

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 79, Fall 2020

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WALDORF EARLY CHILDHOOD
ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA



Margret Meyerkort, 1925-2020

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

The world we knew last February, when the last major gatherings of Waldorf early childhood educators at the East Coast and Pacific Northwest WECAN conferences took place, has exploded. COVID-19. School closures. Remote instruction even for early childhood. Sheltering in place. Quarantine. Masks. Distancing. Separation and isolation. What is going on? Is this for real? When will things get back to normal? What “normal”?

The COVID-19 crisis is also ripping off the mask that tries to hide the systemic racism that is embedded in US society. George Floyd’s martyred death has shocked the world into wakefulness and outrage. Institutionalized discrimination and marginalization cannot be denied. We are individually experiencing separation, isolation, and disconnection from others. Facing the reality of racism and other biases makes evident that groups of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have been deliberately separated, isolated, and disconnected since the first white Europeans touched this continent’s soil.

In the midst of all of this, we share thoughts, questions, puzzlements, frustrations, and practical and economic challenges. We may also admit that we are scared. We do not want to succumb to this fear, but we would be dishonest to deny that we have our stomach-sinking moments of uncertainty. How do we undo racism? How do we make connection?

But there is no use in lamenting the situation. This is what we have, so what are we going to with it? Is there a connecting thread to give us orientation? These challenges seem to cluster together around questions of **BUILDING RELATIONSHIP** on many levels.

- ◆ Relationship with our classes of children and families through times of school closures, distance learning, and screen use
- ◆ Relationships which affirm our classrooms as anti-bias sanctuaries where everyone has an honored place, where there is appreciation of and rejoicing in the differences we bring to community
- ◆ Relationship to ourselves, found through a path of uncovering our hidden biases and shadowy places

In the articles that fill this issue, this thread of relationship—with individuals, communities, and self—weaves through. There are important, powerful words and thoughts waiting to inform, inspire, confront, and challenge us. This is a very full issue, so descriptions introducing the articles in each section are brief. We do not want to delay your getting into the heart of what this issue has to share.

Two Black colleagues, Lynn Turner and Leslie Woolverton, share their professional and personal experiences as people of color. Be prepared. These are powerful. If you read nothing else in this issue, read these.

Two white colleagues, Magdalena Toran and Dawn Warfield, share their discovery of things within ourselves that can prevent, even distort, the possibility of building relationship with people we find different than ourselves.

Jeffrey Kane, university professor and former Waldorf class teacher, reflects on wrong assumptions he had that hampered him in developing the right relationship with a Black child in his class.

Laurie Clark next speaks to us with inspiration to help us wrap our warm attention around the children we so deeply care about. What do the children really need to feel embraced and held in these uncertain times? “Hope: A Tonic for the Future” offers answers.

For Carol St. John gardening and trekking in nature opened a door to relationship with her children, the natural world, and with herself. After-care teacher and avid gardener, she was astonished by what unfolded from the children during their school year. We trust that you will be, too, when you read this piece.

The Spring 2019 International Early Childhood conference at the Goetheanum encouraged Waldorf teachers to look out into the world to other educational approaches and streams to develop connection and relationship. Building bridges with others who care deeply for children’s welfare—but in different ways—is an important step for our movement to take. The next article introduces to the work of Dr. Gordon Neufeld, a Canadian psychologist, whose understanding of attachment and relationship resonates with Waldorf

education. Gail Neilsen, herself a counselor and therapist, describes Dr. Neufeld's steps of "connecting" to create relationship with a child. This is a very practical article with advice that can help us and the children orient back into relationship so we can take a new step forward together.

Back to COVID, we know the possibility exists that we may face death in our school communities. The shock, trauma, and grief that comes with someone's passing can be paralyzing. Allison Reznik describes her school community's experience when a young child crossed the threshold without any warning. Hearing about their process gives reassurance that we can journey such a difficult time in relationship with one another.

Margret Meyerkort, one of the magnificent pioneers for Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education in the UK, passed the threshold last March at the age of 94. Margret made many trips to the North America to provide teacher training. She was unquestionably one of the "greats."

Memories of and a tribute to her are shared by Janet Kellman. Some details from her biography accompany Janet's reflections. Here is food for encouragement and inspiration. Margret was adamant about grasping and working with the essentials and always developing relationship with what was coming. Included also with this tribute is Margret's birthday story from 1983, a little bit of her legacy.

For the Classroom has stories. Mindy Wecker and Leslie Woolverton share some delightful tales with us, reaching out with possible pictures of diversity. How they blend with our theme of Relationship you will discover as you read.

There are also a couple Mother Goose rhyme imaginations that have been adapted for our no-touching, maintaining-distance times. We hope these can be useful at circle time.

International News takes us to Hong Kong in these COVID times. Louise deForest describes the stresses affecting this exotic and bustling metropolis that is dealing both with COVID and with unrest and anxiety as the Chinese government clamps down upon the people's freedom.

Last of all come two book reviews. First is the NAEYC publication, *Anti-bias Education for Children and Ourselves*. This is a guide and practical handbook for self-education, self-reflection, and developing respectful, healthy relationships with and among children and ourselves and with parents. This book is highly recommended.

And lastly, the WECAN bookstore is now carrying the updated and expanded edition of *The Dignity of the Young Child*, a Birth-to-Three volume. This book is all about relationship. It is a beautiful and very practical read that will be of benefit to everyone, not just those working in Birth-to-Three settings.

Uncertainties abound. We have lists of official things that we must do, and things that we cannot do. We at *Gateways* hope that something in this issue will ignite your feelings of courage to see what we **can do**. There is *always* something that we *can* do. If we are momentarily stumped, we can practice touching the children with our gaze in such a way that they feel the smile under our masks. That will count for a lot.

May your work be blessed. We have spiritual companions who want to assist us. They just need our voices, our hearts, and our limbs to do the work. ♦

Focus—Building Relationship

Dismantling Racism Is the Call of Our Times: A Call to Action for Waldorf Teachers

— Lynn Turner

Lynn and her sister, Kirsten, are the founders of The AntiRacist Table, a platform focused on rehumanizing African Americans, educating Americans about true American history, which includes the truth of the Black experience and contributions of Black Americans, and promoting empathy and action. Information about The AntiRacist Table is available at theantiracisttable.com.

The need for racial reckoning, that has been amplified these past several months with the continued dehumanization of Black people as more Black deaths take place without meaningful and timely consequences, is now more consciously with us. The killing of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others created a breaking point for Black people and a painful new awareness for many Americans. We must look more broadly now to see that concerns about anti-Blackness expand beyond the physical violence against Black people. Anti-Blackness attitudes are interwoven throughout American life. This is a community problem and needs every heart and mind joined in the struggle.

Overcoming racism is a fight for humanity. We are fighting to liberate ourselves and ascend to a higher form of collective consciousness where every individual is seen and valued as a free and contributing member of society. As teachers we carry power. We can use that power to cultivate joy, to inspire the learning and growing of the children in our care, or we can wield our power in a destructive way that oppresses and snuffs out a child's self-worth and, ultimately, their will—stunting their ability to learn and grow. We must love every child equally, no matter the color of their skin. Each child must see their reflection in all aspects of the school community; in aspects of the curriculum, in the student body, in

*“The healthy social life
is only found, when,
in the mirror of each
human soul, the whole
community finds its
reflection, and when, in
the whole community,
the virtue of each
individual is living.”*

~ Rudolf Steiner

the teaching staff, and in the administration.

How are we seeing and loving every “Black, Indigenous, People Of Color” (BIPOC)* child and family? Are we teaching Black children to see their gifts and share them with the community, with the world? Black children must be able to see themselves and know that they matter to their teacher, their peers and their school community. The quote from Rudolf Steiner at the beginning of this article speaks to this need. The reverent relationship between individuals creates the community and is at the heart of the matter and the

heart of Waldorf education. A healthy social life is only found when in each person's vision, the whole community finds its reflection, and when the gifts each one has to offer are valued and supported by the whole community. We must strive to do better. We must become AntiRacist. The very act of becoming AntiRacist is transformational and always evolving; it is fluid and unfixed.

For years, so many people have carried the banner of diversity, inclusion and equity almost like a stamp, to prove they are good people doing good work; yet, the inner root of these ideas has not been addressed. Doing one yearly diversity workshop that checks the box, or

adding a Black doll to a classroom, does nothing to dismantle the ethos of anti-Blackness. The denial that racism and anti-Blackness exists in Waldorf schools, schools across America, and worldwide is real. As a Black Waldorf early childhood teacher, I work daily in a white, Eurocentric-dominated school environment, and I have experienced racism and microaggression first-hand. The dominant environment is not a truly safe and inclusive place for BIPOC teachers or students. It is critical that this reality be illuminated, so that denial can be recognized and worked through. Recognition of this truth is the only way forward. Movement towards healing and growth can happen, but that growth will also require a necessary commitment to unlearn old ways and learn new stories of the American experience from the voice of Black people. As W.E.B. Du Bois said, “We who are dark, can see America in a way that white Americans cannot. And seeing our country thus, are we satisfied with its present goals and ideals?”

Similarly, as journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones said in her Pulitzer-Prize-winning *1619 Project*, “Our democracy’s founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true.”

We want to build a more perfect Union. We want to honor the ideal that all persons are created equal—as human beings of body, soul, mind and spirit.

Listening, learning, and truly understanding and respecting the African-American experience form a critical step that is essential for teachers to take up the work of becoming AntiRacist. In tandem, and equally essential, is the inner work of looking into the mirror and dismantling bias, insecurities and racist ideas and policies in each teacher and each school. **This is the moral call of our time.**

Rudolf Steiner had a similar calling after the 1918 Pandemic and the First World War, when the social fabric of the community and the soul of a nation was in peril. He formulated the Three-Fold Social Order at that time as a way to heal a war-torn and disease-ravaged Europe. The Cultural Realm was to be the realm of individual self-expression, and full of diversity. The Rights Realm was to be a realm of equality before the law for every person. And the Economic Realm was envisioned as a realm of brotherhood and sisterhood, where we all acted from the premise that we are “our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.” His ideas were not taken up by those formulating the Versailles treaty. Steiner

realized that people could not understand his ideas.

That same year, in 1919, he was asked to set up a school for the factory workers’ children at the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette company, owned by Emil Molt. Steiner began the Waldorf School, which was, radically, for both girls and boys, and was free—with no tuition. The curriculum was set up developmentally and designed to cultivate the capacity for “free thinking,” for individuals to develop imaginative capacities and the ability to see multiple points of view. Waldorf students could then understand this Three-Fold vision and help birth it into a renewed human culture.

Instead of Steiner’s Three-Fold understanding and proposal, the Versailles treaty’s premise was retribution; and harsh economic punishments were imposed, causing post-war German society to be in even more desperate straits. This laid the ground for resentment and gave fertile soil for Hitler’s “National Socialist” program to take root. Hitler made sure to burn all of Rudolf Steiner’s books and to close all the Waldorf schools in the 1930s. Anthroposophists were targeted for arrest by the SS. Fortunately, the headquarters for Anthroposophy had been built in Dornach, Switzerland—neutral territory. After the war, the work began to resurrect the Waldorf School movement and to expand it. We need to remember this heritage and this vision because they speak to the rights and dignity of individuals as active participants creating a vibrant, thriving community.

Waldorf Schools in the United States began as part of the private school movement. Private schools are economically based on private tuition, which generally results in a less racially and an economically diverse student body. In addition, the American private school phenomenon has a racist history. For example, before public education in the South, wealthy whites funded private schools that were only for their children. It was illegal for Black children and people to be educated. There were no schools for poor whites. Even after desegregation, “Segregation Academies” were created in the South to keep white students from having to attend school with Black students. Black teachers were also forced out of education as a result of integration. Presently, Waldorf Schools are becoming more accessible to Black children in the form of Charter Schools, which receive public support, similar to the German Waldorf Schools. Yet the mission of all Waldorf Schools has always been to strive to build a

better, more inclusive world. Therefore, before we can look to lesson plans and diversify our circles and stories, we need to meet and embrace this racial reckoning.

Leaders in the worldwide Waldorf school movement, like Joan Almon, Betty Staley, Themba Sadiki and many others, consciously embraced research into African heritage and stories in their quest to create equity, to focus on and celebrate Blackness and Black culture. Joan's father was arrested as a Jew in Germany, narrowly escaping the Nazi camps—fleeing with his wife to America. Even though Joan was born in Delaware, she was well aware of ethnic/racial oppression and persecution, and worked as a college graduate in the Civil Rights movement. Joan saw Waldorf education in a worldwide context. For every child she taught she carried a vision of hope for them to realize their gifts and be looked upon with the inherent dignity of a human and spiritual being. The whole community and the gifts of each individual stood behind her worldwide work in the kindergarten movement. She shared key principles with me as my mentor during my Waldorf Teacher Training at Sunbridge Institute, while at the same time she recognized and honored the gifts I was bringing to my work with children and families as a Black teacher with a rich cultural heritage and wisdom.

The deep inner work it takes to live by AntiRacist principles is an essential aspect of being a teacher. In keeping with Waldorf values and vision, the moment calls for our community to embark on a path to AntiRacism; a transformational journey of inner reflection and inner work. My sister and I have created a self-guided 30-day challenge—it will awaken and hopefully inspire change and liberation in each person who actively engages in The Challenge. We have taken our own lived experiences as descendants of enslaved people and mothers to Black sons—a space which holds rage, sadness, and hope—to curate a welcoming invitation to this critical work. Our hope is that it will become the foundation for a new AntiRacist, mindfully-inspired approach to living, that will permeate the participants' life and work as educators—committed to teaching the hearts, minds and souls of our collective future leaders and world citizens.

The ten core principles of the journey exist at the very heart of who we are as interconnected human beings. They universally and seamlessly intersect with how we see and engage with the world. Our core principles and lessons are both heart- and mind-opening, and form

a kind of scaffolding. They build upon each other and can be implemented in all areas of life.

The AntiRacist Table 30-Day Challenge is centered around the ***ten core principles of education, intention, courage, individuality, humanity, being AntiRacist, equality, empathy, alliance, and love***. The Challenge is ultimately an invitation to do the hard work to become AntiRacist. It is an invitation for teachers to use their superpowers as educators, to weave these universal principles into their pedagogy.

To be AntiRacist requires *EDUCATION*

As leading AntiRacism scholar and author of *How to Be an AntiRacist*, Ibram X. Kendi, PhD says, denial is at the root of racism. The first step towards dismantling racism is to educate oneself about the history of African Americans and the Black experience in this country. To understand what “racism” is, and accept that it exists, is a prerequisite for change. We cannot acknowledge or change things that we deny or choose to ignore.

