforms, before crossing a short suspension bridge over a creek to the wetlands. We trek out into the woods over the wet marshy willows and water reservoirs, often seeing ducks, geese and occasionally hawks or eagles along the way. The teachers take time to observe with the children the nature that surrounds the landscape. We hike with snacks of bread and butter, cheese, and carrots in our backpack, along with emergency first aid and supplies. The children take water bottles for themselves in their own backpacks. Upon arriving

in the wetlands, the children do circle together, rest their backpacks on the earth, and then set to playing. The play takes on a life of its own, and time stands still while immersed in the willow woods upbank from the Roaring Fork river. The children then settle in: digging with sticks, climbing trees, grinding fairy dust, or being content in observation of the wildness of the landscape.

This experience cultivates inner and outer resilience through tangible interactions with the natural world. It also opens up the imagination to use "found objects" for creating worlds of play. Sticks, stones, bark, and sand provide a canvas for the imaginative world of young children to unfold. In that unfolding the children find themselves as part of something much greater, yet connected to a developing inner confidence within themselves. This is truly a gift to the innocence and imagination of young children. New ideas are wrought; collaborations and opportunities for greater exploration occur. Most children are content to just "be," held by the teachers in the natural forest environment.

There are many reasons to bring children out into nature beyond having the opportunity to play in and with the natural playscape. Outdoor time provides children an opportunity to breathe fresh air, to witness the wonders of the natural world, to increase powers of observation, and to calm and work out extra energy. Thus, the overall experience fosters the forces of creativity, will, and imagination.

When children are left free to create from their own imaginations, it is remarkable to witness the structures they build, such as shelters, teepees, or forts using fallen tree branches and tree limbs found in the woods. These creations are often large enough for several children to climb inside and explore. Sometimes burrows of tunnels are built within the willow bushes. When they build with fallen trees or limbs, the children are using gross-motor movements and muscles. Their hard work is often done in collaboration with classmates, which fosters communication, flexibility in thinking, teamwork and problem solving. One of the benefits of this type of hard work is that it builds willpower, tenacity, and resilience when faced with challenges, all skills that serve students and prepare them for life. Many students turn to a smaller tiny world and build fairy houses at the base of trees. Building small structures utilizes fine motor skills and provides opportunities for children to imagine more intently by pretending that they are entering a fairy world or a magical realm.

Some children initially do not know what to do or what to play, and ask frequently when we will return to the classroom. We sometimes have to encourage a friend to help bring the child into play and bridge social interactions in nature. Sometimes we whittle wood together with the older children in the classes. Over time, in spending this hike day each Friday outdoors in the wetlands, we discovered more and more benefits to the children's development.

Recognizing that the developmental needs of young children are continuously shifting, we also noted that there is something inherently consistent in terms of their overall needs for sensory, motor, and physical development. Integration through natural materials has a wisdom that streams forth from the children's own will forces. A child with vestibular needs might repeatedly walk on a log evenly placed upon two stumps. They might then progress to balance from one rock to the next along a rocky trail.

Children with eye tracking or vision needs might gravitate towards this activity for their integration. Climbing trees builds upper body and core strength, and creating monkey calls and language while in the trees builds communication and social interaction. With the influence of more and more children exposed to screens, we saw this healing balm of nature to be multifold in its benefits. In response to these growing needs for integration and nature explorations, we created a rhythmic, weekly outdoor program that allows children to be outside for over half of the day; hence, the forest hybrid was born.

Our weekly rhythm shifted from a single hiking day to spending additional time outdoors each day as part of our daily and weekly program. This allows experiencing and learning from the elements of nature and embracing the wisdom of "sky time."

Rather than becoming strictly a forest program, we wished to retain aspects of the indoor curriculum that we felt could best be accomplished indoors. Activities such as painting, drawing, and certain crafts were held beautifully in the indoor space of the Kinderhaus. The forest hybrid evolved as a means to meet the children in a way that nourished their natural development and connection with nature, yet also retain aspects of the indoor curriculum we felt were essential.

The hybrid rhythm is as follows:

- Drop off
- Outdoor Play
- Transition inside
- Circle Inside
- Artistic Activity Inside
- Outdoor Play at Willow Camp
- Snack Outside
- Outdoor Play/Craft at Willow Camp
- Clean up Willow Camp
- Head indoors for Story/Puppet Show/People Play
- Lunch Indoors
- Rest Indoors
- Outdoor Play in the Kinderhaus Play Yard
- Pick up on the Play Yard

We begin our day outdoors on the Kinderhaus play yard with free play and jumping rope. We then call the children to line up and head inside for circle, followed by our rhythmic artistic activity of the day. Next we set our chairs for story time on the red rug;

place our lunches, placemats and napkins at the table; and then get dressed in all of our layers to head outside for the rest of the morning. Starting inside with some formed activities sets the tone for the day and warms the children during the coldest time of the morning. It also encourages the parents to drop off children at school in a timely manner.

Once outside, we hike down to our Willow Camp. This is an outdoor play space that includes a tipi, a warming tent, a ring of wood rounds, and an outdoor mud kitchen that was built by a third grade class at our school. Willow Camp also includes an outhouse to take care of bathroom needs. The camp is in a ring of trees and hills, thus creating a natural boundary on two sides of the space. The fences on two other sides surround and enclose the space. The children learn the boundaries by walking them in the first week of school. They adhere to these boundaries with reverence while playing, exploring, and caring for the space. We have tools such as shovels to dig, brooms to sweep, and sifters to make fine sand. Some children build fairy houses or create playscapes with the found objects of sticks, rocks, sand, mud, snow, and even ice. What continually fascinates me is the ability of children to incorporate found objects into their worlds of play. Having taught for several years in the kindergarten, I expected the children to be bored with the limited resources with which to play. However, I observed that an even richer, more imaginative playscape was created with less formed objects.

Last year at Willow Camp, the children spent several weeks digging out an old car tire that had been submerged under several layers of leaves, sticks and soil. Each day for two weeks, the children worked to excavate this tire. They used sticks, shovels, and their hands to uncover the buried treasure. Once the tire had been brought forth from the earth, there was much celebration and even shouts of joy. Next the children brought the tire to a small hill and took turns rolling it down the hill. Each time the tire rolled down the hill, the children roared with laughter and with joy. This became a favorite activity for the play at Willow Camp for the next several weeks, endlessly discovering ways to engage with this, “found object.”

Last fall, we decided to make all of our Michaelmas crafts outdoors at Willow Camp. We brought two tables outside from the tent and began sanding and rasping our swords and handles. We then drilled holes into the swords using a hand drill, sawed a small

section of a wooden dowel, and secured the dowel in place with wood glue. We painted the swords golden yellow and once dried, we made holsters for each sword by twisty-tying rope to make a belt. Additionally, we dyed capes using marigolds, calendula, and sunflower petals from the garden. We added turmeric to the dye pot to glean the richness of gold and after mordanting the silks overnight in the dye pot with vinegar, hung them up to dry. These processes were all done outdoors, culminating in our knighting ceremony inside the classroom in conjunction with the festival of Michaelmas.

In the winter months the children build snow people, snow forts, tunnels and other sculptures in the snow. Sleds and balancing snow boards are favored playthings as the hills become covered with snow. The children practice sharing the sleds and boards and giving each other a turn. They also work to integrate their sense of balance, proprioception, and gross motor skills while sledding.

Each spring, we create our crafts for the golden knights (rising first graders in the fall) outside at Willow Camp. We roll a skein of yarn into a ball and finger knit the ball to create a jump rope, with handles made using a petal lathe. We will sew pouches for our Little ones outdoors and make puppets to create a puppet show using ideas of the children’s own creation. We do woodwork outside by building sailboats to float down the creek.

The Willow Camp tipi was donated by a family at the school and provides a cozy space in which to play. Last year, we placed flagstone on the dirt floor of the tipi to ground the space, with large lambskins to create a soft, warm and inviting surface. We brought some play stands, wooden blocks, and a play kitchen into the tipi, as well as some silks with which to play. We encourage Little ones to be played with inside of the tipi. This became an outdoor/indoor nook for play to occur while we were at Willow camp.

The warming tent is roughly 24 feet long by 15 feet wide and has a cubby space to hang our backpacks while at camp. It also includes a wood stove in one corner of the tent. The wood stove warms the tent well on days where there is heavy downpour of rain or when the temperature drops below zero degrees. We can fit the kindergarten children inside of the warming tent to have our snack together on days where the weather is inclement outside. The upkeep and maintenance of the warming tent and tipi provide continual opportunities

for the children to do practical work alongside their teachers, like carrying wood, clearing the decks of snow, and sweeping the platform floor.

The forest hybrid Kindergarten strives to meet the developmental needs of young children by balancing our rhythmic time outdoors with time indoors. In doing so, we wish to imbue in children the reverence, resilience, and overall foundation of sensory and physical integration that will prepare them for a lifetime of learning. The living nature of the program is unique to our environment and takes into consideration the rhythm that will best meet the children of the Roaring Fork valley for today's world. Seeing the children grow and develop in their kindergarten years through this rhythm is rewarding for families and teachers alike. If you have an opportunity, please come and visit us in Carbondale, in the Roaring Fork Valley of western Colorado. ♦

Baruch Simon completed his M.Ed., with Waldorf Teacher training certification, from Antioch New England University in 2007. After beginning his Waldorf kindergarten teaching in California, he now is in his fifth year as lead teacher of a “hybrid” indoor/forest class at the Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork. Baruch's passions include puppetry, music, snowboarding, biking, and exploring time in nature with children. He lives in Carbondale, Colorado with his wife and their son and daughter.

The Wisdom of the Bees in the Early Childhood Classroom

— Julie Anne Voss

Children seem intrinsically drawn to those creatures with wings. A ladybug or a butterfly, a fairy or an angel holds a sacred truth of something “up there,” unseen, yet known to the child. The bees enter into this realm in a more social way than other winged beauties, and the buzzing beehive emanates, through gifts of honey and wax, the good work that is being done there. Humans have long revered the work of the bees and through time an understanding of the connectedness of the bee's life and the human's life arose. The study of the bees by the early childhood educator can support children in creating greater connectedness to that which surrounds them, by creating an environment that acknowledges the dutiful and beautiful work of the bees and the hive.

