Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ◆ Issue 80, Spring 2021



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Photo by Chris Shaw, from her article “Honoring Diversity: Inclusion through Puppets and Dolls” (see p. 19)

From the Editor

~ Nancy Blanning

A Call to Conversation "To turn and bend with others"

"Scarcely had the Snake beheld this venerable statue [of the gold king], when the king began to speak, asking: 'Where do you come from?'

'Out of the clefts,' replied the Snake, 'in which the gold abides.'

'What is more exquisite than gold?' asked the king.

'Light,' answered the Snake.

'What is more refreshing than light?' continued the other.

'Conversation,' said the Snake

~ From Goethe's Fairy Tale—The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily

Etymology of "conversation":

- directly from Latin conversari "to live, dwell, live with, keep company with"
- passive voice of conversare "to turn about, turn about with,"
- form of com "with, together" (see con-) + versare, "to turn"
- Conversation—to turn, bend with another or others
- The meaning of "informal interchange of thoughts and sentiments by spoken words" is from the 1570s.

We are coming to the close of the most extraordinary one-and-a-half years of schooling that we have ever experienced. The dedication, flexibility, creativity, commitment, and dogged determination from teachers cannot be adequately captured in words. The world turned upside down, and Waldorf early childhood education has continued valiantly, though restricted, compromised, tested, and hobbled in many ways, to be sure.

New forms and adjustments, new programs, and new approaches have emerged out of what could have been demoralized chaos. But teachers and children are managing to be together and finding joy in this simplified reunion. Parents feel stretched and are grateful for their children to have renewed social contact. There is much good arising in the face of these challenges.

When we can take breath and reflect a bit, many questions await consideration. What positive forms and processes do we want to take into the future, what leave behind in our second 100 years of Waldorf education?

Looking to the quotation from *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*, where is the gold that we want to take forward? Conversation (or Speech) is the Snake's answer. Intentional opportunities and forms for conversation are already birthing themselves in our community. Here are three examples.

One of the first responses to both COVID-19 issues and urgent questions about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) was the creation of the Waldorf Community Hub groups. WECAN, under the leadership and vision of Susan Howard, created this network of connections for early childhood educators across North America (also open to our international colleagues). Countless questions, contacts, ideas, conversations, meetings, discussions, and resources have been shared to the benefit of all. Interest groups, conversation groups, panels, and webinars have graced the internet waves with positive, practical tools; ideas; encouragement; and opportunities to

have conversations with colleagues so geographically separated that we could never have known them otherwise. New communities are emerging, despite the more local isolation that we are enduring. Here is conversation. It is gold.

There are so many questions—practical, pedagogical, philosophical, social, soulful, and spiritual—all tumbling around together. What is the gold we can extract out of turbulent but potentially transforming experiences? Responding to this call, a group of question-asking researchers, under the invitation of long-time early childhood teacher, Holly Koteen-Soulé, has come together as the newly formed WECAN Research group. They are focusing upon "reading the signs of the times," as Rudolf Steiner encouraged, to sense what is essential for our education in this new century. Their initial conversations and work together has produced the first four articles of this issue. Holly's article "2020: A Year in Review" lays the groundwork for building our questions. A description of how the Research Group came into being follows.

The next two articles are guides to asking questions. Laurie Clark offers a School Contemplation through which we can ask questions about our communities, our programs, our institutions and be led to introspection into our own values and attitudes as well. Stephanie Hoelscher's article shares some vignettes that have stimulated deep questions about her work with young children and families that lead us into the consideration of DEI. The group also invites questions from colleagues everywhere to guide their research in directions that will serve teachers, children, and families. The link for contacting the group—for creating more conversation—is included.

A third conversation greatly influenced this issue. A kindergarten teacher, Marieke Duijneveld, posed a question to some colleagues that became a conversation with representatives from WECAN, AWSNA, and Alma Partners. The question: Children are asking questions about race, sexuality, violence, illness, and so on, for which we have no prepared replies. Can teachers share how they have responded to such questions in truthful ways that meet the children's developmental level of consciousness? What does "appropriate" mean now? In her article, Marieke generously describes the particular experience that provoked these questions. She humbly shares her questions without supplying answers. Her article is intended to **open up the conversation**. Following her article is a "call for submissions" to Alma Partners, who are briefly introduced with their "call." This initiative is in direct response to Marieke's question and subsequent conversation.