The *INTENTION* to cultivate an AntiRacist life is needed to be AntiRacist

Doing anything starts with an intention. AntiRacism requires an open heart and mind. Setting an intention brings presence and mindful awareness. Undoing and resisting racist conditioning is a daily struggle that requires attention and intention. Intention has an impact on how one shows up.

AntiRacism demands *COURAGE*

Facing denial and sitting with the discomfort of white privilege and white supremacy requires courage. The capacity for “white people to sustain challenges” to their racial position, which “is limited—and, in this way, fragile,” is known as “white fragility” according to sociologist and author of *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo, PhD. Dr. DiAngelo says that when white people are confronted with minimum amounts of racial stress (e.g. the topic of race comes up), common initial reactions are to become angry or fearful or to feel guilty. Running from shame, blame, guilt, and anger results in the inability to examine and accept racism and anti-Blackness. Courage and vulnerability are key to addressing emotionality and fragility, tethered to racism. AntiRacism allows us to be everyday heroes and to inspire collective heroism.

To be AntiRacist is to see the *INDIVIDUAL*

To see people as individuals, without attributing positive or negative qualities of that individual to others, is critically important. The institution of chattel slavery and all that followed created a negative group identity for Black people. This negative group identity, and underlying dehumanization, has a lasting legacy that embraces harmful stereotypes. Combining these with mental shortcuts, known as “heuristics,” which “can lead us to make potentially damaging assumptions about other people,” result in making split-second judgments about Black people and Black children as being violent, lazy, dangerous, and/or stupid.

AntiRacists take actions that support *HUMANITY*

To support humanity is to fight for humanity, and to oppose things that dehumanize human beings. Actively working to rehumanize African Americans is at the heart of being AntiRacist. “Othering” and dehumanizing allow people to treat others cruelly and to stand by in the face of inhumanity. As noted by philosopher Michelle Maiese, the process of dehumanization demonizes “the enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment,” resulting in a framing of “good versus evil.”

AntiRacism includes at its core, the daily work to be *ANTIRACIST*

AntiRacist is a verb, defined by the action one is taking. AntiRacists are actively in pursuit of equity and oppose things that promote inequity. To be AntiRacist is to dismantle racist policies and to create AntiRacist policies. To see all racial groups as equals and to intentionally promote equity is to be AntiRacist.

AntiRacists champion *EQUALITY*

Holding all groups of people—of any race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, age, and any intersectionality—as equal, is to champion equality. Ultimately, to champion equality is to also fight for equity, which means each one gets what he or she needs in order to thrive. Different needs are all met.

***EMPATHY* is a key tenet of AntiRacism**

One cannot rehumanize the dehumanized without first cultivating empathy. Empathy is also needed to

get past shame, blame, anger, and guilt, attendant on white emotionality and fragility.

To be AntiRacist is to be an *ALLY*

To be an ally or co-conspirator is to take on the fight for an AntiRacist America as if it were your own, as if it is not something that you have the luxury of turning away from. It means that you do what is uncomfortable—you may get into “good trouble.” It means using your white privilege for the good of others. Being an ally or co-conspirator means you are committed to taking a risk and to sharing your white privilege to put marginalized Black and brown people in the center.

To be AntiRacist is to choose *LOVE*

To be AntiRacist one must see and choose love over fear and self-centered comfort. Love is what propels us and energizes us to fight a battle that we might not see to the end. At the center of vulnerability, courage, and empowerment is love. Love fuels the AntiRacist through the hardest struggles and times. Love also brings hope, joy, and gratitude, which are necessary for this work.

These ten core principles intersect and overlap in the work needed to be AntiRacist.

The Challenge is free and can be incorporated in study for your full faculty, or it can be taken up individually, in the privacy of your own home. This is a call to action. This work is the call of our time. I hope we can meet this challenge and begin the work to repair, heal, and mend what has been broken in our humanity. Renewal and liberation for each of us as individuals and as Waldorf teachers is the goal of our work on this important issue.

As the Perseid Meteors once again shower Michaelic iron into our earth’s atmosphere, let us take that energy forward. Michael is the Archangel who is most associated with cosmopolitanism and diversity, rather than homogenous, physically-based group identities. This spirit is the spirit of our time, the Consciousness Soul Age. It means that we need to form new communities based on mutual respect and wider consciousness. One of Joan Almon’s favorite pictures of the development of a new consciousness-based community to undertake extraordinary tasks can be found in the fairy tale from Goethe, “The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily.”

“Midnight had arrived, they knew not how. The Old Man looked to the stars, and then began speaking. ‘We are assembled at the propitious hour. Let each perform their task, let each do their duty; and a universal happiness will swallow-up our individual sorrows, as a universal grief consumes individual joys.’ At these words arose a wondrous hubbub; for all the persons in the party spoke aloud, each for themselves, declaring what they had to do.”

As kindergarten teachers we work primarily through the limbs and with the will. The warmth and caring for the children in our classes and their families comes from our personal development and striving. We incarnate those qualities in our actions. Let us take time in our preparation to courageously embark on a journey to become fully aware of the need for racial justice in our society. Let us broaden our understanding and offer in our work a fuller expression and reflection in our lives and in Waldorf Education of our beautiful, diverse county and world. ♦

* References throughout are primarily to Black children and Black people as a result of the uniquely anti-Black American culture. This is not to say that Indigenous and People of Color are not also subjected to discrimination, however, in diversity, inclusion and equity terms, POC is sometimes used in place of Black, and fails to address foundational anti-Blackness. Any effort to correct anti-Blackness is a fight for humanity and benefits all people.

Lynn Turner *has been a lead teacher of a mixed-age Kindergarten at Washington Waldorf School for six years. In addition to founding and maintaining The AntiRacist Table, she is an avid gardener and has been studying African Traditional Herbalism. She is married and the family's two children attend Washington Waldorf School as well.*

Thoughts on Diversity

— Leslie Woolverton

The choice of my son's nursery school had been an important decision to make. My son's grandmother, my stepmother and only living parent, told me to see a school that was located not too far from our home. This school, she told us not too long after my son's birth, far before we were ready to look, would eliminate the need to tour any others. And when our son was ready to enter into his first independent class at the age of three, she said again that we needed to visit Acorn Hill.

My stepmother, of Dutch descent, had been in a Waldorf School in Holland during World War II up until the final day when her school was forced to shut down. My step-grandmother also had been one of the first anthroposophists and carried a society membership card numbered in the mid twenties. When we saw the school nestled in the woods and began to meet many teachers, we knew why she wanted her grandson there. Immediately, we were in a nurturing, supportive, environment without any unease for our biracial son. My son's father is white and I am a Black mother.

In 2004, I became a faculty member at Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten & Nursery School assisting

in Parent-Child and Nursery classes. At that time, I could have never known how transformational this work would be for my own life and how it would further unfold for me first as a mother, and then as an educator. My son had brought me to Acorn Hill. I knew after the first visit that here, my only child, would be seen, nurtured, and loved for his gentleness, love, exploration of all plants and beings of nature, and for his sunshine. His first teachers still see the beautiful, loving young child who is now becoming an incredible young man.

Throughout the years, diversity has come to be a central focus for our school. Diversity work at Acorn Hill had begun years before I came, affecting how we meet and work with young children and with each other. All teachers, board members, administrators, and the full parent community have participated in conference days and weekend workshops to advance this commitment.

2019 marked the 100 Year anniversary of Waldorf education, founded and based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. Several teachers from the Acorn Hill community celebrated this centennial together

in the spring at the International Waldorf Early Childhood Conference at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. Over 1100 teachers from over 50 countries and every continent celebrated in joyful collaboration our serious commitment to bridge together as a whole world the important work in Waldorf early childhood education. We all were charged at the conference to continue in our strivings to meet each other as colleagues, parents, and children with honor, dignity, and love while recognizing and celebrating all of our differences of race and cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.

Then one year later, almost to the day, the world experienced the outbreak of COVID-19. In several weeks, the world shut down. Our schools shut down; and as educators, we all undertook brand-new technology to communicate with each other and with our classes. The spring of 2020 marked for many the need to stay separated, to ensure health and safety, to prevent becoming sick or worse, in the grip of a worldwide pandemic. We all were scared and remained uncertain as we continued to face the unknown.

Then one more thing happened—the murder of George Floyd. The USA and the whole world had to face its history and the uncomfortable truth that all is still not fair. In the United States, we are being forced to face the horrors of systemic racism and brutality, solely based upon the color of a person's skin.

At this time in the world, many people are looking deeper into themselves to understand why all of this is happening. So many things were happening to divide and isolate us from one another. We teachers scrambled to reach out to meet one another, especially with our young families. While this was made possible through the new streams of technology, we still needed to keep our focus for the youngest, to reassure them that the world is good. As an educator, this made sense. I could continue to work and support my class families through this remote connection that could bring us closer together in many ways.

Yet for me, as a Black, fifty-four-year-old woman, also of Cherokee descent, this past spring was the hardest and most painful year of my life. I needed to conceal my own fears, as day by day, news unfolded around so many injustices that were being revealed. At the same time that I had to stay true to my dedication to the children and the families of my classes and

school, I also had to look my twenty-year-old son in the eye and assure him that he, too, would be okay... that he would be safe. Could I honestly say that?

I remember, as if it were yesterday, the first time I drove up the driveway at Acorn Hill. Located in my neighborhood of Silver Spring, Maryland, Acorn Hill was one out of over ten schools I had previewed for my only child, my guiding light. I, like every mother and family, only wanted the best for my son, as he and I began to navigate our journey of schooling. This is universal for all mothers, for all families; and my husband and I both felt this school was another home—a peaceful sanctuary that spoke to us both.

What is not universal is what mothers of Black children, especially boys, must carefully consider when sending our children out into the world—this world. In this past spring, that raw pain and fear was finally felt by us all. For the first time in front of my son, I held my head in my hands, unable to hold back uncontrollable tears—tears I could no longer swallow back, emotions I had suppressed since even before Trayvon Martin's death. Back then, again as a mother, I had had to make the life-and-death decision that my twelve-year-old son could no longer wear *Gap* hoodies or hoodies of any kind. On this day I could no longer contain my overwhelming daily fears. My son, my young man full of his own questions and fears, cradled me in my need to understand the hows and whys of unfathomable cruelty inflicted because of the color of one's skin.

Diversity in Waldorf Early Childhood means so many things to us all. At Acorn Hill, many of our educators, past and present, felt this work to be crucial in the teaching of our young children, even as we still stay committed to furthering outreach in our student body. Our school's commitment to Diversity has led our faculty to ask the most difficult questions when we begin to untangle many painful truths, which we, as a world, have come to realize this past spring. The color of one's skin will place men, women, and children in harm's way. Even still, this is only one aspect of diversity in our world today. But our being different in just that one way, even when our angels see in us our beauty, honor, and truths, means that often in this society, we are not good enough or equal enough for basic dignity. Yet, this past week, in honoring the life of John Lewis, we all saw, once again, the meaning of

hope, and were re-inspired never to give up on climbing our rocky hill of racial and ethnic injustice in America.

A question for us to ask now is, “How is this relevant in the work we do as early childhood educators, in how we see and teach our young children?” Today, as all schools continue to plan for what our upcoming 2020-2021 year may look like, again in the news, video footage was shared from Aurora, Colorado (or “Anytown,” USA). An African-American mother, and four female children, who were simply going for a “girls’ day out” to a nail salon, were accosted in the parking lot at a shopping mall. Police approached the parked car with guns drawn. They took the driver aside, and the four children were all made to lie face down on the asphalt parking lot ground, the youngest being six, with a 12-year-old, 14-year-old, and a 17-year-old handcuffed behind their backs, as questioning took place. The younger children (6,12,14), terrified and crying, could be seen and heard, as a tape of nursery songs and rhymes played from the van’s radio in the background. Subsequently, the nation learned that it was all about a mistaken license plate;

the police alert was about a Montana motorcycle, NOT a Colorado minivan...

Systemic racism, colorism and ethnic prejudice are worldwide issues. So, yes, a true commitment towards diversity work together is a most-needed calling in our work today and must take center stage for all of us, especially as we teach *all* of our young children. ♦

Leslie Woolverton *began as a Parent-Child teacher assistant at Acorn Hill in 2004. She completed her full early childhood training at Sunbridge Institute in 2014. She splits her time as co-lead teacher for the Three-Day Nursery and Parent-Child classes. Leslie has been an interior designer for over twenty years, recently incorporating her love of textile art with plant-dyed textiles and use of natural dyes. She is currently working on a seasonal treasury of diversity stories and the history of diversity in American Storytelling. Her son Matthew continues to be her guiding light.*

Internalized Racism and the Imitative Nature of the Young Child

— Magdalena Toran

My parents are politically liberal. You could even describe them as Leftists. My father grew up on the South Side of Philadelphia, the son of a first-generation Jewish immigrant. His Bubbie (grandmother) spoke only Yiddish. My mother is a white, former Catholic woman, raised by parents who didn’t know how to properly love and care for children. Yet their house was full of music, and my mother learned to play the piano starting at age four. She went on to study nursing at Mass General and music at Eastman School of Music in New York. My parents met at a protest rally.

My mother became a visiting nurse, which she was for most of my childhood and adolescence. In the late 60s and early 70s, she was a nurse for the mothers and

fathers of the Black Panther movement. She cared for homeless children under bridges and old folks who didn’t see many other people between her visits.

When I was nine years old, my father moved to Washington, DC and soon moved to an all-Black neighborhood, where he lived until just recently. He often had Black youth gathered at his house, where he taught them his chandelier business and called them apprentices. But I stayed in New England with my mom and visited him only a few times a year.

Where we lived in New England, there were only white people in my immediate community. We mostly socialized with my mother’s family, which was white. I only had one Black student in

my kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade public school experience.

It wasn't until I went to college, in a predominately white, New England community, that I discovered, to my shock and shame, the insidious presence of internalized racism living within me. To this day, I am amazed by how I can "believe" conditioned ideas about the life of another person, that are totally incongruous with what I know, deeply to be true. I share the picture of my parents that my brothers and I were raised in a progressive household. My parents lived and worked in Black communities, but we rarely talked about race.

Racism is in the air we breathe. It is an ocean in which we swim, knowingly and unknowingly. So what does this mean for the young child?