The Bees' Plight

It was a sunny suburban afternoon. The red clover grew wild in our yard, overtaking the previously planted lawn. The yard was a haven of blooms surrounded

by well-trimmed green yards, fertilized and “cared for” by their owners. It soon became apparent that the clover-filled lawn was also a sanctuary for ailing bees. That summer, two little boys played for hours in their sandbox, next to a little garden full of herbs and zucchini and spinach and calendula. On the other side of the sandbox was the blooming redbud tree, and below it all the clover grew. It was then that the boys became the caretakers of the bees—and with no direction or lament of the bees' dire situation given to them from an intruding adult. In their own little-boy way, they discovered they could build a bee hospital. They spent hours every day collecting the bees and creating havens and rooms in their backyard sandbox for the struggling creatures. It was obvious to the boys and to myself that the bees were ailing. They seemed sleepy and slow, so many just hovering around the clover. I had to hand-pollinate my zucchini that season—the bees seemed unable to find the budding yellow flowers. Instead they stayed low, buzzing

languidly close to the clover. That was the summer my boys spent their days caring for the bees.

A Study of the Bees is a Study of the Human Body

A hive is comprised of three types of bees, which have been scientifically compartmentalized according to their roles of work within the hive. It is true that the queen bee, the worker bees, and the drone bees each have their own work to do to keep the hive healthy and robust. But interconnectedness is strong between the bees. Steiner explains that just as human beings work to build their bodies through the blood, nerves, and muscles, “the bee also constructs a body; the honeycomb, the cells” (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 17). Steiner continues to say that humans also have a wax inside their cells, and that we are made of a kind of wax just like the honeycomb. “So we can say that it is like this: the human being has a head, and the head works on the entire large body which actually is the beehive” (ibid.). The relationship the body has with the nerves, muscles, and cells is like the relationship between the queen, workers and drones.

As I have been studying the bees, I have brought this subject of bees into conversation at the lunch table with the children. One day I was talking about the wax that bees make for our candles. A three-and-a-half-year-old chimed in, “We have wax too! Here and here and here and here!” And she started pointing to various parts of her body. I was astounded. She, in her cosmic connectedness, related to the bees. Humans revere the bees because there is a sense that the bee’s work within the hive is as the human being’s work within the body. “The only way to understand bees is to direct the efforts of your study toward what it is that actually happens between the human head and the rest of the body” (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 23). Blood pulses, workers move; drones deliver, nerves fire outward; the Queen strengthens the hive, the protein cells build the body. Just as the beehive hums with the work of the queen, the workers, and the drones, the human body thrives as a group intelligence and maintains order within.

Forty to sixty thousand bees live in one community, all born of the same mother, the queen bee. The queen bee is nurtured to her revered and important stature by the worker bees; she feeds on royal jelly her entire life (approximately 2 years), while the worker bees receive the royal jelly for just the first few days of their life. The queen bee gives life to the entire colony. However,

there are many caregivers within the colony—the worker bees—who sustain the life of the colony. The queen bee is the procreator, but the worker bees do the nurturing, feeding and caring for the young bees until they are ready to venture out of the hive and forage on their own. The queen bee often gets the glory; but in the workings of the hive, all organisms are imperative for the success of the hive. This synergism is reflected in the “hive” components of the human body such as nerves, blood and protein cells that must co-exist and coalesce.

As I reflect on the beehive, the hum of the early childhood classroom also comes to mind. A teacher can sense when the classroom “hive” is healthy—the happy hum of play emanates warmth and joy. All workings of the child’s environment need to be healthy for the whole to be healthy. The queen in a beehive gives life to the bees, and in the classroom the teacher becomes the life-giver with the role of establishing rhythms that support the healthy classroom hum. “The Queen is the key to the future of each hive, and forming a strong bond with the workers ensures a prevailing mood of calmness, well-being, and rightness in a hive” (Gunther Hauk, *Toward Saving the Honeybee*, p. 40).

The opportunity to further study how the queen forms these strong bonds with the workers is of ongoing interest to me. Bees, as do ants and other creatures, work intelligently as a group, with a wise volition that exceeds simple instinct (Steiner, *Bees*, page 122). A Waldorf kindergarten teacher can take these observations of the bees and ants and other insects and apply them to the social hum of play in the classroom. Work is being done through play, and a wise order is unveiling itself—and though it may look like a chaotic hive or the twists and turns of a line of marching ants, to a patient and observant eye the order of the healthy child’s play can be discovered.

Community in a social way

The order and great diligence

Are ideals to us since the beginning of time.

~ Old Beekeeper Rhyme,

translation from *Plastisches Gestalten* pp. 140-145

Have you ever seen a rectangular nest? How form influences the environment

Consider the roundness of the sun, the moon, the womb. Roundness expresses wholeness. And within



wholeness, there is warmth and protection. A feeling of completeness encompasses one when looking toward the spherical influences of life. Gunther Hauk of Spikenard Farm Honeybee Sanctuary is researching how different hive forms and structural materials used can create a healthier hive. "Roundness is an expression of the life forces and represents warmth, health, productivity, radiance and an over-all energetic resonance with life" (Hauk, *Toward Saving the*

Honeybee, p. 10). The concept of the popular and modern-day rectangular bee box seems to date back to the Romans, while the Egyptians and the Germanic people continued to use round hives. Today, some countries, including Tunisia and the Dominican Republic, also use round hives. Efficiency for the beekeeper propelled the rectangular box forward, but the impact of this decision on the bees was lost. The angularity of the rectangular bee box is more connected to the mineral world.

Ernst Chladni, a German physicist, demonstrated with metal plates and sand the different forms that can be created through sound. Different tones create different patterns and all forms have energies within themselves that affect the environment. With this understanding of how form affects the environment,

we can look to hexagonal shapes of the honeycomb. The formative force of the hexagonal cell influences the bee within it. Though there is an efficiency of space to the hexagonal shape, there is also energy that works within it that influences the growing larvae. "The larva internalizes these forms; in its body it senses that in its youth, while its body was as soft as it would ever be, it was in such a six-sided cell" (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 7). Again we are reminded that the bee informs us of our human selves. As with the bees, the forms, colors, and sensory experiences of the environment formatively affect the children in our care.

The Gifts of the Hive for the Early Childhood Classroom: Honey, Candles, Beeswax Modeling

Honey contains a life-giving force; it is up to us to nurture the physical condition of the body so that the life-giving process can take place. When humans consume honey, they begin the life-forming process within the body that the bees experience in the honeycomb. Steiner explains, "In this process the honey, having been worked upon by the bee's body, has such an effect that it can create wax in just such a form that human beings can use, because all human beings need to have these six-sided spaces within themselves. Human beings need the same things bees do" (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 51). When we ingest the honey of the bees, our own "bee" line—our blood—moves this honey through our body, and creates a wax within us that aids in flexibility and form. This is of particular importance for young children and older adults. "Honey contains the power to maintain the shape and form of the human body, to give it solidity" (Steiner, *Bees*, page 19).

Honey is a traditional food. Cultures around the world and throughout time have sanctified honey, with priests blessing the honey of the region and the hives. According to Steiner, honey becomes an important building block of the body for young children around the time of second dentition, in the teenage years, and in older people. Warm milk with a bit of honey can have curative effects that include improving red blood cell counts, helping with elasticity of the body, and strengthening nerves after the change of teeth. It is the hexagonal formative force, this six-sided cell that

works within the honey on the human being. Provide the young child with a mug of warm milk and honey from a healthy hive to strengthen these hexagonal forces working within.

Steiner explains, “If you eat honey, you take in yourself a tremendously strengthening force. If you become too weak to develop within yourselves this six-sided force that must flow from your head to the rest of the body, if you don’t have any longer the power to give your blood a certain degree of solidity so that this six-sided force is continually present, then honey must step in to make up for the loss” (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 53).

As early childhood educators we can add this strength of honey into our daily meals with the children. A topping of honey on bread or a dab in the oatmeal bowl is not just for the satisfaction of sweetness but to also know we are building their formative forces within that will sustain the children into adulthood.

When we light a beeswax candle, the energy within our own cells, our own wax, is re-invigorated. Steiner reflects, “This wax, burning there before us, we obtained from the beehive. There was a solid substance. When the fire melts this wax and it evaporates, then the wax takes on the same condition that it has in our own bodies” (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 22). Most people feel an undeniable reverence when looking into the flame of a candle. This wax that is transforming in front of our eyes calls to the inward transformative processes that pulse through our own body. Considering these thoughts elevates beeswax modeling and making and using candles to a new level of appreciation—even awe.

Beeswax carries a status of creation like no other, another reason bees have long been revered and held sacred. Steiner says, “If you take a piece of beeswax into your hands, you are actually looking at an intermediary product arising from a mixture of blood, muscles, and bones, more precisely that which

lies between the latter three” (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 22). Steiner explains that humans also go through their own process of wax production within the body but it does not solidify like it does for the bees. Instead this wax remains fluid and is transformed into blood, muscles, and bone cells. “The beeswax that you can see physically is within you in the form of certain powers and energies” (Steiner, *Bees*, p. 23). When one holds beeswax in the hand, there is a warmth of recognition that penetrates into the life forces of the individual. So the child in my class would exclaim of her veiled relationship with the forces of six-sidedness within her own growing body, the wax she has inside “here and here and here!”

Caroline von Heydebrand was a teacher at the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Germany. She describes the benefits of the shaping of beeswax on the developing child: “If parents can give their children beeswax to shape, the kneading of the noble substance will stimulate the creative will of the child—along with the blood that warms and fires his or her hands—to stream into the very tips of the child’s fingers. This not only promotes manual dexterity, but also awakens and fosters the child’s ability to picture things. For we know how movements and gestures of the hands and feet affect the child’s learning to speak and now they also help him too learn to picture and think” (Clausen and Reidel, p. 147).