Another outgrowth of this conversation was the Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday story you will find from Jessica Oswald. A wonderfully re-imagined format for a birthday story was described during this meeting that inspired Jessica to create this story as a way to commemorate the MLK holiday with her class. You will be delighted to learn that the original of this story is being revised by its author, Dr. Linda Williams, from the Detroit Waldorf School, to appear in the Fall 2021 *Gateways*.

Another short piece comes from a parent letter sent by Laura Esposito from the Kimberton Waldorf School, connecting Dr. King's mission with daily social practices and values shared in the kindergarten each day. And more conversation to fire our commitment to truly universalize and bring anti-racism into our practices can be found in Steve Spitalny's article on "Reimagining Story" and Chris Shaw's tale of skin colors in her classroom puppets.

"For the Classroom" shares two more stories from Leslie Woolverton—another diversity story and a summer story of just goodness and joy.

As we begin distilling what our Waldorf "essentials" are, one article reminds of our affirmation of imitation as the child's primary learning mode. How is our use of and awareness of imitation being used in our classrooms? Thank you, Jane Philipson, for this consideration. And as we want to gently guide the children into practical and social life, another article reminds us of the art of transition. Roxanne Gregoria-Anthony helps us consider the conscious attention these critical moments can be guided by.

We also need to be aware of the different prominent early childhood streams that are often more well-known than Waldorf. Colleague Renee Schwartz is experienced and trained in both Montessori and

Reggio-Emilia pedagogy and practice. Comparisons to these approaches and Waldorf here help us become more familiar with these other two well-respected educational approaches. This article can help to prepare an answer for when you are asked, "Waldorf? You're like Montesstoi or Reggio, right?"

The world of Waldorf education and humanity in general feels a loss in the passing of Ann Pratt into the spiritual world. Ann founded the early childhood program at Pine Hill Waldorf School, among many, many other accomplishments, and was one of the original WECAN board members. A remembrance and tribute honors her contributions and will delight you with some early pictures of the anthroposophical community in its earliest days.

Two book reviews close this issue. *Reclaim Early Childhood* is a very important new resource by Sebastian and Tamara Suggate, researchers who validate Waldorf practices with current scientific studies and bring philosophical insights into subtle questions about the development of young children everywhere—not just in our schools. *Don't Look Away*, by Iheoma U., Iruka, PhD, et al, is an important guide and workbook to bring anti-bias awareness and practices into our classrooms. The book wrestles with questions that challenge us to have inner conversations with ourselves and outer conversations to change our classrooms and schools into true anti-bias communities.

In Goethe's fairy tale, before the Snake's conversation with the gold king, she had come across gold coins that had been carelessly scattered by some will-o-the-wisps. These she swallowed. "And a most pleasant sensation overcame her; it was the gold melting and spreading through her whole body. With great delight, she saw that she had become luminous and transparent." Everywhere she went thereafter, she spread a pleasant light.

At the end of the story, the Snake sacrifices herself to become a bridge joining two lands. She had transformed the gold to light which, opening up "converse" between peoples who had been separated. May our conversations with one another—twisting and bending with one another—uncover the gold we seek.

Be well. Be strong. Answer the call to conversation. ◆

Join the WECAN Community Hub

The WECAN Community Hub in Groups.io was established last spring to offer Waldorf early childhood educators opportunities to engage in conversation and share resources, especially in these times of the pandemic. Its membership has grown to 900 over the course of recent months.

The Hub offers resources and conversations on Activities for Children, Reopening our Programs, Health and Coronavirus, DEI, Inner Development, Courses and Webinars, and WECAN News. The Hub also has subgroups for Parent Child, Birth to Three, Home Programs, Early Childhood Teacher Educators, and WECAN Organizational Members. Several of our WECAN Regions also have subgroups.

We are very grateful for the opportunities the Community Hub offers for us all to stay in touch. We encourage you to join and share your questions and insights!