Rudolf Steiner spoke about the child as an imitative being. He described children as "a great unblinking eye." When our school did a workshop on inherent bias, I was so moved to realize that this principle of imitation, which is a powerful tool for well-being, is also the way that bias or conditioned thinking becomes part of our thinking. Everything that children experience enters their bodies and affects their whole being. In Waldorf education, we know that the inner life of the adult profoundly affects the child. We understand that children take in information through all of their senses, in a totally unfiltered way.

In a workshop offered by a local educational organization on inherent bias and early childhood education, the facilitator shared an important piece of research. Picture a white mother walking down the street, holding the hand of her two-year-old child, and a Black person comes walking toward them. If the mother reacts to seeing the Black person by tightening her grip on the child's hand, that fear imprints itself on the child. The child's little body receives the message that "Black person" equates to "unsafe." This is imitation on a bodily level. There is very clear research that racial bias is implanted in the child by a very early age.

Recently, Bessie Jones of Sowell Tots and her friend and colleague, Mikaela Simms, hosted an important conversation about race and young children. Mikaela spoke about how Black people perceive a white person's body tension when they enter into conversation. She said, "Get rid of the tension in your body." When, as

educators or parents we get tense or red in the face when a child brings something up about race, or if we feel tense in our bodies when we are speaking with a parent or person of color, that is taken in deeply by the children, by all children: white, Black and brown. When we pause, breathe, drop into our bodies and proceed with the best of our understanding, we have the opportunity to do less harm. We even have the possibility to make something right. In our educational practice we are encouraged to reflect, to seek collegial collaboration, to honor and recognize our mistakes and to try again. And try again we must.

One of the most difficult obstacles to Waldorf early childhood education becoming an anti-bias, anti-racist education is confusion over the idea of "protecting" children. We have mistakenly understood that in order to "protect" childhood, we must not talk about or acknowledge painful or difficult things in the world. But I would suggest that in order to "protect" childhood we must have the courage to talk with children, in an age-appropriate way, about race and class. Children are swimming in the ocean of racism and classism, and we are not "protecting" anyone when we let them swim there alone.

In Waldorf early childhood education we are also confused by the idea that anti-racist, anti-bias education somehow tells the children that the world is not good. I believe to my very core in inherent goodness. I believe in inherent wholeness. I believe that the natural world and the potential of every single human being is truthful, beautiful and good. But the society and culture are created and perpetuated by human beings over time, and we are confused and conditioned. We are making unconscious agreements all the time, based on fear and greed. So, the world is inherently good, but the society or culture is not. So goodness is not the experience of every child. We affirm the goodness and wholeness of the world when we are honest with children about the mistakes humans have made and when we work to correct those mistakes together.

It is our task as Waldorf educators to create educational environments that are deeply honest and courageously self-reflective. We must examine our personal, internalized racism. As a highly sensitive being, I took in what the society "told" me about race.

And what it told me was profoundly wrong, dangerous and separating. It is in there. It is in my subconscious. It is in my body. And I have to work daily at undoing it. (I do this through my meditative practice, through study, through collaboration with colleagues, and through listening deeply when people of color speak.)

We have to work together to cultivate a Waldorf approach to anti-bias education in our understanding and our practice. This is how we “protect” children. This is how we show children and make it true, what they know within them: that the world is good, beautiful, and true. ♦

Magdalena Toran is an early childhood educator at the Hartsbrook School. A WECAN board member, she is deeply committed and active in moving forward anti-bias and anti-racist self-education and institutional education within our Waldorf schools and communities. Magdalena also works with development of Birth-to-Three programs and practices.

Respect for the Individual and Cultivating Community

— Dawn Warfield

The following was written in response to a teacher training reading assignment of Michaela Glöckler’s article, “The Spiritual Foundations of Waldorf Education,” published in *Waldorf Early Childhood Education: An Introductory Reader* (WECAN, 2017).

I appreciated this article as an introduction to the spiritual aspects of Waldorf that I am very much in the beginning stages of understanding. One passage in particular struck me: “...respect for the development of the individual while at the same time cultivating a sense of responsibility for the whole” (Glöckler 249). Especially in the past few months, and particularly in the United States, first with the pandemic and now with our country’s reckoning with race, this has come to the front of my mind. How do we raise children to feel a sense of responsibility for their fellow human beings? We see images in the news of people still refusing to wear masks because they don’t want their “individual rights” infringed upon. We see people taking offense at the suggestion that “Black lives matter” because they don’t consider that, as a country, we have not shown that we understand and value this, either historically or in our present moment.

I’ve never felt a greater sense of urgency or responsibility for getting it right when it comes to being an educator and also a parent. This, again, is where being worthy of imitation is crucial. I’m learning, as the author states, that the will of the young child is developed through imitation (251). I take this to mean imitation not just in the form of the care for my work in the classroom, the songs that I sing, and the bread that I bake, but first and most importantly in how I see the children before me, intentionally and unintentionally. Of course, I love all of my students. Of course, I think they are deserving of the same opportunities, no matter their race.

But that is not enough. We as educators must first do the work of understanding our role in upholding the systems that have oppressed marginalized people in our country for so long. Then we must actively seek to undo these systems at every turn. Only then can we be truly worthy of imitation. ♦

Dawn Warfield is a kindergarten assisting teacher at the Brooklyn Waldorf School. She is now in teacher training at Sunbridge Institute after many years as a public school kindergarten teacher.

Respecting Diversity and Finding Unity in a Waldorf School

— Jeffrey Kane, PhD

Shared courtesy of *Waldorf Education: A Family Guide* (Michaelmas Press, second edition, 2020).

As a new class teacher in a Waldorf school in the mid-1970s, I had only one child of color among my students. He was an affable, curious child, but found himself on the social fringe. As an educator well aware of the circumstances, I made every effort I could to close the gap between him and the other children, but the struggle continued. His mother raised the issue in one of our first parent-teacher conferences, and I replied with all my idealism and naivety that I saw her son as neither black nor white. Without hesitation, she took me to task saying, “You had better see him as black because that’s what he is! That’s what he has to deal with! That’s what you have to deal with!” Her words echo within me ever more forcefully to this day.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “We are all inlets to the great All.” Beneath all our differences, we share our common humanity. Waldorf schools will rightly vary from one place to another and one time to another, but all begin with Emerson’s insight. They also recognize that the story does not end there. In this world of flesh and blood, we are, individually and in our communities, diverse in more ways than we can imagine. These differences are far more readily apparent in our daily lives than in the common core of our humanity. And these differences are often significant in creating and sustaining the communities essential to our development and survival as human beings. They are often so essential to us that they become the basis for defining ourselves as “ourselves” and others as “other.” Rather than seeing ourselves in the “great All,” we can come to see ourselves as a separate “I” or “we.”

The simple and vexing truth is that we are at once spiritual beings and human beings who live on this earth with distinctive identities. The two poles form a critical dynamic tension where we can uniquely create ourselves, individually and collectively, and can create who and what we will be. The more complex picture is that the dynamic tension between our unity in our diversity and diversity in our unity plays out in a world made small, in good measure by advancing communications technologies. The very power of

information technologies to connect us across the globe—to open dialogue and to discover that, beyond our differences, we share common interests and hopes—can also threaten the very existence of local cultures and communities as the foundations of identity.

Argue as we might that technology is content neutral, it encourages certain types of thinking and renders others near irrelevant. Consider that the great virtue of communications technologies is that they make immediately available unlimited sources of information and enable us to express ourselves to massive audiences across the globe as easily as we can to an intimate group of friends. As a consequence, the web carries massive and continuous cycles of information that compete for our attention, and we experience urgency in moving from one to the next. The flows of information thus come and go in short bursts that require only momentary attention. The technology is designed to drive our attention to our screens and prevent the “distraction” of thinking with depth, nuance, or creativity. Furthermore, these same technologies do not merely allow but demand that we choose the sources of information that we will use to frame the world, which thereby encourages the growth of self-affirming communities that circulate their own beliefs and versions of fact. The advancements of communications technologies have not and cannot open the door to an Emersonian transcendence; rather they create only the homogenization of cultures at the possible cost of identity. Whether exploring the roots of religious extremism, radical nativism, or incessant consumerism, we find that the driving force is fear—a fear of a loss of identity. The result: security is sought in a declaration of difference.

The point here is that we often define cultures by customs, foods, racial and ethnic makeup, religions, familial patterns, economics, etc. While these are valid as means of identifying and sorting cultures, they do not convey cultures as they are lived. Cultures are less important for the specifics we see in them than they are as the means by which peoples learn to see themselves and the world. The content of specific

practices and beliefs are only the public expression of the way we learn to experience and interpret our experience of life in each moment and as a totality. Cultures shape our understanding of how we ought to live our lives as well as of our individual and collective identities. We human beings are One, but we often see ourselves in our differences.

I learned, as described above, that the effort to look beyond difference is folly. Emerson's insight remains a beacon of light, but just as our ultimate unity is essential to understanding ourselves and educating the generations to come, so are our differences. Viewing ourselves and the responsibilities placed upon us from this perspective, we can complement Emerson by recognizing that we are all outlets of the Great All. Beneath all the differences in our abilities and proclivities, we are effluences of but a single source.

Think of the sunlight being broken by a prism into the colors of the spectrum. Each band of color is different from the others and is in some sense incomplete. When that light is projected out into the world, all that can be perceived will be to that hue. Much will be missed. Similarly, we as spiritual beings share in the full light of the All. Our very physicality acts as a prism, making each of us and each culture appear separate and distinct from all the others. And all that we see in the world, including ourselves, is limited and partial. When we as human beings share our portion of the light with others, the world, including all of us, reveals greater dimension and meaning than we could otherwise ever imagine separately.

Each culture brings its own expression of the eternal and the struggle to bring that expression to life against all the competitions inherent in life on earth. Cultures that have arisen by the sea and those rooted in the mountains pose different challenges for survival. They require varied forms of social bonds and relational patterns with nature. Different skill sets form, and unique modes of understanding yield insights into the world and ourselves that might otherwise remain deep beneath the waves and mountains. Although individual cultures may hold their truth to be unbounded, each culture captures but segments of the spectrum of the light that shines within and through humanity.

Take, for example, how we as adults view thinking itself. During our years in schools, we have been taught that learning is a rational process. That is, when we learn, we integrate information into a rational

framework bound by the rules of reason. We learn that we ought to be able to reason from one idea to another, so that all the knowledge we acquire fits together in a way that can be made publically understood. In a word, we learn to think rationally and to demand the same in others. However, not all cultures agree that knowledge need be so restricted; in fact, many believe that imagination can reveal truths we might never be able to find through rational deliberation. Hasidic Judaism, which has a deep commitment to exacting intellectual rigor, interestingly provides a case in point.

It includes Midrash, a robust literary tradition of revelatory insight in the form of imaginative story. One rabbi was said to put on his glasses when he wanted to stop seeing. When he looked at the world with his glasses on, he saw the physical world. When he took his glasses off, he was not deceived into believing he was seeing reality.

This tradition is concerned not with what is said and how it may be analyzed but with what is left out of the story that cannot be seen or understood in a rational way. When we write a letter on a page, we think of it as a black form on a white background. But we can think of the totality of the page as a broad and deep context in which letters take their form. Instead of focusing upon the letters, Midrash calls us to look at the spaces between them and connect them. Imagine that a story we might read is not placed on the paper but rises to the surface of the page. Viewed in this way, the mystery of our existence and all of creation serve as the foundations for what we may make of them with our rational minds.

If this sounds bizarre, think about Sigmund Freud; think about Carl Jung. They saw dreams—that space between periods when we are awake and, hopefully, rational—as filled with images and imaginary events that speak to greater, deeper truths than we can find through empirical inquiry or logic. When dreaming, we, like the rabbi, take our glasses off to see. This dream-like consciousness is not exclusive to Midrash. It is found in fairy tales, myths, legends, folktales, fables, parables, and religious texts. As representatives of the varied cultures of the world, these dream-like stories pass from generation to generation and offer us the opportunity to illuminate meaning, order, and purpose in the world, especially for the children we teach. They challenge us as educators not only to share these stories but also, and much more broadly, to include cultures from across the world to serve as a

source of illumination rather than as mere objects of study. The lessons learned will create not only greater tolerance but greater appreciation of other cultures and peoples. At the same time, the children we teach will learn to see beyond the limitations of our own deeply held and often unnoticed cultural assumptions.

Our respective cultures enfold within us unconscious methods of understanding about who we are, what the world is, how the world is to be known, and what it is to live as a human being. In this context, we can expand the depth and scope of the minds of the children we teach through creative activities in the arts and through stories, myths, histories, ideas, insights, and religions from cultures from around the world. Each of these experiences can reveal unique aspects of our humanity, ones that teachers understand align with their students' stages of development.

Teachers have to ask, "What aspect or aspects of their humanity are my students ready to explore?" And they might find that it is an aspect that is best expressed by African literature or by Middle Eastern history or by Buddhist religious beliefs. If Waldorf education is successful, students will have the opportunity to achieve their own humanity in fullness.

The mother who insisted I see the difference between her son and the others in the class was absolutely right. Rather than focusing on the abstract notion that we are all united in our humanity, I could have celebrated the diversity he offered to help him and all the children in my charge quicken to the deeper truth of their own identity and shared humanity. ♦

Jeffrey Kane, PhD, is a professor of education at Long Island University. Prior to his position on the faculty, he served as the university's senior vice president of academic affairs for sixteen years. His scholarly work focuses largely on the nature of human thinking. A collection of his poems, *Life as a Novice*, was published by Confrontation Press. In addition to his doctorate in the philosophy of education from New York University, he has a master's in Waldorf Education and was a middle school class teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City.

Hope, a Tonic for the Future

— Laurie Clark

What is awakened in the human being in a time of difficulty is the predisposition to make contact with the spiritual world, the invisible guidance within one's destiny.

~ Orland Bishop

As we begin to find our way into the future and decide the best way to re-open our early childhood classrooms, what is it that is really needed? There are the practicalities that are being planned for as the governmental guidelines are laid out. But what will the children essentially be needing, now that they have experienced isolation from friends and faced a dramatic shift in the world as they have known it? What are the healing gestures that teachers can provide so that children can feel safe and secure as they navigate their way back into the classroom?

The cultural, biographical destiny that we all find ourselves in during this pandemic is calling for us to awaken and meet this unprecedented situation with strengthened inner capacities.

Sometimes it feels impossible to find the way, and yet traversing the unknown is the only choice. We live with uncertainties all of the time that are not under our control. This most certainly faces us now in the most profound way. How can we learn to live with so many uncertainties?