An early childhood educator can bring soul warmth to the child with the sharing of a story about the bees and having the children hold the beeswax between their hands. I had the opportunity to ask Louise deForest about using beeswax in the classroom and how she came to relationship with the bees. She told me how she would talk with her friend “The Bee Man,” Ron Breland of Cowberry Crossing Farm, about how the bees were doing. The following is the “beeswax story” she shared:

The wind sweeps all throughout the world, over deserts and mountains, jungles and oceans. As it travels, it gathers stories from all the different lands. The leaves of the trees catch these stories as the wind rustles through the leaves and drops them down to the flowers, who save those stories for the bees because bees love stories.

When the bees come to gather the pollen, they also gather up the stories brought by the wind, held by the leaves of the trees and dropped into the flowers' open cups. As the bees make the walls of their babies' rooms out of beeswax, they put the stories into the walls, as well, so their babies will know something about the world. The bees know that all human beings like stories too. So in your beeswax you will find a story that has been put there just for you. But you will only find the story if you let the good sun shine through.

Further stories after this introduction were based upon what Louise learned from “the Bee Man” that described what the bees were actually doing. If teachers lack access to a beekeeper, they may do research to learn about the bees so that their activities are described accurately through our stories' imaginative pictures.

As part of the celebration of the Waldorf 100 anniversary, a primary focus for the campaign is to support schools in establishing their own beekeeping opportunities. Many schools have embraced this and have established their own pollinator gardens and/or beehives. There is much to learn about the bees from scientific, historical, religious, literary, spiritual, environmental, and political perspectives. Bees and other insects are the breath of life gifted to us by the earth and cosmos. How we early childhood educators show our interest, appreciation, and reverence for the world of

bees and the gifts they bring opens the possibility for the children and ourselves to be healers of the earth along with the bees, both now and in the future. ♦

Resources:

- Steiner, Rudolf. *Bees* (Anthroposophic Press, 1998).
- Hauk, Gunther. *Toward Saving the Honeybee* (Biodynamic Association, 2017).
- Clausen and Riedel. *Plastisches Gestalten*. Translation and notes provided by Leslie Burchell-Fox

Julie Anne Voss grew up on the edge of a rural Kansas town where she spent early years running through the prairie short grass, looking for box turtles, and playing outside “until the street lights came on.” It was these early days of fresh air, nourishing routines, and being surrounded by a vessel of warmth that drew her to the tenets of Waldorf education. A former Waldorf early childhood teacher at Prairie Moon Waldorf School in Lawrence, Kansas, Julie Anne currently resides near the shores of a very large lake in Holland, Michigan.

Transitions—In Memory of Rena Osmer

Remembering Rena

— Cynthia Aldinger

Rena Osmer was a master Waldorf early childhood teacher, a natural and loving supporter of parents, and an inspiring adult educator, as well as a devoted parent, grandparent, sister, and friend. She had a way of making you feel welcomed, invited on the journey of learning about life and living, with her not at the helm, but by your side.

Born in 1951 in Detroit, Michigan, Rena was the oldest of four children and, in her own words, had a wonderful childhood, rich with extended family life, until she left for college at Western Michigan University in 1969. Of course, she participated in anti-nuclear and anti-war demonstrations, but also studied education and received her teaching credential for kindergarten through sixth grade.

Her first teaching experience was years later, teaching kindergarten and first grade in a one-room cabin in the woods in northern Michigan to the nine children of a land-based community where she was living and raising her two young boys. In 1985, when her younger son was ready for first grade, they moved to New Hampshire where she began teacher training at Antioch and teaching kindergarten at Pine Hill Waldorf School. Parents and colleagues from that time still speak of the gifts Rena brought to their children and their community.

Within five years of teaching kindergarten, she was also called to teach early childhood teachers part-time for Antioch New England during school vacations. In 1995 she was invited to join the board of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association (later to become WECAN) and served for ten years. She also was at the helm of organizing the first national Waldorf Kindergarten conference and the first international Waldorf Early Childhood Conference in Wilton, New Hampshire at Pine Hill/High Mowing School. It was during this time that our twenty-five year friendship began.

By 1998, after Rena and I left our beloved Waldorf



Schools to research birth to three and childcare, we became part of the Birth-to-Three/Child Care Committee, along with Janet Kellman. That's when our travels began, visiting Family Resource Centers and childcare settings, both Waldorf and non-Waldorf. While visiting a homeless shelter in San Francisco where colleague Carol Cole offered a Waldorf preschool, the name LifeWays appeared in our breakfast conversation to describe the type of care ("the ways of life") we wanted to develop for young children who needed to be in childcare.

What a gift it was to get to know this shining jewel of a woman! Many may not know how funny she was. Her laugh was melodic and generous. Her capacity for listening was almost unmatched. And her care and concern for others was genuine and full of compassion.

Rena was also a researcher and did her Master's thesis on brain research at Antioch. She also trained and became certified in RIE 1 (Resources for Infant Educators). Eventually she took a position as director of the Early Childhood Center at the Cape Ann Waldorf School in Beverly, Massachusetts until she was soon called to move to California where both of her grown sons were living. In 2000, Rena moved to Sebastopol, California, where she taught parent-infant



groups and a parent education course and also started working part-time for Rudolf Steiner College. By 2002, she became full time Director of Early Childhood Education at RSC and oversaw the development and expansion of new early childhood programs, to include “Women’s Empowerment” (a parenting education program for homeless mothers) and RSC LifeWays Children’s Center offering parent-child and childcare options for local families. She directed and taught the various Waldorf early childhood teacher training programs and graduated her last class at RSC in summer 2007.

During Rena’s final two years at Rudolf Steiner College, she commuted back and forth to Florida where she offered loving support to her family as her father, and then her brother, a disabled veteran, died within weeks of each other. At Whitsun 2006, Rena followed her heart and made the decision to settle in Florida near her sister and family. One major challenge—there was no Waldorf school nearby where she could do her life’s work. So what did she do? She became a barista at a coffee shop! Oh my, how we laughed as she described her adventures learning how to work the window and keep up with the orders. Her best analogy of her early experience was from an episode of *I Love Lucy* where Lucy and Ethel worked in a chocolate factory and could not keep up with wrapping and packaging the candy as it moved down the conveyer belt. That was Rena. In the most challenging of situations she could thread out a picture that brought humor or poignant tenderness. However, she was never one to complain and was quick to turn any conversation away from herself and back toward whomever she was with.

Clearly the Waldorf world was not finished with Rena. Even though the coffee shop soon recognized her

as worthy of becoming a manager—she had figured out how to work the window!—her heart belonged to teaching. As the fates would have it, a new initiative was starting up in Boca Raton, and Rena offered her application to become their kindergarten teacher. She served her beloved Sea Star Waldorf School from 2006 until her retirement in 2019. The school recently honored her with the planting of a mango tree on the school grounds, celebrated by children and parents she had taught over the years, and offering a lovely evening showing of the Madonna series of paintings accompanied by gentle music.

Rena learned of her cancer diagnosis in August 2019 and crossed the threshold in her sleep on October 18. Within days before she passed, Rena told her sister, “My work is done here.” Her family took her for one last drive to her beloved ocean. She was a water girl through and through. As she was in life, so she was in death, serving and doing whatever it was that needed to be done. She had dinner with her family on that Friday, drifted off to sleep that night, and quietly answered the call to expand her shining self back out into the spiritual world. It is heartwarming to imagine Joan Almon and other dear ones welcoming her as she crossed. Oh, my goodness. I can hear their laughter! ♦

Cynthia Aldinger is founder of LifeWays North America and traveled with Rena years ago to research the needs of children in childcare. She and Rena served many years together on the board of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America. A mother and grandmother, Cynthia’s passion is the preservation of the playful spirit of childhood.

Rena Osmer as Teacher and Colleague

— Charissa Johnson-Routhier

Every morning for ten years, as I would turn into the parking lot of school, there sat Ms. Rena's happy little turquoise color car in the exact same spot. Rain or shine, Ms. Rena was always the first one to arrive at school despite the fact that she lived further away from school than anyone else who worked there or attended the school. For twelve years, Ms. Rena drove an hour and a half to get to school, and an hour and a half to get back home each day. It was important to her that she was fully prepared to greet the children each morning, and she was never in a rush. In this way, as well as in countless others, Ms. Rena served as an example to her colleagues of what true dedication to the work meant.

Our school, of which Ms. Rena was the founding teacher, was called Sea Star Waldorf School up until the year Ms. Rena retired. Ms. Rena was indeed the star that was the shining and guiding light for the school. She worked tirelessly to lay strong foundations, both physically and spiritually, which allowed the school to grow from a small initiative into a strong and joyful early childhood and grade 1–8 Waldorf school. The loving guidance that she brought to the children, she also brought to the adults she worked with. In a way that was never overbearing, she taught us what was essential in our work. She was strong in never allowing the practical and business challenges of the moment to overshadow the spiritual work and study that we did together as colleagues. Also, as any good teacher does, she pushed us beyond our comfort zones to take up



work that perhaps we, ourselves, were not even aware we had the ability to accomplish.

Some of my favorite memories of Rena are seeing her sitting on her blanket in the play yard, quietly focusing on her crafting, and watching the children come freely to her to work beside her, hug her and hang on her. She had the amazing ability to “hold” any group of children—allowing them all their freedom and still maintaining harmony and orderly rhythm. The stories she told the children had the ability to captivate and inspire awe, and her beautiful puppetry brought to life the magic of the seasons. Her singing voice, which could often be heard in the hallways, was sweet and joyful—even as it became harder for her to reach the high notes.

Every day, as I now walk into the classroom I inherited from Ms. Rena, I can feel her presence. Every day I am reminded of her, and the special time we shared when I was her assistant many years ago. I am acutely aware of the great fortune and blessing that was bestowed upon me to have had her as my mentor and friend for so many years. Also, I am aware of how blessed my own children were to have her as their kindergarten teacher.