To subscribe, please go to:
WECANCommunity+subscribe@wecan.groups.io

Focus—A Call to Conversation

2020: A Year in Review

~ Holly Koteen-Soulé

The year 2020 brought unprecedented challenges to us as individuals, as families, as institutions and even as a nation. We have been tested mightily by social isolation, racial justice protests, and political chaos. Individual and collective acts of kindness, empathy and courage—humanity at its best—have kept our lifeboat from being swept out to sea but, nevertheless, brought us face-to-face with existential questions that we usually keep at bay.

As Waldorf early childhood teachers, we have had to ask ourselves:

How flexible and creative can I be?

What is the essence of Waldorf education?

From where do we get our inner strength and conviction?

Early childhood educators are used to being calm centers in stormy times, but in this situation, we have been dealing with extreme levels of uncertainty—for ourselves, our families, the parents of the children in our classes, our colleagues in our schools. We continue to be in uncharted waters as a culture, as a school movement, and as Waldorf educators.

On many occasions I have found myself wondering what is *really* happening? Why did the whole world need to push the pause button? Is there a shining opportunity under the surface of this phenomenon that will only be open for a short period of time and then close again, like flood waters after the rainstorm?

I am writing this piece during the first week of 2021, not knowing, but hoping, that by spring our feeling of unsettledness will be eased, that we will be seeing dry land ahead and a path back to familiar rituals and rhythms in everyday life, including hugging our family and friends and shaking hands with our colleagues.

In my conversations with colleagues, however, it is clear that there is no "going back to normal." The depth of the disruption and the questions that have arisen are urgent and many of us feel compelled to try to integrate the lessons of this year into our lives as we return and regroup. We want to recognize and take hold of the real jewels in our work and polish them even more brightly. We are less fearful of letting go of those things that we had built up and thought were precious, but that are not as real and vital in the same way.

Having to adapt to distance learning has allowed us to look with fresh eyes at Waldorf education, at what is so central and difficult to maintain without face-to-face contact. What is changing in our larger social sphere? The pull of the longing for the familiar and the comfortable will be tempting. We will need to be awake to new possibilities and to find ways to make the good things that often arise in a crisis a part of our new normal. The likelihood of that happening without both individual and collective effort is slim.

"What is my part?" Each of us has the opportunity to renew the work within our own Waldorf communities and beyond, in the human community. Hopefully we can share what we are continuing to learn through the WECAN hub and the other means of communication that have been set up during the past year. In some areas, like the importance of rhythm, for example, we were happily confirmed in its health-giving benefit. Out of our recent experiences, however, we may make new decisions about the balance of inside and outdoor activities or about creating daily schedules that are simpler than what we had previously established for our classes.

In other areas, we have been really shaken loose from our old habits and required by the circumstances to try out new ways of working, especially in the realm of relationships. The constraints on our interactions

have had a deep impact on us all. The undeniable longings for contact, loving touch, and the fullness of an in-person conversation are becoming increasingly palpable. Even those whose preferred mode of interaction prior to 2020 was social media have come to recognize that feeling of being "hungry," even though they have just eaten a digital meal! Modern culture's love affair with technology and social media is meeting with an unexpected rival—the longing for human touch, human interaction!

Relationship is the heart of Waldorf education. What are we learning about our relationships with the children, the parents, our colleagues?

Some colleagues have remarked:

- "I am the anchor for the children, and they are mine. I couldn't go on without them."
- "My parents have been able to see more of why I do what I do, and I have been able to really understand their needs and struggles. It is a partnership for which we are both so grateful."
- "My colleagues and I have had to work much more collaboratively than ever before in order to find a creative way to meet the stringent conditions we have been facing."

Out of my conversations with colleagues, I am sensing that we have discovered something profound and are preparing for a paradigm shift in all of our relationships. The restrictions on our interactions dictated by the pandemic and the rising urgency of the issues of diversity and inclusion have both echoed strongly in our Waldorf communities. As we take up our work anew and rebuild our relationships, how can we not fall back into old patterns of thinking, feeling and reacting?

What have we done differently that allows us to connect or not connect? How have we learned to listen more deeply when communicating to a matrix of faces on the screen? How have we learned to feel what is in another's soul, even though all we can see was a digital image? Can we hang on to the mutual vulnerability that has brought us into more authentic relationships?