Rabbi Moss suggests a path in a Sabbath blog that he composed. "It is not that we have lost our sense of certainty. We have lost our illusion of certainty. We never had it to begin with. We never know what the future holds. We have to admit our vulnerability. Close your eyes and feel the uncertainty. Make peace with it. Let yourself be taken by it. Embrace your

cluelessness. Wash your hands well. And every time you do, remember whose hands you are in."

The children who will return to our care after the quarantine will need the teachers to provide an inner atmosphere that will be restorative. Can we find the way to set our hearts on fire with enthusiasm so that we can make discoveries in what is being presented to us during these times and bring the distilled essence that will bear fruit for the future?

In a lecture entitled, "Faith, Love and Hope," Rudolf Steiner implores us to embrace and permeate ourselves with "spiritual hope." Steiner goes on to say, "The forces of hope are life-giving and bring confidence for the future. We cannot take a single step in life without the force of hope. We actually know nothing about the following day, even whether or not we will be alive. We know about the future just as much as we need to know. Life would be impossible in the physical world were not future events to be preceded by hope. Would anyone sow seeds if he had no idea what would become of them?"

Hope counteracts uncertainties. It provides a powerful antidote to despondency. It enlivens us to take steps towards the future, knowing that our plans might need to completely change before we get to where we thought we were going. Flexibility and adaptability at every turn are what is needed now. To bathe one's soul with "spiritual hope" provides an inner gesture of healing and will be a gift to the children in our care when we return to the classroom after this long absence. It gives us the potential to courageously face the circumstances that the unknown future might hold at any given time.

The "spiritual hope" that we hold in our hearts can be infused through the advice that Henning Köhler describes for working with children that have experienced anxiety, trauma and uncertainty. *Protecting attentiveness*, *comforting trust*, and *accompanying interest* are the qualities that work together to provide the faculty of understanding that the child so desperately needs at this time.

Protecting attentiveness requires the teachers to be creative in their understanding and with deep devotion and reverence "listen in" to what it is that each child is needing. The teacher adapts a quiet and alert attention without a lot of talking about it with the children. This kind of inner listening gives a picture of what is needed, initiating a sense of "listening acknowledgment" that embraces the children; they feel held and supported.

Accompanying interest involves being there for the child and patiently "standing at the child's side with a waiting attitude." Trauma and anxiety do not disappear quickly, but accompanying the child creates the quality of being deeply interested and involved. It will give the child the gift of time without expectations to hurry through their ordeal or to change. This kind of participation from the teacher is subtle, but powerful, and follows the process of the child's development without demanding results.

Comforting trust is perhaps the most important of all. The emotions that the child carries need to be met by the teacher with empathy and confirmation. One of the most important ways to establish comfort and trust is providing all of the healthy things we know to do for the young child. A strong and predictable rhythm, nourishing food, homelike activities, and being in nature create security and well-being. In these times, simplifying and reducing our transitions could be helpful, asking less changing from one thing to the other for the sensitive children in our care. However, the most comforting way to establish trust is to ask for help from the child's angel. This is the key that opens the door to true comfort and will instill the deepest trust between the child and teacher.

Henning Köhler describes "healing" as not "an elimination of illness but rather a guidance to the essential. Healing means giving hope, to give hope means to have hope. A person's hopeful thinking about a person is loving thinking."

Spiritual hope brings the warmth force that is needed in these times. Carrying hope in our arms as an offering to the children will gracefully pave the way into the future, whatever it brings. ♦

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

Developing Inner Eyes to See

— Carol St. John

Do you remember in the very beginning of your early childhood teacher training when you were asked to observe children in a kindergarten classroom and journal about what you noticed? When I was asked to do this, I remember thinking, “What am I looking for? What should I pick up on in children in these early stages of development?” Eighteen years later, as part of a year-long foundation course in Goethean method, *Encountering Nature and the Nature of Things*, I was again asked to record observations. This time it was to observe an object in nature in a very focused way. I wondered what observing children in a classroom and observing objects in nature would have in common.

After almost two decades as a Waldorfschool kindergarten teacher, I know that the ability to see developmental milestones in a child is an acquired skill. For me it has taken a lot of inner growth, training, and patience. However, even after all this time and study, I realized there is so much more to learn to see and understand about children.

The German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe explained, “If we want to attain a living understanding of nature, we must become as living and flexible as nature herself.” I learned more about “the internal ecology of plants and animals and to better understand how structures and functions interrelate in forming creatures as a whole.” I thought about plants’ roots and I investigated the whole organism as part of the larger web of life. I expanded my thoughts about how we are all dynamic and integrated beings.

When I had completed my nature observations, I applied the Goethean observation methods through an independent, observation-based research project with the 3-to-5 year-old children in my aftercare program. I was focused on two phenomena at the same time: children at play and children interacting with nature. This research enabled me to experience the sense perceptible world of nature as one with the children. It had a profound effect upon my teaching. Like other Waldorf educators, I’d learned how to tap into children’s needs and find ways of bringing what they needed in that moment; but this experience was different.

In the fall with my new group of children, I set about establishing the rhythm that would provide ample opportunities for outdoor exploration in the

school’s six-acre wooded site. I included a weekly nature walk and provided each of the ten children with a lined burlap pouch with a strap for collecting mica, feathers, nuts, acorns, and other assorted findings from the forest floor. The only other weekly activity was baking. We mixed our ingredients outdoors at the picnic table, the same table we used for crayoning and sorting our nature collections. Seasonally we planted, weeded, watered, harvested, and then composted in our school’s Biodynamic garden. “Simple,” I thought, “keep it simple.”

As each week passed, the nature collections got more and more interesting. Children would approach me before class began and pull things from their pockets they had picked up that morning. I’d barely



get the picnic table set with water bottles and children would flood me with their latest findings. As the school year progressed I needed to say less and less and soon we prepared for our nature walk without a word. Pouches were put on, and off we went to the grove where wild things live.

One day when we returned from our walk and we were organizing our nature collections onto the picnic table, I asked the children to pick one object and draw it. I didn't expect to recognize what they were drawing because most of these children were three or almost three years old; some were four years old and there was one five-year-old. One little boy, not yet three, took his stick crayon and looked into space as he was turning it round and round inside of half of a black walnut shell. Another girl who was three and a half years old chose an acorn, another child a rough white stone, and one little four-year-old chose a piece of mica.

I was astounded by the true-to-life depictions of their findings! The drawings looked like the item they had selected. They were younger than most of the kindergartners I had in classes years before. I didn't think children under five would be able to draw like this.

As the weeks turned into months, my journal was filling up with observations. The children started noticing all kinds of different things, including milkweed seeds and deer coming to our fence; bird song became more pronounced; and when the sun started to set, the children would sit to watch it. They wanted golden silence during snack (a term which I never used, and normally I would encourage conversation during this time) to hear the birds sing. I began to wonder what was happening. Why were the children so responsive and joining in with not a word from me? I was feeling something different afoot in myself as well.

I transcribed my journaled notes into a PowerPoint presentation along with some pictures of the children's drawings and sent it to my *Encountering Nature* course mentor, Jon McAlice. "Jon," I asked, "What is going on? The children are interacting with nature in new and profound ways. It's like I'm 'in it' with them. They are bringing me items every day!" I waited with bated breath for his response. A few weeks later, he wrote back: "Sounds like Resonance Education to me." That was a term I had to read more about. Jon recommended a book, *Resonance*, by a German professor of sociology, Hartmut Rosa. Rosa explains, "The quality of a human life cannot be measured



simply in terms of resources, options, and moments of happiness; instead, we must consider our relationship to, or resonance with, the world."

As a sentient being with the capacity to feel, perceive, and experience subjectively, I was in a state of equanimity while in nature with the children. It was so easy to keep mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper as I was experiencing a shared resonance with them. I felt as though I had stepped through the wardrobe into Narnia. Except, of course, I hadn't. I was completely grounded and even journaling about our shared experience. It turns out that a shared resonance is another way of portraying a shared "wave length" and is a concept applied to teaching where the teacher has reached a pinnacle of shared phenomena with the students.

This research with children in an outdoor program in the woods was deepening my inner development and understanding of the natural world through the eyes of Goethe.

Many, if not most of us, have experienced moments where we seem to transcend time and enter into a place of knowing with the children in our care. This is the artistry of taking pedagogical principles and lifting them to a higher realm while all the time being grounded in our training as Waldorf early childhood teachers. Over the years I have come to understand this as informed intuition or a systematic way of filling up

my decision-making process with a deep understanding of specific children. John Gouldthorpe of the Nature Institute explains that “informed intuition leads to intimacy and is expressive of a caring presence.”

I experienced at least three levels of observation and resulting perceptions that had an impact on my connection to the children.

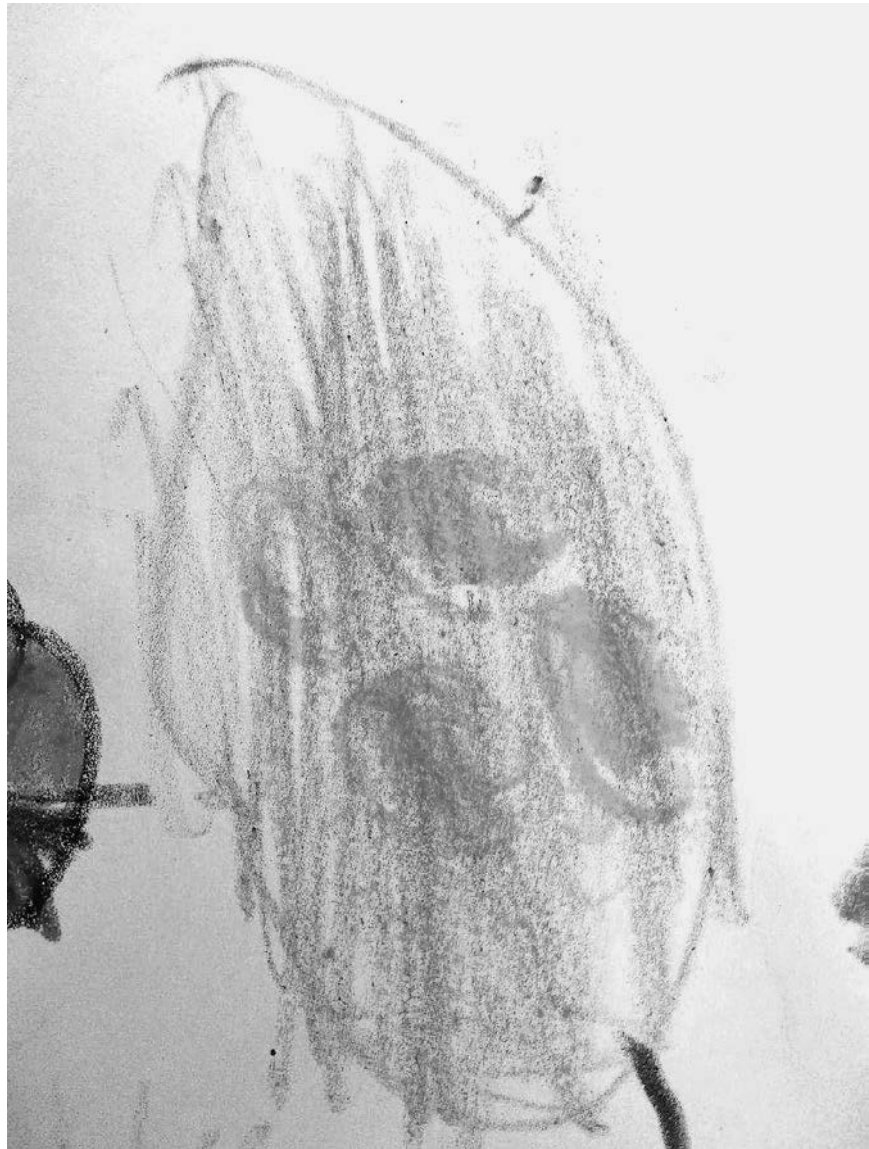
- ◆ **Heightened awareness of physical objects in our surroundings**
- ◆ **Subtle observations of children’s life senses** (i.e. mood, gesture, touch, movement, colors)
- ◆ **A deeper connected presence with the children (the other)**

At this point you may be thinking, “Isn’t this too scientific or clinical for an early childhood teacher’s observation skills?” If you desire to be more consciously perceptive and grounded in your child studies, I suggest it is worth exploring. Developing a practice of Goethean observation provides a foundation for developing eyes that can clearly see, and the ability to articulate, using neutral language, a portrayal of a child’s development.

Developing the Goethean skills of observing phenomena while perceiving the child’s interaction with the world around them was a gift to me as a teacher of young children. The course in Goethean Method allowed me to consciously intertwine the two simultaneously. As a result, I discovered a deeper resonance and was rewarded with a child’s perception of their unvarnished world within. ◆

Resources:

- Hartmut Rosa, translated by James Wagner, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 2019)
- *Seeing Nature Whole—A Goethean Approach* <http://natureinstitute.org/nature/> (The Nature Institute, Ghent, New York)



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“Collecting Our Children” in Waldorf Schools: Introducing Dr. Gordon Neufeld’s Relational Developmental Approach

— Gail Nielsen, MA, RP

Perhaps the most commonly cited concept of psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld’s approach to caring for children is his call to “collect before you direct.” In a school setting, children must be emotionally attached to their teachers in order to learn and grow, and it is adults who are responsible for creating the right conditions for students to form healthy attachments. If a child falls out of attachment, the teacher must re-establish this by “collecting” the child back into the safe womb of the attachment before any change in behavior can be requested—or expected—as it is only from within this safe connection that a child’s heart opens enough to be guided. Attachment’s opposite, “separation” (including perceived separation), always activates one of three core mammalian emotions: *alarm*, *frustration* or the *pursuit of proximity*. Most challenging behaviors in the classroom are a result of the child being moved by one of these emotions.

Dr. Neufeld points out that an adult can bring a child to emotional rest by collecting his “eyes, a nod and a smile,” thus, anchoring the relationship back into place using these basic connecting devices. That is, the adult should move to make eye contact (unless the child is averse to eye contact), to connect over a shared point of levity with the aim to light up a child’s genuine smile, and to engage the student in something that brings the child into agreement with a nod of the head. These gestures activate the natural “attachment instincts” and bring a child to emotional rest. Attachment is the preeminent protective measure for maturation and has its source deep in the physiology of the child. This was intuitively understood and acted out in ages past. Such attachment activity must take place with a higher level of consciousness in our times.