Ms. Rena, you are deeply missed and incredibly loved. Thank you for still being the shining star that guides our early childhood program—your early childhood program. The birds in the play yard have grown in number, and their song has become louder and brighter since your passing. The butterflies in the butterfly bush seem to have multiplied immensely, and as I push the children on the swing I sing our song and think of you each day with love and gratitude. You have not gone far. I know your wings have widened and you are flying with joy all around us. ♦

*Fly like a butterfly, fly like a butterfly
Fly like a butterfly in the sky!*



Charissa Johnson-Routhier is a 2012 graduate from the Sunbridge Early Childhood program. She leads the mixed-age kindergarten at the Waldorf School of Palm Beach in Boca Raton, FL where she has served in leadership positions over the last ten years. Charissa's deep love for Waldorf Education grew out of her experience as a Waldorf student herself from early childhood through 12th grade. Charissa lives in West Palm Beach with her husband and two children, who attend the Waldorf School.

For the Classroom

Rethinking Birthday Celebrations

— Jessi Lisell

Birthday celebrations are something I have wondered about for many years. While I have often experienced the magical beauty of these unique moments with families in the classroom, I have also noticed something else at work within these celebrations. In my school there has been a longstanding tradition of inviting each child's family into the classroom for a few hours to celebrate the child's birthday. But when I sat down to really think about what it was I wanted to offer to the children and their families, I found myself wanting to reimagine the whole experience.

I began by focusing in on the feelings I wanted to offer for the children to experience: a sense of community and togetherness and a celebratory joyfulness. The feelings I wanted to minimize were self-centeredness or greed and a sense of being "on display" or of performing. In this process I spoke with many former and current colleagues about what things they experienced in birthday celebrations, as well. It did not take long for me to decide that celebrating more than one child at a time could be a way of bringing more togetherness and simultaneously reducing the self-centered all-about-me attitude that occasionally appeared on a child's birthday. Because my classroom is smaller, I decided to aim for two to three children per celebration.

In deciding which children would share celebrations, I used observations about their personalities, as well as taking into consideration their family constellation (for example, not necessarily pairing an only child with a single parent with another child with a very large family). I also reviewed the Calendar of the Soul verses for the week each child was born and the week during which I hoped to celebrate. There were many times when the date for the celebration had been set in advance of these considerations, however. Then by some

miracle the verses would align in a very cohesive way!

The other soul activity I greatly enjoyed leading up to one of these birthday celebrations was creating the birthday book as a class activity. Birthday-book drawing days would often last much longer than regular drawing days. A feeling of calm settledness embraced the children at the table as they imitated my concentrated, loving work on a picture, and this became a treasured part of the process.

The week of the Birthday Feast there were many tasks that the birthday children would assist with. They would help prepare the flower vases (often helping to pick items from the garden outside our classroom), bake the cake together, and help carry the extra chairs needed for the celebration. On the morning of the celebration while their friends played outside, they would help to set the table, cut fruit, and whip cream to add to our cake. Including all of this work with the two or three birthday children helped build on the sense of togetherness and also helped create an atmosphere of gratitude from the other students. The feeling began to shift from "this celebration is for me and about me" towards "this celebration is a gift of myself to my friends."

The celebration itself, the portion including families, birthday story, and snack, went through a number of transformations during this process as well. In the past, I had told a birthday story and the parents added in an anecdote from each year of the child's life. This format was not conducive to a larger group, especially if the children were turning different ages. Additionally, I often noticed children either withdrawing under this amount of focused attention in the group or expanding in their discomfort with disruptive or silly behaviors. My question was how to engage the birthday children in a meaningful way.

I thought deeply on this question: what does it mean for a child of these ages to be engaged? What does it look like? My answer was that it looks like doing, like being active. It looks like telling the story through action. I began to imagine shifting the original birthday story into a people-play with me leading the birthday children on a journey. Again, wanting to avoid a very focused feeling of attention or “performance,” I decided to have this journey circle around the outside of our birthday story ring. I wrote three short songs in the mood of the fifth to sing as we traveled around the outside of the circle. Each journey around the circle ended with the birthday children in the center of the circle (with their backs to their friends, facing our birthday table) receiving a gift from each of the places we had traveled to.

We would “travel” to The House of the Sun while singing our sun song, and then receive a gift from the Sun at the central table. Their birthday candle, which their parents had made beforehand, was waiting for each child and then lit from a central candle. Next, we would journey to The House of the Moon, singing our moon song, and receive a Moon gift. Waiting on at the central table as a gift made by their teacher was a rainbow cape for a five-year old or an embroidered tooth pouch for six-year old children. Finally, singing our star song circled us back round to The House of the Many Stars where the birthday book classmates had made for them awaited as the Stars’ gift. In between each of these journeys, while the children were receiving and opening their gifts, a few words were spoken to link the birthday story together, about the little angels doing their heavenly work before they traveled to the earth. At last, the assisting teacher pulled out the rainbow silk from under the central table so the birthday children could walk across to

join their families. As the birthday children looked through their birthday books, the other students brought chairs to their table places while the cake was cut. The birthday children worked together to serve everyone, we’d sing our meal blessing, and all began to eat.

While we ate quietly, the birthday families would each take turns sharing anecdotes about their children. This often brought much laughter to our table and such a rich warmth of community that parents have often commented afterwards how tangible it felt. These stories also created many windows and mirrors of experience for the children to take in about their classmates. By speaking with parents before the celebration about what types of stories are best received, I’ve had the benefit of learning some interesting tid-bits about my students and their families that I might not have otherwise ever have heard.

Throughout this process of reimagining how we celebrate birthdays in the kindergarten, my main focus was upon creating an experience for the children and their families that felt more authentic. In practice, I’ve found that the shared Birthday Feast has brought about a deeper sense of community in the classroom as well as among the families who have joined us. The children have readily taken up the generous work of creating this celebration as a gift for their friends, and I see them engaging more fully in the collaborative telling of the birthday story. There has been a marked shift from the sense of “this celebration is for me” towards something more like “this celebration is of me.” It has been a gift to bear witness to this transformation in the children. ♦

Songs

The “Sun Song” is sung to the tune of “In Heaven Shines a Golden Star” (found in *Let Us Form A Ring: An Acorn Hill Anthology*) and the words Jessi uses are adapted from a verse by Rudolf Steiner (original unknown):

*The sun makes bright for me each day
Golden light to guide my way
So everything I say and do
Is filled with kindness warmth and truth*

The “Moon Song” is adapted from a word-of-mouth, unknown source. Note name in bold italics indicates the second octave above middle C.

B A B A
Moon boat, moon boat

G–A B ***D*** B G E D
Sail-ing si-lent-ly a-float

B A B A
Moon boat moon boat

G E E G G
Sail me on the sea

The “Star Song” was also passed down from a forgotten source. Feel free to use a favorite tune or make up your own.

*We bring you flowers of love and joy,
Oh, birthday children today.
We bring you flowers of love and joy,
To pass along your way.*

Jessi Lisell was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She’s a K-8 Waldorf graduate, outdoor enthusiast, freelance knitter, and single mom to a fourth grader. She’s been working in the realm of Waldorf Early Childhood for over ten years and currently teaches Kindergarten at her alma mater, City of Lakes Waldorf School.

Group Birthday Celebration in the Nursery

— Lori Daniels

I began teaching in Waldorf schools more than fifteen years ago and learned from the teacher I was assisting how to bring a beautiful kindergarten birthday ceremony. A year and a half ago when I was hired to teach a nursery program, I was filled with excitement and a bit of hesitation, knowing I would be holding a class of fourteen two-and-a-half to four-year-olds for the first time. Many questions began to swirl in my mind, especially about how to celebrate birthdays with this young group. Do I invite parents in, possibly disrupting the children's dreaminess? Oh, the tears the children may shed when their parents must leave after a glorious celebration! The teacher should carry the best interest of the child at all times, yet, of course, we want to show parents how beautiful a birthday celebration can be. In the celebration is the young child to experience something deeply spiritual, or is this experience as much or more for the parents?

As I pondered all of this, I began to wonder about a group birthday. Could all the children together be celebrated in a meaningful way? Yes, this could be possible. When would this group celebration occur, and what might be just the right gift for this young group? The world has become so bogged down by materialism. How can that be kept from entering this sacred space? A solution has held true for two years now, so I want to share my experiment with others who may be carrying the same questions.

I decided to hold the birthday on the last day of school before the holiday season. This rang true. We have a half-day of school, so why not invite the parents in at the end of the morning to join together for a beautiful story filled with love and wonder to take with them into the holiday season? As I prepared for this special day, I honestly had no idea how it would be received by both the children and their parents. This was an intimidating leap of faith.

At the very first parent meeting of the school year I informed the parents about this special birthday celebration and asked them to mark it on their calendars. This was not to be missed! I explained how birthdays are typically experienced in Waldorf kindergartens, and why a different form had been

chosen for this young group. These young ones are still in a group consciousness, and attention brought so directly to them individually can be uncomfortable, even overwhelming.

Arriving very early to school on this festive day, I set up our 'big room' where I hold our parent meetings. This is special for the children because it is a space we never enter as a class. The previous day, loving hours of baking and decorating produced star cupcakes—more than enough for each child and parent! These I set out along with flowers and golden star napkins, all then covered carefully with a star-and-moon silk. RSVPs from the parents told how many cupcakes to bake, as well as how many chairs to place in an arc around the small, round birthday table covered with a rainbow silk and holding a golden candle. The table also holds a lovely needle-felted moon boat with an angel holding a baby resting inside it. Music would sound from a fine marimba.

As the parents arrived and chatted quietly in their chairs, the children and I sang songs as we waited with anticipation in our little classroom. They clustered around me singing and followed as I led them into our big room to happily snuggle onto their parent's lap. Everyone was quietly greeted with a smile and a few words. The rainbow silk was lifted. Then I sat down behind the round birthday table and played the marimba. As the music danced through the room, the assisting teacher carefully placed a starry crown on each child's head. Once each child had been crowned, the candle was lit, and the song of "In Heaven Shines a Golden Star" filled the room.