Can we recognize that we, as well as the children, are all humans-in-becoming?

The bridge from 2020 to 2021 is a story of strength and softness, harshness and beauty, of breaking down and building up, of holding on and letting go, of breathing in and out, of listening deeply to ourselves and others. We have looked down at the smallest things in the grass with the children and up at the stars when they were asleep. We are waking up to things that we have been asleep to, seeing our circle expand, and remembering how much more we can do when we work together. ◆

Holly Koteen-Soule *is Early Childhood Director for Sound Circle Center in Seattle. She served as kindergarten and parent-child teacher for 25 years at the Seattle Waldorf School and then the Bright Water School. This past year has brought her more Zoom and online time than she could ever have imagined. While she appreciates what it has taught her, she longs for the joy of more in-person conversations in the coming months. Holly is also a member of the Pedagogical Section Council and WECAN board member.*

Tending the Fire

The Forging of the WECAN Early Childhood Research Group

Rise up O flame
By thy light glowing
Show to us beauty,
vision, and joy.

The lighting of a single candle may bring clarity to a meeting. To light a candle in the presence of the children gathered around the table for snack brings an unspoken reverence. Watching the flickering flame of a story candle suspends time and encourages an anticipation broken by a human voice speaking, "When did it happen, when did it not?" The burning candle shines as soul and spirit made visible.

Waldorf early childhood teachers are masters of enkindling fires of soul and spirit. We bring attention and intention to breathing life into the many sparks of light that come to us, sparks which can grow into glowing embers of soul warmth radiating outward. As tenders of the spiritual hearth, we need to be attuned to sensing the needs of others and the environment in order to keep our flame steady and sustainable. How can we extend a circle of warmth during this time of a global crisis of extraordinary dimensions?

Last spring the pandemic brought the world into a shared place of anxiety and vulnerability. Fear raged and consumed our forces. The metaphorical fires of our communities fueled existential, practical, and socio-economic questions about the nature of our work with children and families. The WECAN hub rose up from this worldwide, viral wildfire. The hub quickly became a central point of connection, information, and support for teachers across the continent. Our sole early childhood representative on the Pedagogical Section Council posted on the hub. She wanted us to know about her questions on the sense of touch in creating trust and relationship and to invite others to join her in the task of bringing forward research questions about what is essential at this time. This spark of invitation enkindled the creation of something new—the ad hoc Early Childhood Research Group.

Six teachers came together to form this group. As individuals, we are diverse in biography, geography, and interests. Our shared point of intersection is feeling called to better understand and support the nature of our early childhood work in this moment and into the future. Our initial point of inquiry was to ask, "What is needed at this time?" Our hope was that by sharing our experiences and finding new, meaningful connections we could all gain a deepened sense of the essence of our work, reinforce our core values, and give rise to new inspiration and the inner strength to meet the challenges of our times.

The research group meets regularly and sees its task as discerning the right questions to ask in order to support our colleagues in a shifting landscape of needs. Our first wave of work focused on the theme of a healing education for all. Motifs of hope as a tonic for the future, care as an antidote to fear, and a call to broaden and open our perspective were guiding themes in our writings. How can we bring into our daily encounters Steiner's aphorism, "Interest is more powerful than love," as a soul habit for the "new normal"? The group's first virtual discussion sought to illuminate how taking a compassionate interest in others is a healing gesture for others and ourselves.

A second wave of work brought attention to practical concerns about working outdoors with children. The research group helped to hold a two-part virtual discussion on the topic. Experienced outdoor educators offered reflections and recommendations. This discussion sparked attention on the need to support the inner work and vitality of the teacher, which led to another virtual discussion on the spiritual and meditative foundations for our work, well-being, and movement forward.