Physical separation between adult and child can also be “bridged” so that child and teacher

*“It is undoubtedly
this act of collecting
a child that sets the
master teacher apart
from all the others.”*

~ Gordon Neufeld & Gabor Maté

remain “attached while apart.” For example, a main lesson teacher might take time to affirm at the end of the school year that he looks forward to seeing his students when autumn comes and will perhaps speak about a point of common interest to revisit when they are reunited; another might give a child a token for safekeeping over a holiday or remind a child that even though she has treated another student harshly (out of

frustration), the student-teacher relationship is still strong. Anything that emphasizes a future point of contact or brings to mind the enduring quality of the relationship, rather than the sense of disconnection, creates an attachment bridge over the separation.

Attachment should never be taken for granted or presumed to be operating simply because the teacher cares for the child and things appear to function well enough, e.g. the child appears agreeable, the relationship seems established, child and teacher have known each other for a certain length of time, etc. A child’s experiences of separation can occur on a regular basis. Tenuous attachments can be broken in an instant and must be consciously re-established. Collecting and bridging may be required to maintain safe attachments on a day-to-day or even an hour-to-hour basis.

Waldorf education has always placed great importance on human relationships. Relevant examples of this include encouraging later enrollment in early schooling and the ideal scenario that a single main lesson teacher remain with a class through its elementary years. The approach also places a high value on regular connection between students and teachers, including a warmth of emotional connection and practices such as “taking a child into sleep”; strengthening attachment through choral speaking; the study of mythology and folk tales that support

an understanding of human relating; and rituals and rhythms that cultivate a sense of togetherness. The common daily ritual of greeting a child at the door of the classroom each morning stresses the intention of teacher to see and truly embrace a student. Using naturally-sourced materials results in a healthy attachment to the natural world. Consensus models for decision-making help to cultivate human connection at the faculty and board levels.

It is critical to note, however, that all of these examples are based on forms of closeness that can exist *outside* the womb of human attachment. That is, all of these activities and many more that are aimed at closeness can be part of everyday experiences in a school, while the key relational attachments can be nonexistent, weak, or injured. In fact, well-intentioned activities, even those based in a sound curriculum, may actually be working against the natural order required for the students' flourishing. Then, relationships and the class and school climate all suffer. This can leave a teacher at a loss if she believes herself to be present and attentive to students' needs, executing the pedagogy impeccably or "doing all the right things," and yet students continue to exhibit academic or behavior challenges. In Neufeld's words, "Children were never meant to take direction from those to whom they are not attached" (see Neufeld and Maté, *Hold On to Your Kids*, Chapter 6).

Love between students and teachers and the familiarity of one's community are hallmarks of the Waldorf model. Yet few points call for more emphasis than Neufeld's assertion that genuine feelings of love as well as physical proximity are *not* synonymous with safe attachment. Attending to a child by remaining physically close, even coupled with a teacher's genuine feelings of love for a student, does not guarantee that critical attachments take hold. Winning a child's heart requires that a child's attachment instincts are activated and satiated in the right ways, according to nature. Nor is it enough to meet a range of otherwise essential needs, including those addressed through the inherently therapeutic measures of Waldorf pedagogy.

The Four Basic Steps to Spark a Child's Attachment Instincts

The following must always be done before making any attempt to change, lead, or direct a child's behavior or attention. (See Neufeld and Maté, page 179ff.)

#1 "Collect" the child's eyes, smiles, and nods.

We move into the child's space in a friendly way. The objective of "collecting" is to attract the child's eyes, evoke a smile and if possible elicit a nod. A sparkle in our eye, a warm or funny comment to draw out a smile, and referring to something with which the child can come into agreement take very little time, but serve to open the child's heart. All three of these factors elicit the attachment response and prepare a child to follow our adult lead. Collecting before we direct is the primary missing ingredient in most disciplinary approaches. After a child is collected, we can "come alongside" the child and invite the desired behavior.

#2 Provide something which the child can hold onto.

We remind the child that we, the adults, hold the unbreakable tether. We articulate to the child our attention, interest and enjoyment, and no matter what the behavior, we follow this with unwavering emotional warmth, gestures, affirmative words, symbols, transitional objects, etc. We bridge all separations as soon as they occur, including anything that might cause students to perceive that they are not in our good graces; we bridge beyond negative behavior episodes, over recess, over weekends and holidays, and always affirm the relationship is "okay."

#3 Invite dependence, rather than push for independence.

We don't need to push a flower to grow and we don't need to push a child to mature or behave independently. This is nature's job. When we perceive that children should be more independent than they are, we may be taking on too much of the burden of getting them to be independent. Children do well when they are ready; until then, we, the adults to whom they are entrusted, must compensate for them in all areas. This allows emotional rest and growth to occur at nature's command, not ours.

#4 Act as the child's compass point.

We orient the children in our care and take advantage of any “orientating void” they might experience, inserting ourselves into the situation and taking up the role of guide. We are the “alpha” or leader in the relationship hierarchy, and children who experience this come to a place of the psychological rest required for organic growth at all levels. This “provider” stance reactivates attachment instincts and moves children to remain close, feel protected and to follow our lead.

When he offered his indications regarding education, Steiner could presume healthy working attachments to a greater degree than we typically can nowadays; they were a more dominant binding force of the cultural fabric in which he lived. As such, the act of collecting children occurred more naturally and an intuitive sense of this binding force was more alive. Today, Waldorf education is not exempt from the common need for a more conscious undertaking of attachment-building in order to win, keep and guide children's hearts.

For Steiner, a child's educational life depends on sound pedagogy, and such a pedagogy aims to support the whole child to develop into full personhood. For Neufeld, everything depends on sound attachments, including whether or not a child can truly engage with a teacher and remain receptive to adult guidance, and whether key aspects of the pedagogy can have their intended influence. His offerings can also be viewed as essential for spiritual growth, which is critical for enlivening the senses and otherwise supporting every child's development at the deepest levels.

Neufeld reminds us that according to nature's plan, it is *right relationships* and *soft hearts* that allow children to achieve their full potential and to become “more human and humane.”

Misunderstanding what constitutes genuinely healthy relational attachments has resulted in perhaps the greatest sin of omission in modern education, even when parents and educators truly value connection. At the same time, Waldorf schools are in an ideal position to play a central role in advancing nature's

vital relational practices, as offered to us by Gordon Neufeld. One hundred years after the birth of Waldorf Education, deliberately cultivating school cultures that are “attachment-conscious” may not only be timely, but may be essential for the future of the movement. Doing so allows parents and teachers to fully assume their rightful roles as the proud protectors of children's hearts. ♦

Resources:

- Hartmut Rosa, translated by James Wagner, Neufeld, Gordon and Maté, Gabor. *Hold On to Your Kids - Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2013).

To find out more about the work of the renowned developmental psychologist and speaker Dr. Gordon Neufeld, visit neufeldinstitute.org

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Like a Butterfly: Acknowledging a Child's Death

— Allison Reznick

Our school community is grieving. A young boy, not even three years old, returned to the angels. “How could this be?” a parent from the kindergarten asks me. It was unexpected and there were no health concerns of which we were aware.

Apple Blossom School is an early childhood Waldorf school, serving babies to six-year-olds and their families. Benjamin* and his mother attended our parent and child classes for a year. Then, dedication to our school, despite a 23-mile drive, brought Benjamin to my three-and-under Nursery class in the fall.

Many questions from parents rolled into my inbox when we had learned of Benjamin's passing.

“When will we see them again?” a father asked us.

“How will you explain this to the children?” another parent inquired.

During my communications to our community during that first tear-filled weekend, I wanted to be supportive and helpful to the parents as we grieved together. Since Benjamin attended the nursery just two days a week and his classmates are three years old and under, the faculty was clear on its decision not to bring this to the children. The kindergartners did not see him regularly, either, so his continued absence was not directly questioned.

We guided the parents not to burden their children with information, unless they initiated a question. This is always a challenge in our information-driven society. This was not to be insensitive to the loss we were all feeling, but to protect early childhood. To the parents, I wrote, “Respond to your child's questions as they come. Often they are asking a concrete question. Give as brief and clear an answer as possible. Refrain from elaborating. Let any questions unfold from the child; otherwise we may give them more than they can handle at their developmental stage.” If their child were to ask, a simple response such as, “Benjamin has gone to play with the angels,” would be enough for the young child.

Communicating to the parents and staff while experiencing sorrow myself was no easy task. Yet, knowing it was what our parents needed, our small community's love strengthened me. The expansiveness of the weekend was a gift as I gathered my thoughts. Sunday evening brought awareness to the upcoming school week, and once again, I reached out to the

parents. “Tomorrow morning at school, be fully present around the children. Keep your mood light and filled with love as usual around your child at drop off. The teachers will be doing the same.”

How could we honor this young child, even if for some of us our contact with him was limited? Some staff and parents gathered one morning in our community room to light candles and express their responses to this loss. As feelings were shared, an idea arose. Toward the path of healing, a few days later tea lights and a note were placed in parents' mailboxes. Parents were given the suggestion, “On Friday at 9 pm, from the comfort of your home, cultivate quiet within and light a candle for Benjamin, visualizing his soul rising up and holding strength and love in your hearts for his family.”

Rudolf Steiner gave a verse (December 31, 1905) to read in a quiet moment and again before sleep to send love to the departed soul. We shared it with the community:

May my love be woven as a sacrifice

Into the sheaths

Which now surround you,

Cooling all warmth,

Warming all cold,

Live, upward carried by love,

Endowed with light!

Dark and bare days support our inner reflection. We can bring forth our soul's light into the life of everyone we engage with. Life gives us many cycles and death is a part of life—like the caterpillar who has to die to become the beautiful butterfly, who flies off even more beautiful than before. ♦

**Names have been changed for privacy.*

Allison Reznick is the three-and-under Nursery teacher at Apple Blossom School & Family Center in Wilton, CT. Her Master's degree in early childhood special education is from Bank Street College. In 2019, she graduated from the early childhood teacher training program at Sophia's Hearth.

Transitions—In Memory of Margret

Margret Meyerkort: A Tribute

— Janet Kellman

As I ponder meeting Margret Meyerkort, beloved teacher, colleague and friend, the words I heard in my own childhood softly echo within: “For that, you will receive an extra star on your crown.”

Those words were spoken by my mother on unusually rare occasions when she witnessed an extraordinarily kind gesture toward another, when my action was free of any awareness of right or wrong or any need for self-recognition. (In fact, mother never would have offered such words if I was expecting them, because I know she didn’t want to make a little materialist of me; one who was nice just in order to get the “extra star.”) In recalling the feeling evoked by her words, the closest I come to expressing it is “quietly looking up in wonder.” And now, so many, many years later, in a flood of memories, emotions and experiences which fill my heart as I contemplate the 40 years of knowing and working with Margret Meyerkort, it is crystal clear that our meeting and our working together in this lifetime was the gift of an “extra star on my crown.” Without question, I know that there are many other Waldorf colleagues who are also filled with gratitude for a similar experience which has arisen from meeting Margret.

Beginning in 1980 and continuing for more than 20 years, Margret made her annual six-week trek from England to America. Teaching courses each year at Rudolf Steiner College in California, as well as other anthroposophical centers, allowed extra weeks in the States for her to travel to individual schools. This provided an opportunity for many of us to work on a one-to-one basis with her. It was a gift to ponder our immediate situations, as she always considered our individual styles, the children in our care, and the classroom settings we had created. Because I had not received a formal Waldorf teacher training, the initial years of my annual visit with Margret were extremely humbling, scary, and filled with soul-searching anxiety. Yes, I wanted and desperately needed her help, and at the same time was painfully aware of my shortcomings and my limited understanding

of what I was doing. But Margret’s presence, her steady guidance and support, with nary a touch of coddling sentimentality, allowed me to be vulnerable in accepting her down-to-earth honesty and steady example. These years provided the “walking stick” I needed to find my own way forward toward *What* I was doing as a Waldorf teacher and, better yet, *Why*. The *How* also became clearer as I traveled the path toward confidently offering real substance to the children, to their parents, to the broader community, and to myself.

As a teacher, Margret characterized the beloved key points she chose to share as her “hobby-horses.” She would land on subjects such as Rhythm, Education of the Will, Domestic Activities, and the Inner Life of the Teacher; and she would ride and ride! One of her Hobby-horses was Movement: “We are always *moving toward...* and if we ever think we have arrived, we might as well ‘dig our grave.’” With these words and all that lived within them, I could now relax and live more and more into the reality that the dynamic of life



is a process. I could release the anxious feeling that we have to “get” somewhere before everything will be clear. Yes, in Margret’s words, “Life is a journey toward...”

Margret was a real thinker. Her constant inspiration was Rudolf Steiner. Her fount of knowledge, cosmic and earthly, and her ever-present example of active striving, served as a springboard toward deepening our own journey into anthroposophy and Waldorf education, and into life itself! Even with her sometimes austere (and perhaps opinionated) manner, one could feel that beneath it, Margret had a genuinely warm interest in others. Embedded in that interest was the kernel of her life philosophy that “Human relationship is the foundation of existence. Social relations, even more than the cultural life, are the key to understanding our work as Waldorf educators.”

With that thought came her deeply personal and honest question: “What right do I have to stand before the children, their parents and my colleagues, if I am not morally working on myself; if I am not spiritually working on myself?” Yes, the early childhood work became much more than what songs, stories and puppet plays we should bring to the children, even though she had many suggestions regarding these practical matters, too. Margret’s passion became an invitation to take responsibility for developing our own consciousness, so that we could live into the understanding that as teachers we are truly examples of how human beings live on the earth! It was exciting and encouraging for us as teachers to live into this “Toward...” And yes, the hard work was that each of us had to find our own way in that journey, deepening our thinking, warming our feeling, and activating our willing. Margret presented us with lifetimes of work if we chose it. And many of us were filled with gratitude.

A seminal experience between us occurred when we travelled to Yosemite National Park to spend some days hiking and absorbing the majesty of the land. On the hiking trail one day, we came to a closed gate, upon which was posted a warning sign: “No trespassing beyond this point. Danger ahead!” Margret read the sign, pausing for a moment as she gazed up toward a mighty granite mountain rising high above us in the distance. She then proceeded to thrust the gate open as she spoke in her determined manner: “C’mon!” With trust in her hiking experience and curiosity sparked by her gutsy attitude, I followed. The trail led through

a vast open field, gently leading upward. The mighty granite mountain faced us at one end. We came to a forest path, winding gently upward, upon which we walked for a considerable time. At length, we arrived at the edge of the forest where the granite mountain now stood at our side, so tall it seemed to touch the sky. I remember gazing upward and then toward the narrow foot path which snaked along the side of this mountain cliff. Off we went on that path, with, of course, Margret in the lead.