The weeks leading up to this ceremony, the children had heard stories of the wonder of a child coming and of how everything in the world is born. The room filled with quiet expectation as the following story was shared—

Once upon a time a long time ago, but not so long ago, and far away, but not so far away, all of you children were not here on the earth at all. You were star children together up in the heavens. Each of you had a big angel who was always by your side. So happily you all played together, for

you were not far from one another. You loved to listen to the beautiful music there and gaze at the many splendid colors around you.

One day, the clouds parted in the heavens and all of you looked down and saw the big, blue, beautiful earth below. Looking in amazement, you saw pretty birds flying in the skies, colorful fish swimming in the waters and then—what was that?—children! Children with skin of many colors and eyes shining with the light of the heavens. These children were running, building sand castles, swinging, walking down tree-lined paths, and gazing at majestic mountains covered with snow. You noticed grown-ups with the children. Those grown-ups had twinkles in their eyes. They were kind and good and longing for children of their own. All of you ran to your big angels and cried, “Can we go down there and be with them?” “Yes,” replied the angel, “but first you must each make a long journey.”

One by one, when each of you was still a star child, you traveled alongside your big angel and went to visit and receive a gift from the House of the Sun, the House of the Stars, and the House of the Moon. When you arrived at the House of the Sun, you were given the gift of strength, the strength you would need on Earth to do your very best. You thanked the Sun. Soon you visited many, many, shining stars. A special star reached out, giving the gift of the twinkle you would have in your eyes on the earth. Thanking the stars, you all continued on to the House of the Moon. There the Moon gave the gift of courage, the courage you would need to stand up tall, to do right for all. You thanked the Moon. One at a time, each of you climbed into a little moon boat of your very own, which gently rocked to-and-fro, to-and-fro [here I held up and rocked the moon boat that is sitting on the birthday table]. You knew it was time to leave the little boat.

A Rainbow Bridge stretched all the way down to Earth. You slid down the bridge of beautiful colors right to your place of birth. Before each of you took your journey to be born on the Earth, your big angel gave you a hug—and a kiss that

is still with you [pointing to the indentation above the lip]. Your big angel said, “I will always be with you.” So down the rainbow bridge each star child went... First our dear Cahill and Tyler were born to their mommy and daddy. Next to be born was Savanna, then Meets, followed by Huddy. These children on earth were now waiting for the other star children to be born from the heavens! Soon after, dear Yvette and Nathaniel were born. These seven had made their way from heaven. Now they were on the earth as babies and they began to smile, roll and crawl, for they were happy to be with their earth parents after all! With twinkles in their starry eyes, they heard star children calling who had not yet been born, “We’re coming soon!” and it was true. One by one from the heavens they were born. Next came Nolan, Ehro, Mirabelle, and Esme who joined their mommies and daddies here on the earth. Nelly and Luna were next to arrive. Soon after, Matilda, Thomas, Lucy, Park and Harper were born to join the laughter of their friends here, too. All of these dear children began to walk and talk, and as they had planned in their starry bower, they joined together here at Starflower [the name of our classroom]!

The whole room was quiet while I carefully reached down and picked up a big basket filled with gifts for the children. Going back to concerns about materialism, what would be a right gift to give each child? The first year I gave each child a small doll wrapped in a little piece of silk. I hired a friend to help me complete the dolls beautifully on time. When the birthday story was finished, I sang the words, “Star baby, star baby come down to the earth. Star baby, star baby, it’s time for your birth.” The children sat very still and somehow knew not to open their gifts until each child’s hands were full. When they opened their precious baby, there were gasps of excitement heard throughout the room. The candle was snuffed out and the children came running to give hugs and thank yous. It was a most heart-warming sight.

Considering what to give this year after the joy of last year’s celebration, I decided on a woolen angel wrapped in a golden play silk. This year, knowing

the angel would be the birthday gift, the angel was integrated into the story of the child that would soon be born. When the children carefully unwrapped their angel, again there was a gasp of excitement and, again, they ran to give hugs. A quiet mood of contentment and communal gratitude and love filled the room.

Entering winter break in this soulful mood allowed the birthday celebration to sink in with deep contemplation. Had the ceremony brought what the children needed? Was the truth and beauty kept alive from years past? Yes, a resounding yes! The children were calm, attentive, and starry-eyed. The quiet—even while eating cupcakes!—was a clear indication the children had a true connection with the story. The gift did not bring a sense of materialism. One very awake,

precocious four-year-old child asked, “Miss Lori, how did you even make these angels?” “Oh, with so much love!” With that response, the child smiled, satisfied.

Will I continue to hold birthdays this way in the future? Yes, until another seed of inspiration comes. ♦

Lori Daniels is currently the lead preschool teacher at The Denver Waldorf School. She is married and has two sons, ages 21 and 24. Before coming to Colorado almost five years ago, Lori taught and assisted at City of Lakes Waldorf School in Minneapolis, MN. With a passion for those children who love to challenge us teachers, she hopes to open a therapeutic kindergarten in the near future.

Auntie Lila's Garden

— Annie Sommerville-Hall

Excerpt from *Tell Me Another Story: More Stories from the Waldorf Early Childhood Association*, edited by Louise deForest (WECAN, 2019).

Down a little lane and past some houses and tall trees there lived a gardener. This old Auntie had been tending her garden for many years and it had grown. She had fine tall blueberry bushes and fruit trees that were gnarled and squatty, and a large garden full of vegetables, herbs and flowers.

She made sure her plants had rich compost and plenty of water, and that they were planted in just the right places to soak up the sun.

Butterflies and ladybugs loved Auntie Lila's garden. They flew all around adding color and life. They went from plant to plant, flower to flower, and the pollen that went with them helped the flowers and the plants to grow. Bumblebees came to her garden, too. They collected pollen and as they went, their legs became so full of pollen that they almost seemed too heavy to fly.

When Auntie Lila came to check on her blueberries and fruit trees she could see some fruit starting to grow; small, at first, and then into the summer season, they grew ripe and juicy.

The children who lived nearby loved to visit her. They came with their garden gloves and helped her weed, and dig, and pick the fruit and vegetables.

In the heat of the summer, they came and helped her pick the ripe blueberries. They picked the fruit off the bushes. They brought the blueberries into Auntie Lila's kitchen and helped her make the dough for the pie crust and added the juicy berries. They only made two pies, but OH!, they were delicious!

Out in the garden, the butterflies and bumblebees and ladybugs flew from plant to plant. There was a gentle wind and it blew them all into the same area of the garden together.

“How can we help Auntie and her garden?” the butterflies and bumblebees and ladybugs all wondered. “She gives it so much love and attention, but she needs help from the honeybees, too.”

They all agreed to spread the word to neighboring gardens and farms and forests that honeybees were welcome and wanted there.

Summer went by and autumn came, with a harvest of a few apples. Winter came and Auntie Lila made sure her plants were bedded down with leaves and mulch.

Spring arrived and new leaves, blossoms, and life came to the garden. One early spring day, she came out to work in her garden and there before her was a swarm of honeybees!



Such a sight! It was a cluster of honeybees looking for a new home. She had a hive! They had arrived! She collected what she needed and came back out to the bees. She laid a sheet carefully out under the swarm. She put an empty hive box right under them. She took a rope and very carefully tied it to the branch where the swarm was clustered all together, buzzing loudly. She took hold of the rope and took a deep breath and then yanked quickly on the rope.

The bees dropped. Some bees went into the box, and some on the sheet, and some on her! She stood very still and watched. There was a small cluster of bees in the box. They were all around the queen bee, taking good care of her. The other bees were marching in a line, one after another, right into the hive box. They looked like a royal parade.

The bees set up house in no time. They had a new home. When all the bees were inside, Auntie put the top on her new hive. Now her garden was so busy! From dawn to dusk the bees went from blossom to blossom, from plant to plant, gathering pollen and nectar and making honey.

The butterflies, bumblebees and ladybugs were glad for the company. That spring there was more fruit on

the trees, more vegetables in the garden, and more blueberries on the bushes than ever before.

In the heat of the summer, the children came to harvest the blueberries and brought their friends. They picked and picked and picked! So many blueberries were brought into the kitchen and so many pies were made, all sweetened with golden honey! OH! They were delicious!

After the children had eaten, they went with Auntie Lila into the garden. They played and sang. The garden hummed and buzzed. The butterflies and ladybugs flew all around. The garden was so much happier with the honeybees and it was especially happy because it was full of children. ♦

Annie Sommerville-Hall *has been an early childhood teacher at the Waldorf School of Atlanta since 1993 in both the kindergarten and nursery. Each year with the parents and children in her class, she collaboratively sews a quilt on a theme, "following a thread" just like a story can! She enjoys weaving stories from her experience in the world around her, and from the growth and understanding that the children bring.*

Building the Kingdom of Childhood Together: Two Vignettes

— Stephanie Hoelscher

Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar

When human beings meet together seeking the spirit with unity of purpose then they will also find their way to each other.

—Rudolf Steiner

An American teenager stood in a Buddhist temple complex. He, the observer, was seventeen, educated through eighth grade at Waldorf schools in southwestern and northeastern United States and now studying in a public high school.

They, the subjects of his interested gaze, were kindergarten-age children eating their lunches. Many, many children. Dozens of children. Too many children to count. Burmese, Shan, and Chinese children.

They sat on benches at long rectangular tables arranged end-to-end. The six tables occupied most of the space in the rectangular room adjacent to a row of six classrooms. Tall pots of rice and vegetables sat on a counter alongside a jug of water and a plate of cups.

The lunchroom was quiet. The children were eating. When finished they stood from their places, scraped their bowls, and rinsed them at a sink. Children wanting more food helped themselves standing on tiptoe at a stool to reach the food. The children were as young as three and a half. A few teachers worked quietly in the corners of the room. They did not speak. No verbal instruction or redirection was needed.

The observer was astonished. “That would be utter chaos in the United States,” he reported to his mother.

His mother, an American Waldorf early childhood teacher, agreed. She turned to her host, Ying Hwe, who had brought them to this “leading kindergarten” in the northern Shan state of Myanmar. This school, the first to bring Waldorf early childhood education to the Shan state, serves over 200 young children in

twelve classrooms in a large temple complex perched on a high hill overlooking Lashio, the final stop on the British-built narrow gauge railroad line from Mandalay, a 12-hour ride away.