The third wave of work is rising with the tides of the times. The fuel for fires of inspiration, clarity, and new growth live within each of us and most powerfully with all of us. Please share with us your needs. Please tell us your stories, so they can spark the questions that are waiting to be asked. The Research Group can be reached at: ***research@waldorfearlychildhood.org***. ◆

School Contemplation: A Potent Tool for Waldorf Schools in Challenging Times

~ Composed by Laurie Clark in collaboration with the WECAN Research Group

COVID-19 has brought challenges on every level to Waldorf communities. Here in North America schools are struggling to cope with major pedagogical, social, and financial questions. While solving everyday problems is a necessary priority, in order to move beyond reacting, we may need to remind ourselves to take time to listen and speak with one another. Sharing our stories helps us to realize that we are not alone and that we can find soul strength with one another.

We also have a potent pedagogical practice of "Child Contemplation," also called "Child Study," which teachers use to support a child going through a developmental challenge. Sometimes a faculty will also undertake a "Class Contemplation." This process involves observation, imagination and meditation and helps us deepen our understanding of a child or a class.

Could we also use this kind of process to help us penetrate the deeper issues and gestures that are arising in our schools out of the current situation or in any period of significant change? Those of us who have practiced Child Contemplation know how revealing and healing the process can be.

There is an urgency at this time for each school to contemplate the communal environment with an open and honest transparency. The importance of acknowledging, seeking understanding, and deeply committing to integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (including LGBTQ+) in the school provides a way to take action towards the ethical roots of social justice. Raising awareness of these issues within the school has the potential to be regenerative and transformative.

A school that went through a difficult transition two years ago initiated a version of this process, out of a sense that the outside pressures had pulled the school away from its center, allowing it to become more and more Matter without Spirit. Some faculty members were also carrying the question of "What is the Being of the school?" (See note) The school contemplation process helped them rediscover and recommit to actively working with the spiritual impulses at the core of their work.

Here are some suggestions for how to approach a school contemplation process.

School Contemplation Process

Open the session by reading a verse that has a meaning for your community.

I. Social Mission of Waldorf Education

- Recall the founding of the first Waldorf School and its social impulses.
- Read the Mission, Vision and Core Values of your School. Is there an alignment of the vision and values with the mission of the school?

II. Biography of your School

- Share the inner and outer qualities of your place: geography, climate and ecology, physical characteristics of buildings and campus, organizational structures, the balance of long-term and newer teachers, the balance of tradition and innovation, the mood of soul.
- Recall the history of your school from its inception to the present time: founding members, how the name was chosen, major milestones, accomplishments, crises.

III. Awakening to Community

- How does each individual, group and the school as a whole stay aligned with the school's mission, vision, and values?
- How can we continue to stay awake to the spiritual being of the school?
- How can we invite our spiritual helpers to meet us in our endeavors?

IV. Reflections on initiatives for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in our school

- Describe how the school is implementing DEI awareness and how it is coordinating plans in the faculty, administration, leadership structures and parent community.
- How is DEI sustained and incorporated in the school's mission and policies (i.e. hiring, admissions)? Is there a diversity committee? Is there a safe place to share grievances?
- What is the mood and quality of the DEI work?

What plans can be put into place to increase diversity and ensure a more equitable future for the school?

V. Reflections on our Present Circumstances

- What aspects of the school are healthy and thriving?
- In what areas are we currently facing challenges?
- Is there an archetypal image or story that characterizes the present situation?

VI. Steps towards Healing and Renewal

- What images are arising that can bring balance or healing to the situation?
- Are structural changes needed?
- How can we strengthen our relationships?
- How can we communicate and deal with conflict more creatively?

VII. Moving into the Future with Courage

Esoteric inner courage—"Let us never forget that every step taken at the prompting of the spiritual world leads us into a situation where we have to look right and left and make a new decision. These decisions that are continually facing us have to be made with courage, with inner courage of life." —Rudolf Steiner (Lecture 2, *The Curative Education Course*)

- What are our visions of the future?
- How can we support one another in our work together?

It would be ideal to be able to work through the steps of this process over the course of three days or three faculty meetings. Parts I and II could be completed in the first session, II and IV in the second session, and V and VI in the last session. This allows for questions to be worked with in the night and over time. Reviewing the results of the work together at a later date would also be fruitful.