I do not remember how far along this narrow way we walked before I turned my head downward. Taking in the sheer cliff just below, I had my first experience of vertigo! Immediately, I thrust my body against the side of the mountain, yelling, “MARGRET! HELP!” As she turned around, Margret’s eyes suddenly bulged, and in a tempered voice she spoke: “Oh Crumbs! There is a fine line between bravery and fool-hardiness! I’m afraid I went TOO far!” As she moved toward me, her steady gaze was exuding the confidence I needed to feel that “Everything is O.K.” Margret directed me to stand up straight, and then, with an ever-so-measured voice, explicitly and resolutely gave her instructions as to just what I needed to do. “Stand close beside me, your hip touching mine, and place your right elbow firmly within the inner fold of my left arm and then firmly grip my hand. Now, with each slow and deliberate step that we take together, dig your heel, with force, into the ground.” In this manner we slowly made our way step-by-step together, until at last we reached the forest’s edge. We had arrived safely on a wide expanse of solid ground.

In later reflection all I can say is that those heavily-silent-Will-filled-moments of moving together toward the end of that steep trail contained within them the revelation of a panorama of lifetimes in our being together. The reciprocity that lived between us was clearly saying “YES!”

What a gift it has been to have had a teacher in life, leading me to a seemingly far-fetched limit, absolutely supporting me, while at the same time leaving me in total freedom. Years later, in our last conversation before she passed, the only words we repeatedly shared were:

“Thank you, Thank you, yes Thank you; Yes, Yes, I love you, Yes, Yes; Thank you - YES!”

Here follow reflections from other colleagues who shared time with Margret:

- ◆ “Waldorf education is a human-being-centered education” she would say. “So, don’t get so caught up in the busy-ness of songs and stories and fingerplays and so on and lose sight of who the child is in front of you.” “*A priori* is ‘Who is this child? How can I serve him or her?’ ”
- ◆ Margret was so different from all of the Waldorf early childhood people I had met. She looked different; she talked differently; she was not all wrapped up in silk and linen and expensive everything; she wore real shoes. She was so practical; she wore old clothes, not because they were vintage, but because they were still serviceable and wearable and presentable.
- ◆ One inspiration she brought that stayed with me was “The Pause”: taking a moment, listening to the message, possibly from the spiritual world, or one’s angel, to “hear” before speaking. I wasn’t very good at that skill, but when I do stop and listen before speaking, things always go better. This was invaluable in the work with young children, and in conversations with parents.
- ◆ To see Margret as she listened with deep wonder to the rushing of leaves in the wind, or the flight of a flock of birds, and to live each experience as a willed impulse of the spiritual worlds around us, became a gift to enter into true communion with life. She taught me to see each child as an enduring Being, embarking on a new earthly journey, the path held securely by their guardian angel. A guardian, available through meditation, always ready to help both child and teacher on their journey together.
- ◆ One of the great gifts I received from Margret was how to arrive at school each morning with the feeling of “being truly present.” Before this practice, my head used to be spinning with everything I had to do, leaving very little room for cultivating “being in the moment.” Margret’s words: “When you get out of the car, feel how your foot meets the ground, really feel the first five steps you take, watch your feet. Then look up to the sky; what is there? Clouds, blue...? What is the smell in the air? Is there moisture or is it dry? Feel yourself breathing as you say, ‘It is a new day!’ Live INTO the elements, not as an idea but as a REALITY!”

I came to treasure this morning time of “coming into presence” so much that I started parking further and further away from the classroom.

- ◆ A few years before her death, Margret spoke emphatically: “Things HAVE to change! The new has to be different! The question, of course, is HOW. Every generation has to interpret Rudolf Steiner’s Spiritual Science in a different way, to meet the cultural circumstances of their times. Therefore, I have arranged all of my lecture notes into piles, taped them together (so the cinders would not fly all around) and used them to kindle the wood in the fireplace. And, I must say, I have enjoyed these good warm fires, immensely!” (She later admitted that she did keep the three weeks of notes on her most beloved subject: Rhythm. Margret gave copies of her notes to some of us as close colleagues. Her stern message was “BURN THEM!”) (JK) ◆



Margret Alice Meyerkort: A Life Devoted to Waldorf Early Childhood Education

September 17, 1925 – March 16, 2020

These excerpts are taken from a tribute to Margret in the June 2020 Newsletter of the Anthroposophical Society of Great Britain.

Margret Meyerkort was not only a kindergarten teacher at Wynstones School for twenty-seven years; she established the first kindergarten teacher training in Britain and was acknowledged worldwide as an authority on the theme of early childhood. She travelled internationally to give courses, published Waldorf early childhood classics such as the well-loved seasonal anthologies published by Wynstones Press, and co-authored, together with Rudi Lissau, the classic (now sadly out of print) *The Challenge of the Will – Experiences with Young Children*. Her insightful essay “Working with the Karma of the Young Child” is still available in the collection *Working with the Angels: The Young Child and the Spiritual World*.

Margret’s earnest, stern demeanor did not suggest close association with that most carefree and playful age group, the young child. This contrast highlights the mystery of individuality and destiny. Her “destiny,” in Lynne Oldfield’s words, was to be “a true pioneer, giving firm roots to our teaching and training practice in the UK.” The following words by Margret give an insight into the deep spiritual ideals that guided and inspired her work: “When one tries to understand the intentions of the time spirit, one serves the time spirit. I respond with my whole being. ‘Yes, here I am!’ – Every morning I wake up and ask myself: how I can become more modern? We must be more modern!”

Margret was born in Rangoon, Burma, the first of five children. Her father came from a cosmopolitan merchant family in Northern Germany. She loved her father, a selfless man with a good sense of humor. Throughout her childhood he would speak the Lord’s Prayer with her at bedtime; something that she loved. Her mother was strict and formal: Margret had to kiss her hand at least five times a day until she was sixteen years old. From her she learnt her fastidious attention to detail, the ability to create beautiful spaces and rich festivals and celebrations.



Margret was always a little different, in her dark looks as well as socially. She preferred books to playing with others. In 1945, she began a nurse’s training in Germany, interrupted by a call to help sick children in a makeshift hospital. When the hospital was disbanded, Margret walked 270 kilometers back to complete her training, sleeping rough and begging food. After graduating, she took on private nursing work for a family with a son with special needs. It was during this time while looking at an encyclopedia from the time of National Socialism that she came across the curious word, “Anthroposophy.” Printed in bold words next to the entry was the word, *Verboten!* – “Prohibited!” Margret response was, “Well, if it is prohibited, then it must be something for me.”

And so it most certainly was. From that moment on Margret devoted her whole life to the study of

anthroposophy. She received her teacher training at Hawkwood College Waldorf Teacher Training. Some of her teachers had been personal students of Rudolf Steiner.

In the autumn of 1953 Margret began her dedicated career as the leading kindergarten teacher at the Wynstones School. Apparently, she arrived at Wynstones with twenty-six pairs of shoes: a pair for each dress! But an inner shift took place: it was now the little child that would stand at the center of her life. She began to sort the essential from the non-essential and reduced her possessions to what she felt she absolutely needed. "What right do I have to stand before the children if I don't develop myself?"

Everything began modestly. The kindergarten was housed in a little wooden hut with a wood heating stove that Margret had to fire up each day. After two years Rudi Lissau, one of the leading teachers at Wynstones, spoke of the importance of integrating the kindergarten into the life of the whole school, and the kindergarten was moved to Wynstones. Margret's understanding of education came out of her disciplined inner work with anthroposophy. One day she read in one of the karma lectures that the "stars are gateways to the spiritual world." Out of this study,

she designed her Advent Calendar. Then she read that the straw of the wheat is condensed sunlight, so she made the bowls for two doll's prams out of thick wheat-straw. When she read about the activity of the Spirit of a language, she studied the English nursery songs and rhymes and used these frequently in the kindergarten. It was due to Margret's initiative that many festivals were added to the cycle of the kindergarten year, including Michaelmas.

In time she became very involved in early childhood teacher training, especially in the USA, but also in Finland, Canada, Australia, Ecuador, Israel and New Zealand. When giving courses abroad, instead of asking for course fees, she would ask to be taken to a remote place in that country, such as a game reserve in South Africa, the northernmost town in Finland, and a remote hut in the wilds of Canada. Margret stopped working in Wynstones kindergarten in 1980, but continued lecturing and training around the world and running her own training.

Striving to be modern to the last, before her death Margret took all her notes and recycled them, explaining that every generation of teachers needs to be free to develop pedagogy out of an evolving Spiritual Science. ♦

Margret Meyerkort's Birthday Story

Until the publication of the Wynstones collection of verses, songs, and stories, there were literally no resource books available to North American Waldorf early childhood teachers in English. Then in 1983 came this collection, initiated by Margret. These books were like golden coins dropping from heaven. The volume titled Gateways contains Margret's birthday story. This may be the story that has sparked the many beautiful variations that are told in our early childhood classrooms today.

Once upon a time there was a Big Angel and a Little Angel. Big Angel led Little Angel from house to house. Little Angel worked in the house of the sun. Then Little Angel worked in the house of the moon and in the houses of the many stars. When the work was finished in each house, Little Angel received a gift from each.

One day Little Angel said, "I want to work on the earth."

"Yes," said Big Angel, "It is time for you to go to the earth. I will take care of your wings until you return because now you will become a human child."

Then Big Angel took the gifts of the sun, moon and stars and changed them into sounds, tones, and music. "When you are on the earth," said Big Angel, "you will hear the music of these gifts in the sound of your name, and that will give you strength in the tasks you have chosen to do on the earth."

And with the gifts of sun, moon and stars sounding in and around, the little one went down the rainbow bridge. The child went to the house specially chosen for its work on earth and there found a mother and father waiting. The mother and father were overjoyed that a child had come who wanted their care and they said: "This child's name is . . ." ♦

For the Classroom

Soleil and the Mermaid

— Mindy Wecker

Once upon a time there was a little girl who loved the ocean. She walked every day from her house down to the shore, sometimes early enough to see the great Sun rise like a ball of orange-yellow above the vast ocean. The water shimmered and glimmered while the warmth of the Sun and his fairy dancers would light upon the water and sand. This little girl, whose name was Soleil—meaning “sun”—walked without shoes to feel the soft, warm sand beneath her feet and toes, dancing and singing in her happiness.

Sometimes the sea was wild, with great waves crashing upon the shore. But most days it was quiet and still, sometimes with seaweed lapping along the water’s edge along with jellyfish, clear and blue, that she stepped by carefully. She loved shells and collected those she liked best to bring home. If the shells had holes in them, these she strung together to make a necklace or bracelet.

On one particular day she saw something so wonderful that she could not believe her eyes. Not far from the water’s edge a mermaid was lying near a large shell. “Help me,” she cried. “I’ve hurt my tail and cannot get back into the water.” Soleil went to the poor creature and tried without success to pull her toward the water.

“Wait here,” said Soleil. “My friend has a sailboat. I will get him to help lift you so the breezes can blow you out to sea where the water is deep.”

“Oh, do hurry. I cannot stay much longer on land,” said the mermaid.

Soleil ran to find her friend and quickly returned with him only to find the mermaid weak from being stranded on land so long. Together they pulled her aboard the sailboat, and the soft winds blew them out to sea. As the mermaid said her thanks to these two new friends before they helped her from the boat back into the sea, she asked Soleil to make a wish. This sea-loving child asked to be able to breathe like a mermaid and swim deep down in the ocean. The

mermaid touched her cheek to grant her wish and whispered that a treasure from the sea would come to her for her kind help. Then she was gone over the side of the boat. Without a sound she dove into the deepness of the waters.

That night, Soleil dreamt of a beautiful time swimming deep in the sea, seeing the most amazing sights. There were beautiful, rainbow-colored fish with coral and plants swaying and dancing in the deep, blue sea.

The next day Soleil excitedly skipped the whole way to the ocean. When her feet touched the water, a great sea turtle crawled out and spoke to her. “I am friend and helper to the mermaid and know your wish. Step onto my shell. I will carry you below the waves.” Once her feet were well planted on the turtle’s back, they moved from the shore and slowly descended beneath the waves. Soleil knew her wish had been granted when she could breathe in the ocean depths. With eyes wide open, she lived what she had dreamed the night before. Beautiful coral, fish of rainbow colors, shells of every size and shape, and sea creatures greeted her eyes. She swam like a mermaid the whole day until the turtle came to bring her back to the shore.

When she returned home that night, she looked at the shell treasures she had collected that day. As one caught her eye, she was astonished to see what looked like the form of an angel, carved from a shell. “This must be the promised gift of which the mermaid whispered,” thought the Soleil. Her kind and loving heart swelled to receive this gift of love and protection sent to her in thanks from the mermaid of the sea. ♦

Mindy Wecker is an artist, dancer, educator and Waldorf Early Childhood teacher. She has taught parent /child classes, nursery and kindergarten to children for over twenty years. She is a lead kindergarten at the Waldorf School of Palm Beach in Boca, Raton, FL.

Author’s Note: “Soleil and the Mermaid” is a story that is easily translated into a puppet play. What I love about this story at this critical time in our history is the universal theme of helping another in need. Descriptions in the story pose no limits upon how the characters can be portrayed. Diverse representation is possible and invited.

A Seasonal Treasury of Diversity Stories

— Leslie Woolverton

After attending last year's February WECAN conference in Chestnut Ridge, NY, I was inspired to write a series of stories based upon and for the direct purpose of diversity. Not too long after that conference, our school, like many others, was shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic that swept over the world.

As the Lead teacher of the Three-Day Nursery Class and Parent/Child classes at Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten & Nursery in Silver Spring, MD, my stories are short and simple. There are four seasonal stories that follow the course of the school year, from fall to summer. The fall and winter stories are shared in this issue.

The Good Soup (Fall)

One day, a mother and her young child were working in their small garden. It was fall, and it was time for harvest. The mother and child gathered the vegetables they had planted long ago, caring for them tenderly and watching them fully grow from seeds in the ground to tall stalks and bountiful vegetables. Together they had planted corn, squashes of many colors and sizes, broccoli, kale, spinach, and pumpkins. The weather was changing fast, and the little family wanted to collect as much as possible before the weather turned too cold. The young child was gentle, for as much as she and her mother would collect, the kind-hearted girl would leave a little behind, for the animals in their yard to eat.

Now, back inside their cozy warm home, it was time to make dinner.

"What will dinner be?" asked the young child.

"I am making a hearty meal. I will add a little from each of the vegetables we gathered today, to make a delicious soup," said the mother.