“We could not do this in the United States,” said the American teacher. “How is this possible?”

Ying Hwe did not understand the question. She cocked her head, wrinkled her nose, crinkled her eyes and grinned at her American friend. The American rephrased the question; she tried to provide a cultural context.

Ying Hwe was quiet. She looked out into the expansive outdoor play space, quiet and empty at lunchtime. Some moments passed before she spoke.

Ying Hwe gestured toward her heart. “When the teachers are calm inside, the children will be calm,” she said in reply.

The American mother and son looked at her. They looked at each other. They did not speak.

Ying Hwe sensed their wondering puzzlement. She continued:

“Every morning before the children arrive all the teachers come together for twenty minutes of meditation. All together. Two dozen teachers each and every day.”

Ying Hwe’s seven-year-old son pulled on the arm of his American teenager-friend. The older obliged the younger with a smile, and the two scampered off. The two teachers continued to sit together in silent contemplation. Brought together months ago in Dornach. That is another story.

Every day something must be achieved inwardly.

—Rudolf Steiner, *Guidance in Esoteric Training: From the Esoteric School*

Yulin, Guangxi, People's Republic of China

A single dusty fan pushed heavy, humid air around a classroom crowded with tired and sweating bodies. After a morning of physical labor during a community workday at the Little Forest home kindergarten, this Waldorf classroom in southern China had new wood flooring inside and a brick pathway outside. The audience of forty or so people perched on benches and straight-backed chairs marked with names like “Little Fish” and “Flying Cloud.” Most were young and parents of the young children who played noisily outside in the dirt, water, and scrubby grass of a large, fenced lot. Outside the fence was a half-acre of land farmed primarily by elderly women who lived nearby. The open door of the classroom led to a covered porch overlooking the garden’s mounded rows of ripening corn, beans, and tomatoes. It was mid-summer, sunny, and very hot.

It also was a special day for the school. Little Forest, one of the 300 private initiatives in China practicing Waldorf early childhood education, was celebrating its five-year anniversary and its new home on the first two floors of a three-story house on the outskirts of a large city, Yulin, in the province of Guangxi. The school’s founder and director, Chen Qiaohong—a grey-haired, motorcycle-riding visionary—had procured funding from the International Association of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) and China Waldorf Early Childhood Education Forum (CFCEF) to support my two-week mentoring visit to her school. As part of the anniversary festival, everyone gathered for the school’s first outreach event, a public lecture on a topic known in all corners of the world: the work of parenting.

Over the course of the afternoon individuals recalled memories of their own childhood to reflect upon the shared work of building a kingdom of childhood in the world today at school and home.

What came forth in this honest and open collective self-reflection spoke not of cultural traditions that divide but of a common human experience that unites. What brings to children a world that is good, beautiful, and true, then and now, there and here? Family, home, human relationships: a father’s voice announcing his arrival home after work; a cat curled on a pillow at bedtime; the aroma, anticipation, and taste of a grandmother’s cooking; the cool touch of a mother’s hand on a warm forehead; a waiting dog. Hearth, home, and family. Warmth, love, and security.

More than 2000 kindergartens in 80 countries around the world exist in this year of Waldorf 100. After a summer spent with Waldorf teachers on the other side of the world, I return to my work here reassured by what I witnessed. Waldorf pedagogy is neither a theoretical system nor a collection of methods. It is a wellspring of living insight. As Orchard Valley begins a new school year, it is my hope that we might forge new intentions informed by the worldwide movement and begin to think beyond the confines of our own place and purpose in rural, central Vermont. In the preamble to the IASWECE statutes, Dr. Helmut von Kgelgen writes: “Against a background of prevailing materialistic trends in education and modern culture, the protection, indeed the salvation, of childhood as the fundamental state of each individual’s unfolding life has become a worldwide pioneering work.” ♦

Stephanie Hoelscher *lives in central Vermont with her family, dogs, and chickens and teaches kindergarten at the Orchard Valley Waldorf School. She is deeply grateful for the opportunity to support the international movement which unites her work as a Waldorf educator and an anthropologist who believes in the power of observation, participation, and deep listening.*

Book Reviews

With Stars in Their Eyes—Brain Science and Your Child's Journey toward the Self

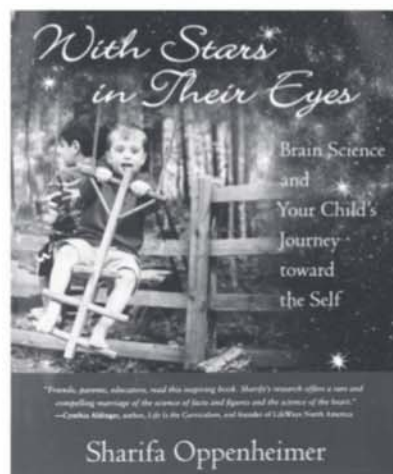
Sharifa Oppenheimer

Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

With Stars in their Eyes by Sharifa Oppenheimer is a valuable new resource for Waldorf early childhood educators. The book is written primarily for parents of young children to give encouragement and practical advice to support healthy development toward true Selfhood, true individual Humanhood, which includes nourishing not only the body but also the soul and spirit. The author does this in a warm, accessible, artistic yet practical way, giving us another rich resource to recommend to parents for enriching and strengthening family life.

But this is not all that our skeptical times are asking for. People today want to see mainstream, scientific research—especially about brain development—that confirms that what we do in our early childhood classes truly does prepare the neurological foundation for future intellectual, academic development and achievement. The gift Sharifa gives to us educators is these exact research studies we have been longing to find and share with our parents and the wider community. We know from our own experience of watching the children grow and develop that the wisdom of Waldorf education is true. Now we have mainstream research that confirms what Waldorf educators have been practicing for the last one hundred years.

When people hear “brain research,” ears perk up and attention warms. To competently share this confirming research well, we have first to educate ourselves in the basics of brain structure and development. Learning accurate vocabulary, which we can use with confidence, is essential. So the book kindly begins with a primer to introduce us to this topic. The explanation credits Dr. Paul MacLean, a leading brain scientist, with introducing the concept of the “triune brain.” We have likely heard reference to the



“reptilian brain,” the “mammalian brain,” and the “human brain,” three different levels of brain structure. The “reptilian” part of the brain regulates the sensory-motor system, survival, and fight-or-flight regulation in the brain. It is literally the lowest part of the brain structure as part of the brain stem. Located spatially above and surrounding this lower structure is the “mammalian” or “limbic” part of the brain, which has to do with emotional life, relationships with other members of our species,

herd or pack behavior, and nurturing of the young. The “human” part of the brain, the neocortex is structurally uppermost and houses our capacity for analysis, logic, verbal language, synthesis, imagery and “gestalt.” And then there is the prefrontal cortex, the seat of executive functioning, of the capacity to identify and direct higher purpose, altruism, generosity, and an experience of “Oneness” (Oppenheimer, p. 10). This is identified as the “cosmic” part of the brain; a diagram in the book locates this as just behind the “the third eye” position on the forehead.

This offers a picture of a bottom-to-top arrangement called “a serial functional progression also referred to as scaffolding. This means that each stage of development depends upon the stability, efficiency, and durability of previous stages” (p. 11). A more direct way of saying this is that how well the higher-level areas will develop and elaborate depends directly upon how fully and completely the previous level has developed. What happens next depends completely upon the strength, maturity, and consolidation of what has happened before. The implication of this is that the child’s development should be allowed to unfold and elaborate in its own time. When things are pushed or rushed by outside demands for which the brain is not developmentally ready (such as early academics) it means that higher-order levels of the brain will become engaged before the previous area has finished its growth. Things will be skipped and the overall integrity brain structure and function be compromised.

The book goes on to describe in more detail the sensory-motor, the limbic-relational, the neocortex-thinking, and the prefrontal-empathetic-understanding “angel lobes” systems of the brain. These discussions offer more vocabulary for describing the many attributes of human life that these discrete parts of the brain exist to house.

In our classrooms we know that direct sensory experience of the natural world, active, purposeful movement and practical work, artistic activities and stories, and play are essential, foundational experiences that children need to grow their own bodies and to begin to find their place in the world. Extensive chapters are devoted to these “essentials” and are accompanied by research material that validate that all of these grow the brain in healthy, integrated, beautifully elaborated ways. Clinical MRI studies and sociological studies also show that experiences in nature, movement, arts, stories, and play also lay the foundations for adaptability, resilience, flexibility, and creativity.

The later chapters in the book offer examples for home and family activities that can be integrated into daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms to support this wholeness of development in addition to what happens at school.

The book starts and ends with “the love connection,” referring to the warmth of true interest in dedication to the welfare of the other. Committed relationship between child and parent (and other adult care-givers) lifts these suggestions out of the check-list or recipe-like approach that could arise from a clinical brain study. It counteracts our tendency to search for “quick-and-easy” answers to the question of how to grow a healthy human being. The warm, reassuring, and supporting gesture of this book makes it accessible and inviting to readers while it also maintains an objective presentation of this confirming research information. It is well worth our attention as a valuable new resource to support our work with children toward growing up strong and true. ♦

WECAN Brings Two Vital Resources Back to Print

— Donna Lee Miele, Publications Coordinator

We are pleased to play a role in keeping important resources for Waldorf educators available after the original publications go out of print. Two books WECAN has brought back this year arose from international conferences examining the intersections of health, development, and education through an anthroposophic lens.

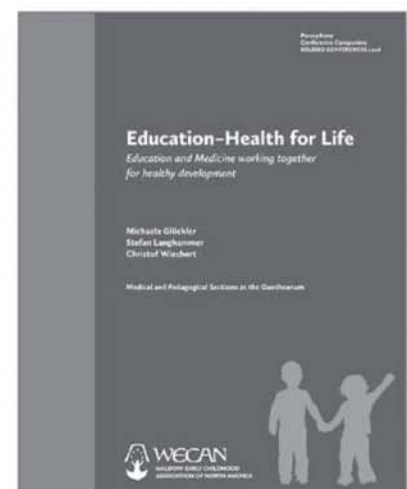
Education – Health for Life

Edited by Michaela Glöckler, Stefan Langhammer, and Christof Wiechert

Originally published by the Medical and Pedagogical Sections of the Goetheanum, *Education – Health for Life* sprang from the 2006 Kolisko conference series, seeking to bring together the pedagogical and therapeutic tools found within Waldorf education. The WECAN edition offers revisions to the original text and a new article, “The Nature of the Human Being,” by Astrid Schmitt-Stegmann.

From the section entitled “About the Kolisko Conferences”:

Eugen Kolisko (1893-1939) was an Austrian physician who specialized in preventative medicine and worked closely with Rudolf Steiner, becoming the school doctor at the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, Germany. His practice took into account children’s developmental processes in body, soul and spirit. His legacy encourages the collaboration of teachers, doctors, therapists, and parents to support the healthy development of each child.



Over the last few decades, the Kolisko conferences have sought to bring together the pedagogical and therapeutic tools found within Waldorf education. In 2006, for the first time, there were nine such conferences held worldwide in Hyderabad, India; Taipei-Taichung, Taiwan; Cape Town, South Africa; Manila, Philippines; Krym, Ukraine; Sydney, Australia; Guanajuato,

Mexico; Järna, Sweden; and Paris, France. This compilation arose from the 2006 Kolisko conference lectures, spanning topics that include meditation for teachers, projective geometry, children's exposure to technology, how to approach sex education, physiology and its connection to education, and more. ♦

Transitions in Childhood from Birth to 14 Years Pedagogical Section of the Goetheanum and the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education

Originally published in German and English by the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum, *Transitions in Childhood from Birth to 14 Years* arose out of a 2015 conference on the theme, drawing 550 people from 46 countries. WECAN's edition is in English only.

From the Preface:

A main intention was to bring together a variety of professionals from different areas to work together on current educational questions and thus deepen their understanding of child and human development.

Claus-Peter Röh summarized the mood at the end of the conference as follows: "During this conference we have tried, with great intensity and candor, to create a community of awareness around various areas of education. The desire to always keep the idea of 'a whole' in mind while discerning the individual was clearly apparent as well as the attempt to see the holistic aspect of events in time in connection with tangible developments. Now we stand before the challenge of further developing our collective work and newly gained insights into the future."

Opening the book with "Transitions: The In-Between," Florian Osswald discusses the essential need for educators to recognize and honor not only developmental transitions but transitional spaces at school and in the world. He writes, "Every person stands alone, goes his or her own way and that which forms between people can occur only through encounter. Therefore, a substantial portion of education is dedicated to that which occurs between people." ♦



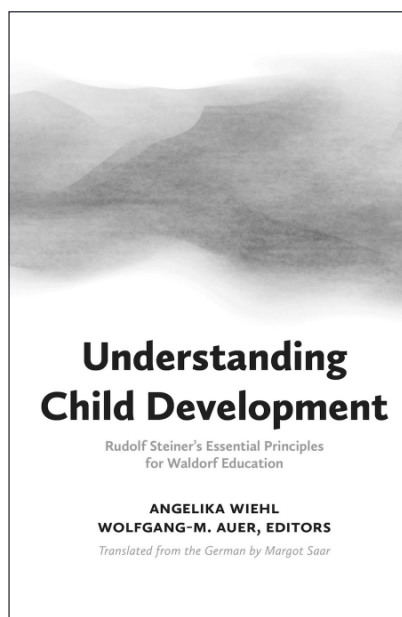
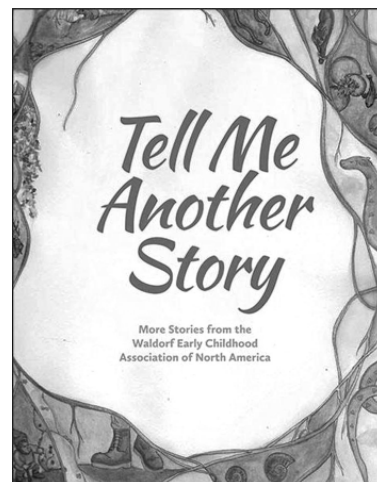
New Books from WECAN

— Lory Widmer, editor-at-large

Waldorf educators are challenged to be both creative artists and scientific researchers, bringing joyful, life-enhancing experiences to the children while also continually deepening their understanding of the human being through the insights and ongoing development of anthroposophy. We are pleased to offer two new publications that can help with these different aspects of your work.

Tell Me Another Story: More Stories from the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America is a companion volume to the bestselling *Tell Me a Story*, offering another wide-ranging selection of favorite stories contributed by Waldorf early childhood educators. There are stories for “Spring and Summer Time,” “Autumn Time,” “Winter Time,” “Times in Need of Special Care,” and “Anytime,” including original stories and classic tales retold, stories for younger and older children, and stories from many different countries of the world. As with the first volume, we hope that this will become a cherished resource for parents and families as well as in the Waldorf nursery and kindergarten. See the “For the Classroom” section of this issue for a seasonal story taken from the collection.

As editor Louise deForest writes in her introduction: “In our world of too much information, a world of too little heart and too much logic and reason, stories reconnect us to the wonder and the possibilities we knew existed when we were children. Life becomes pregnant with the unexpected, with laughter and genuine tears, and we can feel that anything is possible.” Created out of the loving work of many colleagues, this book may become a gift for your own work, sparking a sense of the limitless possibilities to be found in the world of story.



Understanding Child Development: Rudolf Steiner's Essential Principles for Waldorf Education is an important contribution to teacher development, from our colleagues in Europe. Edited by Angelika Wiehl and Wolfgang-M. Auer and translated from the German by Margot Saar, it centers around a thoughtfully chosen and arranged selection of excerpts from Rudolf Steiner's works, which form a basis for meeting the needs of children out of a true, holistic understanding that supports them in the fullest way possible. Topics covered include the image of the human being in Waldorf education, child development, imitation, the sensory organization, imagination, play, rhythmic life, and the temperaments. The section concludes with sources that guide the educator in self-education, developing pedagogical intuition, and the practice of exercises for self-development.

Along with introducing the Steiner excerpts, the editors and other authors have contributed extended essays on the anthropology of childhood, imitation, sensory development, the study and practice of Waldorf education, and the future of childhood. With many years of experience as teachers and teacher trainers, they have made this a compact but very powerful resource that should be widely used and appreciated. ♦

Calendar of Events

Personal and Professional Development

April 25, 2020, Waldorf School of Princeton, Princeton, NJ. Mid-Atlantic Regional Gathering: "Pictorial Speech and the Nurturing of Imagination". For more information, contact Mary Marshal at mmaschal@waldorfsaratoga.org.

June 14 - 19, 2020, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY. Introduction to Waldorf Early Childhood Education: An Immersion in the World of the Waldorf Nursery / Kindergarten, with Lisa Miccio of The Waldorf School of Garden City. For more information, contact info@sunbridge.edu / 845-425-0055 x20.

June 14 - July 31, 2020, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY. Sunbridge Summer Series courses and workshops, including "Introduction to Waldorf Early Childhood Education," "Exploring the World of Birth to Three," "Waldorf Weekend," "Collaborative Leadership," and more. For information/registration, visit www.sunbridge.edu or contact Barbara Vitale at info@sunbridge.edu or 845-425-0055 x20.

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

June 22 - 26, 2020, Marin Waldorf School, San Rafael, CA. Birth to Three: Meeting the Young Child Today, with Kate Hammond and Donna Stusser. This week is designed for practitioners already immersed in working with Birth to Three in Waldorf settings, and assumes participants have completed a Waldorf teacher training. For information: www.bacwtt.org / tiffany@bacwtt.org / 415-479-4400.

June 26 - 28, 2020, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY. Developmental Insights and Practices for Working With Infants and Toddlers, with Anna Ruth Myers of The Nurtured Child. For more information, contact info@sunbridge.edu / 845-425-0055 x20.

June 28 - July 3, 2020, Star Dance Farm, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Dancing Hands and Frolicking Voices: Summer Week-long Retreat. Developmental movement, music, and speech providing incarnational support for healthy early childhood. Stand alone retreat or part of a 2-year program. For more information contact lynnstpierre77@gmail.com.

June 29 - July 3, 2020, Marin Waldorf School, San Rafael, CA. Building the Vessel: Early Childhood Rejuvenation, with Diane David and Anna Rainville. How do teachers develop and continue to grow so that they can provide the vessel for the many magical qualities that must be brought into the Early Childhood environment? For information: www.bacwtt.org / tiffany@bacwtt.org / 415-479-4400.

July 6 - 21, 2020, Great Lakes Waldorf Institute, Milwaukee, WI. Early Childhood Summer Intensive: An Introduction to Waldorf Human Development: Birth to 21. Essentials of a Waldorf Kindergarten. For information please contact Sandra at 414-299-3820 or admin@greatlakeswaldorf.org.

July 6 - 24, 2020, Rudolf Steiner Center, Thornhill, ON, Canada. 2020 Summer Festival: Early Childhood offerings include Kathie Young's "Wet and Dry Felting" and "Leading Learning Communities - a Case Study of Two Waldorf Schools," with Heather Church and Arlene Thorn. For information please contact info@rsct.ca or visit: www.rsct.ca.

August 6 - 10, 2020, Threefold Education Foundation, Spring Valley, NY. Pathways to a Human Future: The Twelve Senses. To address the trauma and unrest of our time, we must be in authentic relationship to those around us. The care and development of the senses is crucial for the capacity to experience real compassion and to live in service to the world. For more information contact 12senses@threefold.org.