"I do not like all of those vegetables, and especially not all together," said her daughter.

The mother who was both wise and calm, simply replied, "We will see..."

And unbeknownst to her daughter, the two sat by the fire that evening, eating something from all that they had gathered from their garden. And the soup made from everything that had grown from the good earth was delicious.

The Green Forest (Winter)

Once upon a time, in a far-off place, past lush grass-filled meadows and beyond deep blue, babbling brooks, was a great Green Forest. There, in the forest, were so many trees of all kinds, young and old. There were mighty Maple trees. There were giant Oak trees. There were Willow trees, upon which the leaves would softly dance, as winds blew gently through their limbs with such delicate grace and beauty. In the spring, the Dogwood trees would produce the most colorful and elegant flowers that seemed as if the tips of color were put on by the most delicate paintbrushes. The Sycamores' bark resembled woven tapestries of mottled light and dark, that supported the trees' stately structure as they grew tall towards the sky. Spruces of all kinds stood in line along the edge of the meadow, full of strong green boughs.

Here, in the forest in late winter, was also a tiny evergreen, named "Little Pine." A bird had dropped the seed from a pinecone long ago, and amongst the gentle giants of the forest stood this very tree. It, too, was grand; but the Pine tree never believed this to be so, since it also believed that it was not as grand as all the others. Spring came, and Little Pine admired the Dogwood's subtle beauty. It sighed sweetly watching the Willow's grace amongst the winds. The giant Spruces, Oaks, Sycamores, and Maple trees were so impressive, that the little Pine tree wished it, too, could touch the blue sky and feel more of the golden sun from high above. Birds and animals would often find shelter amongst the other trees, but not under its smaller canopy; and the Pine tree often felt sad. Spring turned to summer. Summer turned to fall, and the Pine tree still continued each day with a heavy sigh.

Finally, the Pine tree asked all the other trees why it was not as beautiful, since it did not flower or have different-colored bark, was not as tall to touch the sky and feel the sun, not as strong to be solid when heavy rains or heavy strong winds passed through. The other trees told the Little Pine to wait. One day, forward into the future, it, too, would become everything that it desired. Little Pine, far away from its brothers and sisters along the meadow's edge, could not see the mighty pinecones it would once bear, nor how strong

and grand it too would be, nor how many animals would feel sheltered both beneath and upon its boughs.

Now, deep into fall, the little Pine tree witnessed how leaves from all the other trees began to fall, flowers of all colors from the rainbow were now long gone, and the Forest became open to its world for all to see. Birds and animals were now far less sheltered under its vast green umbrellas. The other trees now spoke again to Little Pine. "You have not lost your needles, your branches are not bare. Look how grand and protective

you now are." And as Little Pine looked about, two of the most beautiful red Cardinals landed in the evergreen, suspended by the support of its branches. Little Pine understood in that moment how it, too, was a central part of the Green Forest, and never again did the tree feel itself to be not as good as the others.

This story includes the names of all our classrooms at Acorn Hill: Spruce, Dogwood, Sycamore, Oak, and Willow. ♦

Mother Goose Movement Rhymes: Adapted for COVID Restrictions

— Nancy Blanning

In our unusual times when physical closeness and touching are restricted, imaginations have turned to how to still have active movement in circle time while maintaining distance and not touching one another. The first of these Mother Goose rhymes tries to get a lot of active movement while standing in one place.

Boys and Girls*, Come Out to Play

Boys and girls, come out to play,
The moon doth shine as bright as day;
Leave your supper, and leave your sleep

And come with your playfellows into the street.
Come with a whoop,
Come with a call
And come with a good will
Or come not at all.

Arms extended in gesture of invitation
Gesture arms upward to draw attention to the heavens
One arm to side as though pushing something away with "supper," then the other arm with "sleep"
"Come on!" gesture with arm
Jump and "Whoop" spoken loudly
Hands to mouth as though calling out
Hands extended out, palms up
Palms down and push slightly away

Up the ladder and down the wall,

A halfpenny loaf will serve us all.
[Halfpenny is pronounced hap-en-y]

Jump up and then down into a crouch repeat 3x

Spoken with affirmation and head nod
rubbing in a circle on the tummy

**The language can be degenderized by saying "Little children, come out to play" rather than "Boys and Girls..."*

Everyone needs to feel touch. If we cannot touch one another freely, then we can self-touch. This rhyme was originally imagined with the teacher gently stroking the face of a distressed or sad child. Now the teacher may do the touching on her own face and the children imitate the motions on their own faces.

Little Tommy Grace Had a Pain in His Face

To cheer up a tearful or distressed child

Little Tommy Grace had a pain in his face,

So bad he could not learn a letter;

When in came Dicky Long

Singing such a funny song,

That Tommy laughed,

And his face felt much better.

Stroke slowly and “sadly” down

sides of face. Model a sad expression

Start at waist and creep fingers up to chin

Tickle under chin

Draw fingertips from under chin up along either side of face and smile.

International News

Waldorf Around the World in the Time of COVID-19: Hong Kong

— Louise deForest

Hong Kong is an interesting place to know about for several reasons. I have visited Hong Kong several times and, much to my amazement, have fallen in love with the city and the people. In spite of being a big city, it is beautiful with extraordinary architecture, full of friendly people within a very diverse population, and presents the beauty of nature all around. I have close friends there who pour out to me their fears and hopes for their beloved city and the five Waldorf Schools scattered throughout. Here is a sharing of the viewpoint of these friends. They are young people in their thirties and forties, all native to Hong Kong, who are raising their families and starting Waldorf schools in the midst of this pandemic and political and social unrest in their country.

In November, 2019, people heard of a type of pneumonia in China that had never been seen before. Immediately Hong Kong residents were on high alert. Hong Kong had had the experience of

SARS being transmitted from mainland China in 2003, so many medical personnel recommended closing the borders immediately; but the Chinese government denied any danger. Just in case, people began to hoard essential food and non-food items. Soon store shelves and markets began to be bare, as we saw here in the US also.

At the end of January, the night before the Chinese New Year, news came that Wuhan had been closed. Soon the first cases of this new illness began to arrive from China. Travelers from China and their friends were immediately isolated, though the government allowed the borders to still remain open. There were initially few local cases of COVID, but the crossover between China and Hong Kong is very active. More cases arrived every day. Schools were all closed. Parents still went to work, yet, encouragingly, the number of infections fell.

Then in March came a second wave of COVID, stemming from the fact that restaurants, gyms, and stores had remained open. The government then closed all but the essential businesses and announced social distancing policies. No more than four people could gather at a time. This stopped the spread of infections. Within the month there were no new cases, and the rules relaxed. Flight personnel, merchants from China, and the shipping industry, all received exemptions from testing and quarantine. This led to the third wave of COVID in July. New cases spread, especially among the elderly; and there were more than 100 new cases in Hong Kong every day (now, in August, at the time of this writing, it is down to about 70 new cases a day).

The restrictions have become even more severe, with all schools, restaurants and other non-essential businesses once again closed and a limit to only two people allowed together at a time.

As may be remembered, last year the movement for independence from China became a very active yet highly disciplined protest movement in Hong Kong. Hundreds of people were demonstrating evenings and every weekend. The country has divided into two factions. There are those who oppose both local and Chinese centralized governments, who are in the majority. The other faction is those who support the current governmental structure. The Chinese government, since the pandemic erupted in Hong Kong, has become much more controlling of the region, under the excuse of protecting the population. Now all forms of media are being increasingly controlled by the censors in China. One friend suggested that in the Hong Kong COVID situation, the oppression and human rights violations that are happening in the name of protection are worse the illness itself.

As mentioned before, schools re-opened for only a month—first the international schools opened, followed by mainstream upper grades and then the lower grades classes. Kindergartners were still asked to stay at home. All schools have been closed for the summer (except several small

Waldorf programs), and it is predicted that all classes will be online when the new school year begins. However, the government has said that if parents need to send their children to school, the school has to accept them. This leads many to question whether the government is genuinely concerned with the health and safety of the children and teachers. Likewise, keeping the general social distancing in place serves to cut down on the social and political unrest.

The demonstrations are still happening in pop-up events around the city. Police use force, even violence and tear gas, to break them up protest demonstrations. Pro-government people, however, can have rallies and demonstrations whenever and wherever they want while police turn a blind eye. Leaders of the independence movement have slowly disappeared. They have either been arrested by the police or emigrated to another country. Recently, the last newspaper to publish impartial news was raided by over 200 policemen, the executives were all imprisoned, and everything was confiscated.

Some people have been able to work from home, but the majority of people continue their usual commutes and jobs. There has been no financial support for those who have lost their livelihoods, and most parents have to work. This leaves their children mostly in the care of grandparents; unable to go outside (all public parks, beaches and recreational centers are closed) or play with others, the children spend their waking hours watching media. Other parents who are able to stay home say that being with their children for 24 hours a day is too much. Parents struggle to find healthy ways to respond to their children's behavior and to put supportive rhythms in place.

A few Waldorf early childhood programs remain open, but it is risky and difficult for teachers to navigate regulations. Children now run to the teacher to tell on someone who is not wearing a mask (and children as young as two months old can be seen wearing masks). When children play imitative games, no one wants to be the policemen, who are seen as being evil. Everywhere

it is seen that children are increasingly anxious, high-strung, frightened, and craving movement. Parents, too, are traumatized by the politically divided population, often within the same family. People explode aggressively and often violently at the least provocation. As one person said, “It seems that the worst is not the worst every day, as we find something worse happening the next.”

Teachers there strive to remain positive and to protect the children as much as they are able. As

one Waldorf teacher wrote: “I pray every day and hope the situation of fragmentation would be at ease and wish less people lost their jobs and that life could be back to normal soon—even though it seems impossible. But these are our times. If I can just maintain calmness of soul, I may be able to help the children and get through these times of not knowing anything.” ♦

Book Reviews

Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves, Second Edition

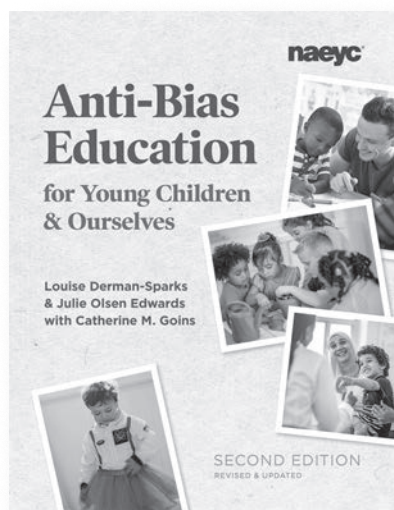
By Louise Derman-Sparks, et al.

Published by NAEYC

Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

This book had been in thoughtful and quiet preparation for a long time before COVID-19 began to turn the world upside down. The waking bad dream of the pandemic has shown in stark relief that racism and obvious and unconscious biases are systemically imbedded in our societal attitudes. This book was important from the start (this volume being a revised edition from its 2010 predecessor). Then came George Floyd’s death and, with it, a roar of fury and anguish that is uncontainable. While this book would be helpful reading at any time, it is now essential and urgent. As Gandhi taught, “The change we want to see” begins with each of us. Unrecognized and denied *-isms* abound all around us. And this book is a tool for beginning to find one’s way into this intimidating landscape of society and self.

First of all, be assured that this book is very readable, practical with lots of examples, non-scolding or shaming, and encouraging that we can all do better. We have to be willing to wake up, look objectively at



what we see happening around us, and listen to what we hear and say ourselves. Derman-Sparks lists the obvious biases, resulting in prejudicial conclusions about and discrimination toward race, culture, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Overt discrimination is obviously damaging and demeaning. But equally destructive are implicit biases that are not outwardly expressed but which hover below a polite social exterior. *Implicit biases* are defined as “attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and

decisions in an unconscious manner.” When we begin to look inward, it is almost inevitable to find that we all carry some, if not actually a shocking number, to which we have been quite asleep.

The beginning of the book describes the landscape into which we must enter in anti-bias work. Quickly the material gets practical to help navigate the sensitive areas of this journey with the children, their families, and our colleagues. First of all come objective suggestions for how to look at our curriculum and physical classroom environment. One topic addressed, for example, is “Holidays in a Diverse World.” Valuing all cultural identities comes with questions to ask of families so we can respectfully learn about and

support their personal practices. Specific chapters are dedicated to Diversity and Fairness—addressing racial, gender, sexual-orientation, economic, ability, and family differences.

As a reader, I have learned something new and important in every chapter. Yet one section that stands out in a special way is the chapter on “Relationships with Families and Among Teachers and Staff.” There are many suggestions given for building friendly and respectful relations with families. Many are already common practices within Waldorf early childhood programs. Some scenarios are shared of how conversations can be difficult and how differing views between adults can develop with tension. Sensible advice is given for how to not get enmeshed in a struggle. There are many different ways to view a situation, and each one has its truth and validity. The goal is to acknowledge our differences but keep genuinely speaking with one another to find a point we both agree upon as a new starting point.

Reflecting upon this, another implicit bias suggested

itself—“Waldorf knows best”—which implies that other views, including those of the parents and different educational streams, are short-sighted and inadequate. This is one to think about deeply. Memories bring shameful awareness of conversations with parents where the unspoken goal was to point out to them their error. The goal with this respectful listening is to hear and affirm all the positive things they are already doing to which we can join the wise insights of Waldorf education for the welfare of the child.

The spirit of *Anti-Bias Education* holds every child, parent, teacher, and colleague in high regard. This book is a handbook of guidance toward developing anti-bias attitudes toward other human beings—all human beings. It is also a workbook for the reader willing to take the plunge into self-reflection to uncover what biases live in one’s own being. And it is also a book of encouragement to bravely and honestly confront our personal shadows and step forward to affirm the worth and dignity of every human being. This striving will give our children noble models for imitation. ♦

The Dignity of the Young Child 1

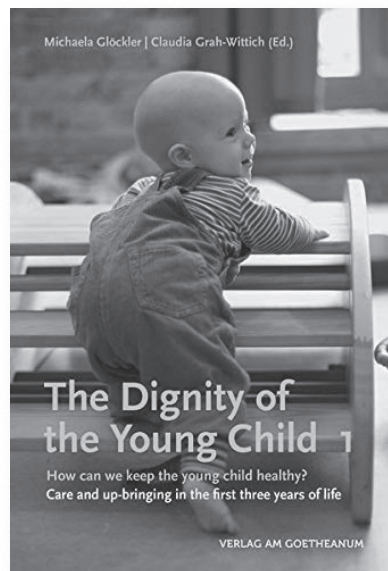
**Dr. Michaela Glöckler &
Claudia Grah-Wittich, Eds.**

**Published by Verlag
am Goetheanum as a
collaboration of the
Medical Section at the
Goetheanum and the
International Association
of Waldorf Kindergartens**

Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

The time when children under the age of three spent their early years at home with a parent is becoming a “Once upon a time...” experience.