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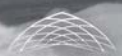
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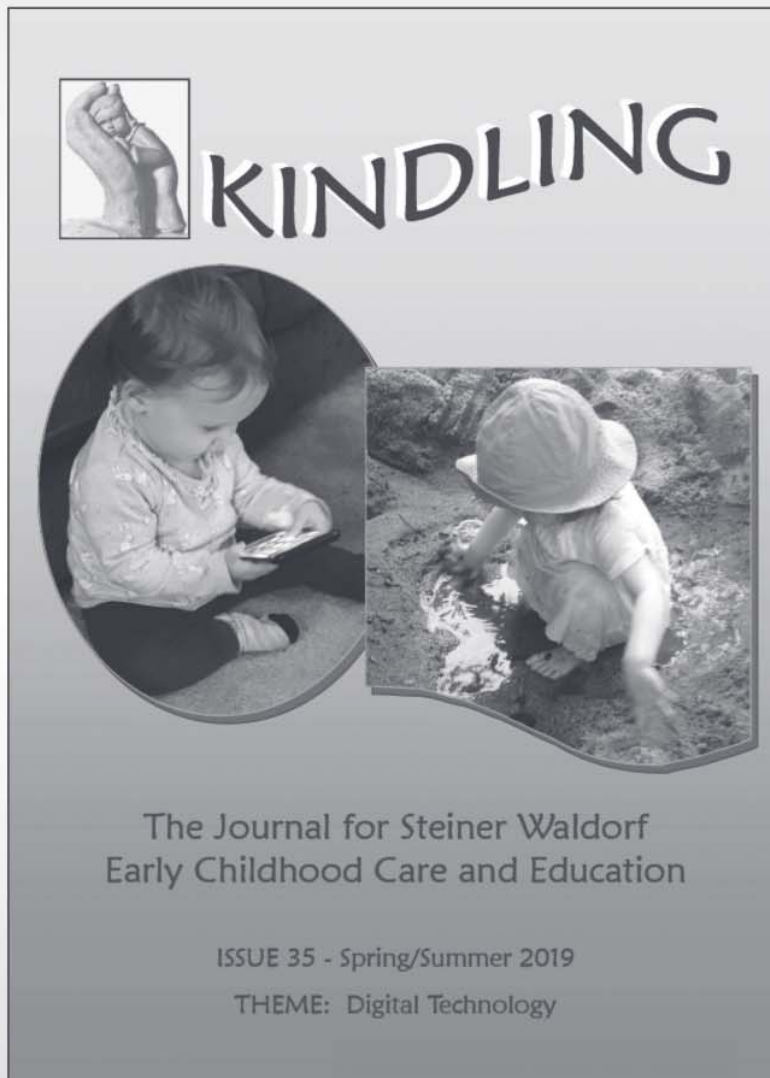
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- have no training or background in the work, or
- have been out of the field for a while and could use a refresher.

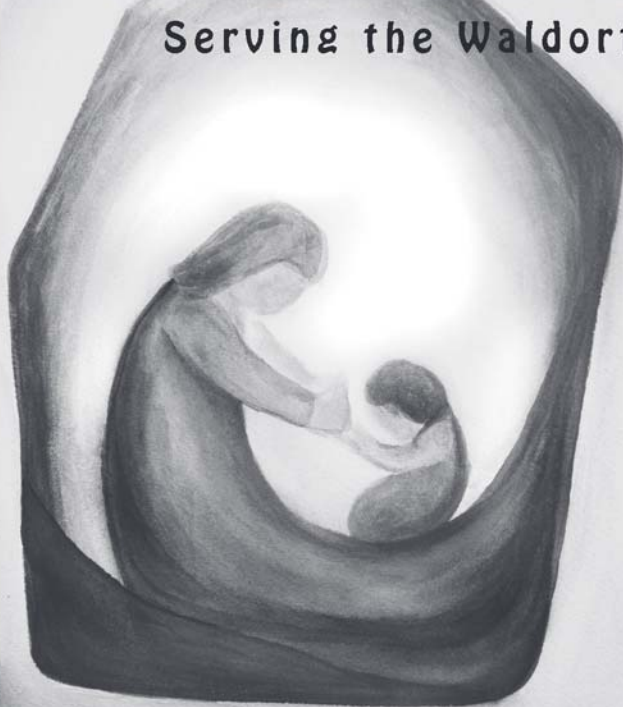
The 2020 in-person workshops will take place in two locations: choose **Tucson, AZ** in July or **Boulder, CO** in August.

Learn more about the LifeWays Fundamentals Course as well as other Online Courses and the LifeWays ECC Certification Training at

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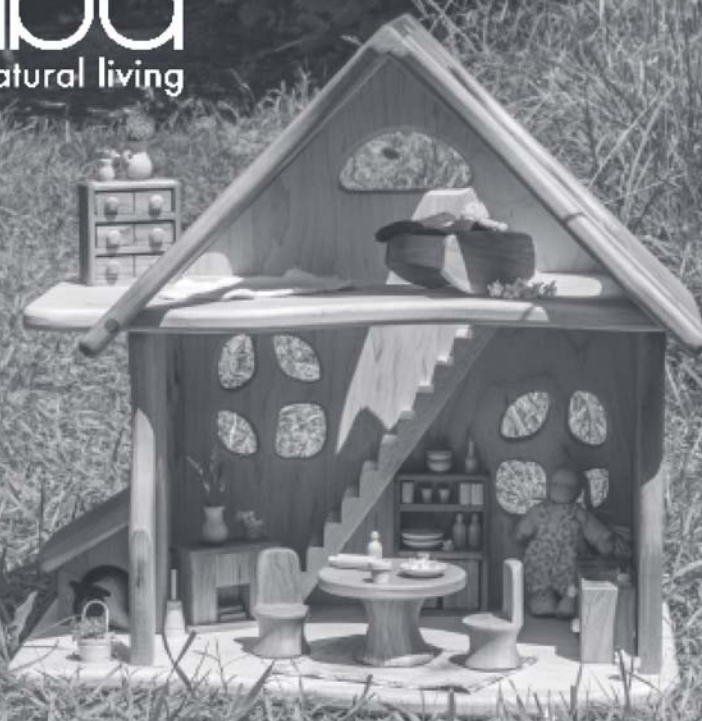
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NEW SESSION BEGINS JUNE 22

Our 500-hour training is for the full Early Childhood Teacher Certificate recognized by WECAN. The program starts with the Birth-to-Three Specialization curriculum, focusing on the first phases of development of movement, language and social life. The Kindergarten years look more clearly toward the group and the outside world. Anthroposophical studies and an advanced research project deepens the teacher's foundation.

Birth-to-Three Specialization Program

NEW SESSION BEGINS JUNE 22

This 300-hour training provides a philosophical, practical and artistic foundation for the care of young children and for supporting family life. Waldorf Early Childhood Education forms the basis of the program, which is complemented by the work and research of the Pikler Institute in Hungary.

Child Development I & II

JUNE 22 – 26, AND JUNE 29 – JULY 3

Incarnational Support

JUNE 22 – JUNE 26

Engage in further pedagogical exploration and personal development in this week-long course which focuses on the incarnational challenges of today's children. This is a post-graduate level course.

Introduction to Waldorf Early Childhood Education

JULY 6 – JULY 10

Foundational course looking at the unfolding development of the child from pre-birth to seven. There will be music, artistic and practical activities for the Waldorf teacher working in the nursery-kindergarten, in home care, childcare and parent-child programs.

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Early Childhood Teacher Training

Applications Due June 1st 2020

Beginning in June 2020

Summer Courses

- June 29 - July 3 • New Paradigms in Waldorf Early Childhood Education - Finding a health-giving balance between continuity & change
- July 6-10 • Approaching the Question of Diversity in Waldorf Schools - An exploration with guest presenter Meggan Gill and SCC Faculty
- The Art of Teaching Spanish - with Rosa Vela Sachs From grammar and story telling to, practical applications, lesson planning and Arts and movement.
- July 13-17 • Middle School Inspirations - Touching the source & finding one another

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Heaven on Earth

Supporting 'Unbornness', Birth and Early Development in Waldorf Education

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with Debbie Laurin, Louise de Forest,
Angela Light and Esther Chase

Accompanying children under three years of age is becoming an important mission of our times. In order to accomplish this with right activity and grace, we need to have understandings about the nature of these younger children, about birth itself and the 'land from whence they came'.

Understanding Today's Children Practical Therapeutic Applications for the Classroom

July 6 to 10, 2020

with Laurie Clark, Louise deForest, Debbie Laurin,
Angela Light and Wendalyn von Meyenfeldt

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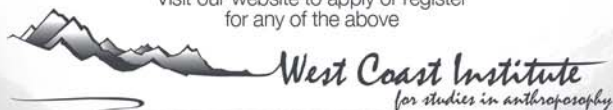
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NEURODIVERSITY *a living conference* CRAFTING CONNECTIONS



Fri 17 and Sat 18 July 2020, Ruskin Mill College | United Kingdom

In partnership with Hay Festival, this conference explores neurodiversity in an atmosphere of creativity, social inclusion, lively cultural exchange and research. Come and experience the transformative power of craft alongside Ruskin Mill Trust students, and listen to the many voices of neurodiversity with Steve Silberman and other guest speakers. Thought provoking panel talks and performances, and delicious biodynamic food. rmlt.org.uk

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We will explore the healing of nature and ourselves through the wisdom of story and the
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Our presenters this year include:

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Jennifer Aguirre - Presenting from the Sphere around Us - Story Apron Art
Amelia McIsaac - Foraging for Color - Dyeing with Local Plants
Susannah White - Animal Companion Puppets and Creating a Forest Lap Stage
Janene Ping - Elemental Dreaming - Forest Puppetry with Children
Marjorie Rehbach - Silk Marionette Nature Spirits

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with Lisa Miccio of The Waldorf School of Garden City

June 26-28 Exploring the World of Birth to Three

Developmental Insights and Practices for Working with Infants and Toddlers

with Anna Ruth Myers of The Nurtured Child

June 19-21 Waldorf Weekend

Foundations and Fundamentals of Waldorf Education

with Linda Ogden-Wolgemuth of Sunbridge Institute

July 26-31 Collaborative Leadership

Personalized Strategies for Becoming a More Effective Member of Your Leadership Team

with Joachim Ziegler, organizational development consultant, and Jessica Heffernan Ziegler of Sunbridge Institute

see website for full listings and to register

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