Cultural and societal attitudes and opportunities, family constellations, and economics have shifted dramatically in recent decades to both invite and push parents into the work force. Young children remain the same, however—vulnerable, tender, and needing the most loving care possible.



The Birth-to-Three movement in Waldorf early childhood education has stepped forward to protect these most vulnerable young ones with a louder public voice of conviction and intention. This newly published fifth edition of *The Dignity of the Young Child 1—How can we keep the young child healthy?* is a treasure of objective developmental information, pedagogical insight, and description of the capacities and intentions these souls carry with them from the spiritual world. The book contains a rich collection of presentations given in conferences at the Goetheanum on

everything from healthy information and advice on embryology, typical growth and development, support for the child’s forces of will toward autonomy, infant care, feeding and nutrition, and play—to name only a few topics—to the dark side of mistreatment and neglect. And there is ever so much more.

I initially set to read this book for information. Just getting into the first article on embryology was so interesting (having just explored this topic in teacher training) that my reading accelerated. My original intention had been to skim the book to get an idea of the overview. But that soon deepened into reading every word with great interest and often awe.

The theme that runs through every presentation in this volume is clear, simple, and profound. Young children come from the spiritual world carrying gifts and talents, intentions, and great developmental wisdom embedded within them as their birthright. When given security and safety in their environment and embraced within a loving and respectful relationship with their caregivers, they will grow themselves beautifully. Gentle, age-appropriate stimulation; freedom of movement; rhythmic, predictable bodily care; feeding; exploring and playing; and rest are the essential supports that will allow the children to flourish. These are to be offered in a way that allows children to enter into each experience out of their own initiative. Coming to each milestone, skill, accomplishment on their own—without any artificial, untimely acceleration or insistence—grows healthy, independent will. This and growing a healthy, strong physical body and organ systems is what the first seven years of life are all about.

The book does not only speak about these things theoretically. Practical examples accompany every point with delightful photos of little children coming-into-incarnated-being through sleeping, eating, crawling, climbing, exploring, sensing, and finding joy in their own accomplishments.

As a reader, I found every article interesting. A few sections stood out particularly that call for reading several times. Dr. Michaela Glöckler's "The Dignity of the Young Child—Ethical Motives and Challenges" elucidates many essential points, including "Love as a Cultural Task" and "Working on a Healthy Self-Awareness." She discusses the connection of four foundational senses and the four social/spiritual

senses, as described by Rudolf Steiner. The descriptions of these pairings—touch with perceiving the I-being of the other, life with thought, self-movement with word/speech, and balance with hearing—are stunning in how she pictures the sensitive relationship between these sensory partners and the importance of healthy sensory development for the child. Others that call for additional re-reading are "To be separate and then together," by Claudia Grah-Wittich; "The Genius of Play," by Sally Jenkins; and "Speech development and speech promotion" by Elisabeth Wutte.

This publication is obviously an essential handbook for teachers involved with Birth-to-Three and Parent-Child programs. It is also essential reading for all Waldorf early childhood educators. No matter what our level—Birth-to-Three, nursery, or mixed age kindergarten—we need to know the whole scope of growth and development. We need to know where the child has come from, what the child's tasks and opportunities for development will be when they will be in our own class rooms, and what they will be heading toward when they progress onto the next setting. Whatever can happen next depends upon what did or did not happen well before.

I learned things I truly did not know before reading this book. It is naturally pleasing to have more information giving insight into this precious time of development. Yet perhaps the greatest gift from this reading is the mood of reverence, appreciation, and awe for this time of the child's life that this book has invoked within me. Being reminded of the purity, the dignity, and yes, really the majesty of the wise spiritual intention living in each of these little beings swells my mind and heart.

Along with the new WECAN publication, *Understanding Child Development*, this book is one that teacher training programs will do well to consider as an addition to other essential texts for their students. These titles will certainly become required reading for the courses I present in the future. ♦

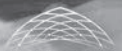
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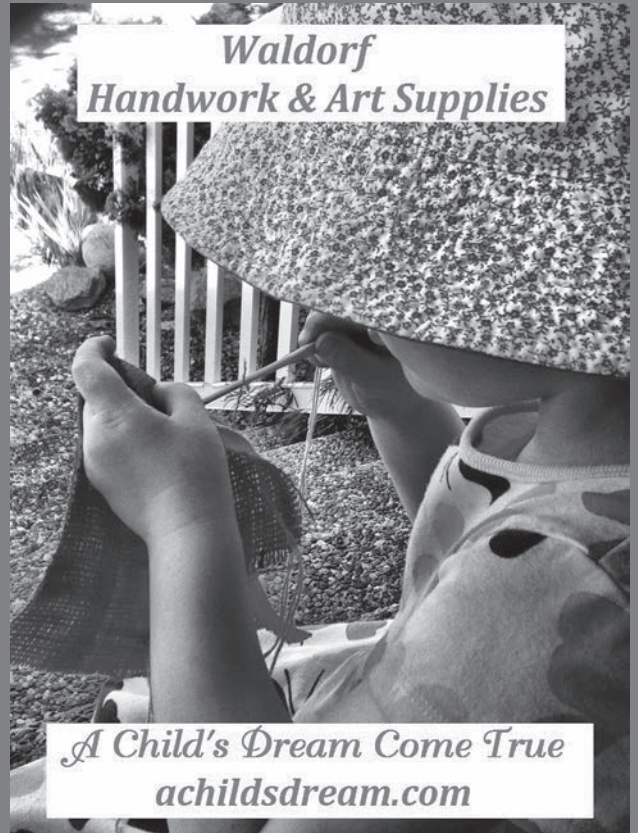
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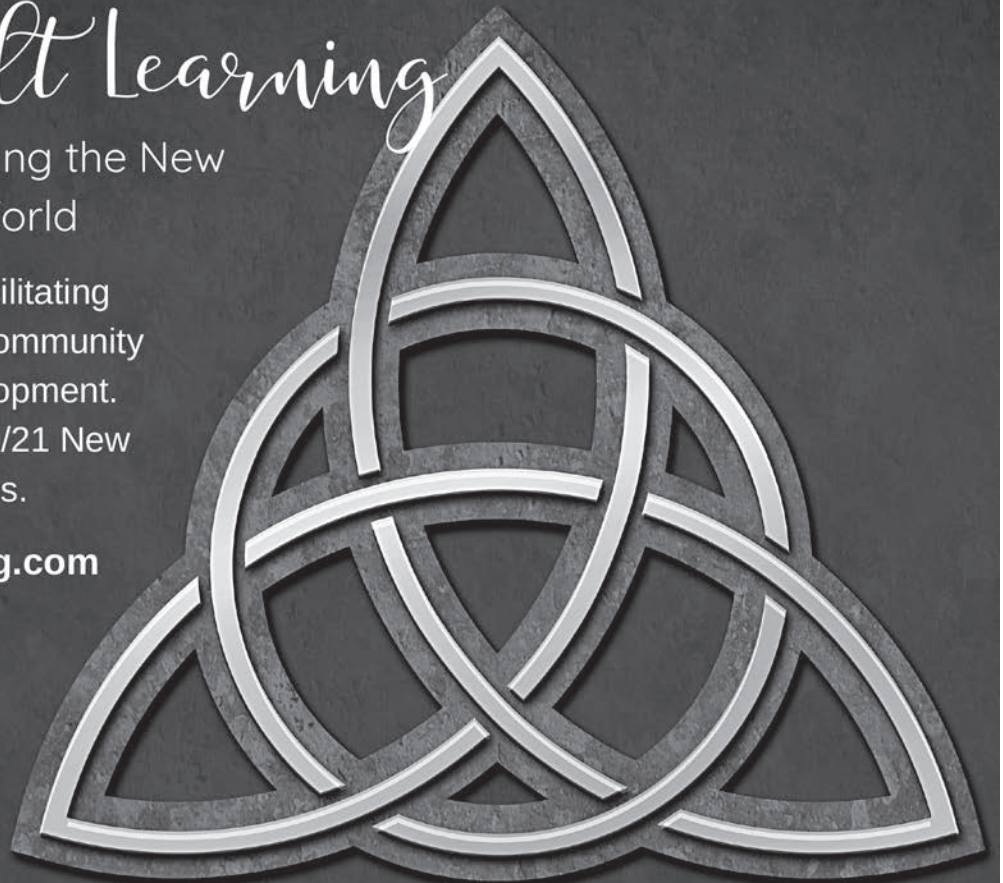
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- LifeWays Early Childhood Fundamentals Course – begins online in Sept with 5-day retreats in AZ and CO next summer. Enrollment deadline EXTENDED and Scholarships available!
- Living Arts through the Seasons (new every season)
- The Living Arts, Cornerstones of Care (begins 10/14, CE hours)
- Discipline with Loving Awareness (begins 11/11, CE hours)

On Demand Online Courses

- Creating Home Away from Home, A Course for Home Childcare Providers (CE hours)
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- Healthy Home Rhythms

See www.LifeWaysNorthAmerica.org for details

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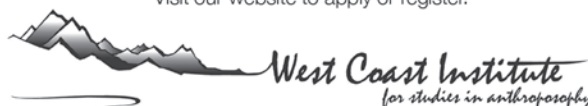
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KINDLING



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The Journal for Steiner Waldorf
Early Childhood Care and Education

Issue 37 - April 2020
Theme: Communication

The Journal
for Steiner
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- Developing Faculties for the Future
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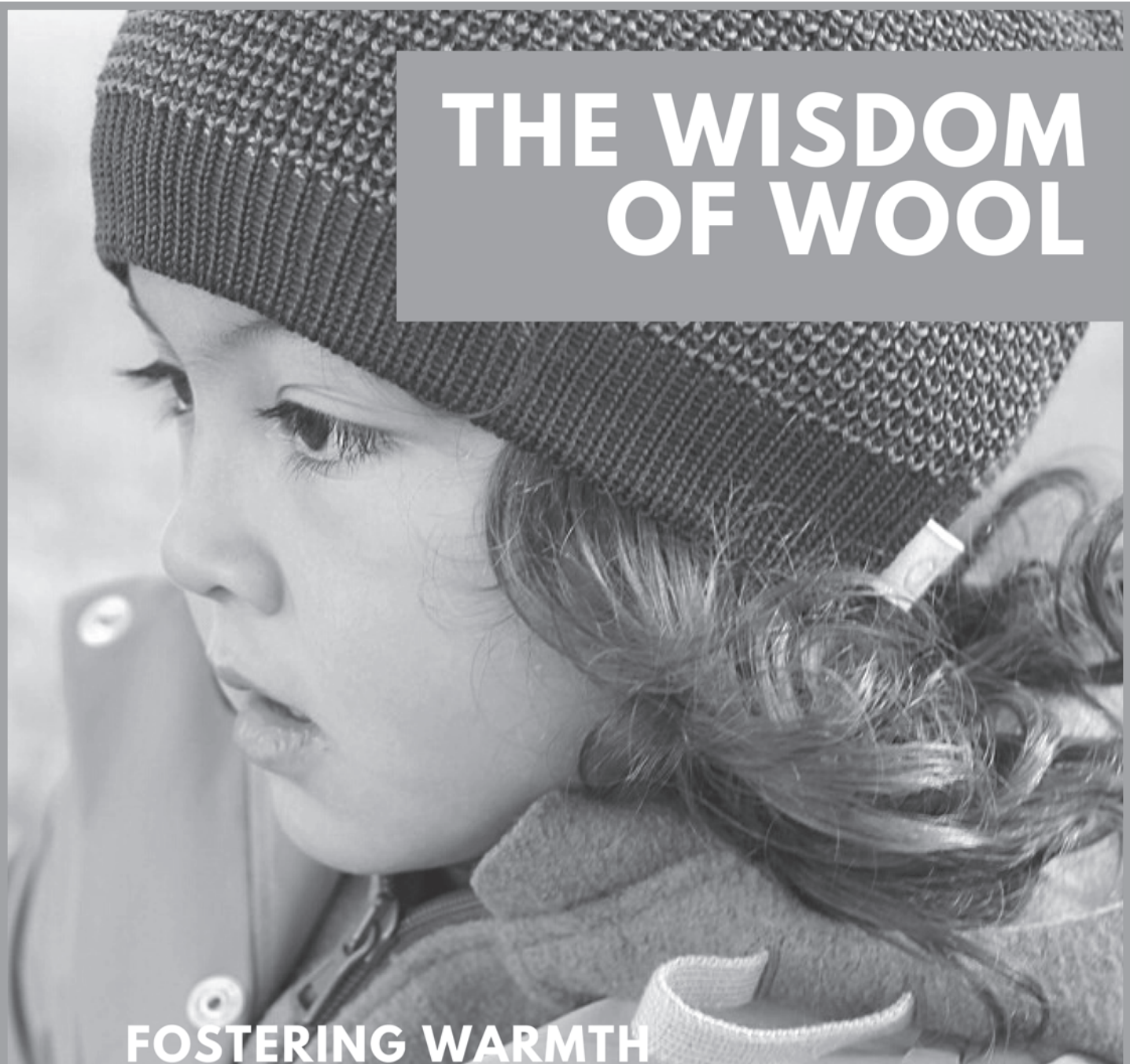
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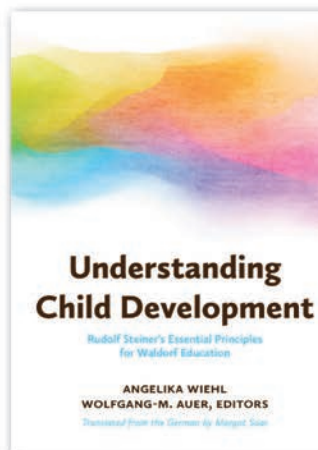
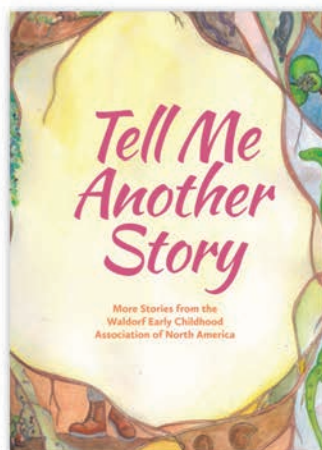


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