Coming to clear insights is a critical first step in meeting the need for change. Creating plans and implementing them is a second level that requires other kinds of meetings and resources. In the same way that our inner attitude towards the children in our care matters, so does our attention to inner spiritual activity by our teachers and school leaders make a difference in how practical solutions unfold. ◆

A Waldorf early educator since 1978, **Laurie Clark** *incorporates her therapeutic training into all aspects of the classroom. She is in continual research through observation and constant engagement with the young child to answer the deep question of how to meet the child of today. Laurie mentors teachers, is a frequent conference presenter, and has co-authored two books with Nancy Blanning on therapeutic movement for young children.*

NOTE:

The following is a free rendering of what Johannes Tautz, one of the teachers at the first Waldorf School, wrote about the "Being of the School."

Just two days after the first Waldorf school's opening, the founding teachers gathered to take on the task of forming a faculty. They wanted to form a faculty that was aware of itself as a responsible community that worked in cooperation with all of its members. In this way, the community could become capable of inviting the being of the school into its presence and become an organ for this being.

It was essential for this faculty to commit to a regular rhythmic relationship to this spiritual experience through a practice of soul exercises. Experience confirms that a spiritual practice by the community members of the school invokes the being of the school and helps the essence of the school to manifest. It also works constructively into the healthy social life of the community.

The Meditative Life of the Teacher
Three lectures by Johannes Tautz
Wilton, New Hampshire, June 18–20, 1986
Pedagogical Section Council of North America

Reconsidering the Good, the Beautiful, and the True

Stories from a Waldorf early childhood educator looking for a wider map of the world

~ Stephanie Hoeschler

Acknowledgements

I introduce this essay with an intellectual acknowledgement. What I share here comes not from books or articles, such as might be footnoted and referenced in academic writing, but from people. Whether a silent observation, a fleeting encounter, or sustained relationship, people from our Waldorf world and beyond have provoked the thinking that I tentatively share here. And so I begin by acknowledging the formative contributions of teachers at the Spark Teacher Education Institute, Brattleboro, VT; Bessie Jones and Mikaela Simms, authors of *In the Company of Black Women: A Conversation about Race and Raising a Young Child*; and parents of the Desert Marigold and Orchard Valley School communities—those who came and stayed and, more significantly, those brave enough to come, to leave, and to speak about their experiences.

Guiding Thoughts

It does indeed seem that the world is falling apart. We, in our Waldorf circles, feel it, talk about it and hold pressing questions, both practical and existential. On a wider inclusive map of the world, chaos, dislocation, constant change, and an uncertain tomorrow affect all. Where might we find our compass to orient us? What is true cannot be learned from a sweeping master narrative. Our compass that guides us in a wider world asks us to be aware and awake to the nuances of daily life. We all have experiences in our daily lives that can help us ask the right questions. The world needs us to ask these questions. I write this essay as an invocation to that goal, open-ended and wondering.

How do we walk in the world? Do we walk as "Waldorf teachers" with a narrowly defined Waldorf worldview? Do we walk as human beings? How do we "see"? Where does our gaze go? Do we have narrowed "Waldorf" eyes or eyes open and receptive to the other?

Stories of Places Not Yet Found on the Map

Stories are important to us. These include not only those we tell the children, but also those we live as people. Thinking consciously about how the two flow together is a way to stay active in our work, to make a difference in the world. We tell our parents, "Share a story from your life." We can say this because, regardless of the content, we know that the telling of a personal story brings connection and intimacy.

For many people, keeping their family safe, fed, and cared for—keeping everything from falling apart—is an ongoing, daily challenge. The world does not present itself as good, beautiful, and true. Where in our everyday encounters with others do we find meaningful connections that can help guide us to new places? Below, I share a series of stories to extend this question. I have resisted bringing them into neat and tidy congruence.

Decentering the Good, Beautiful, and True: A White Parent Perspective

I was a parent at my first parent meeting at a charter Waldorf school in Phoenix when I first heard the words that would initiate a personal and professional journey:

"All children need to know is that the world is good, beautiful, and true."

That is how I remember the words, words that I received with deep resonance and jolting dissonance. They struck deep with meaning about what I wanted for my son and deeper many times over in discordance with the world in which I lived at that time. Guns, overhead police presence, poverty, racism, human exploitation, environmental degradation. I asked for reflections on this conflict between one's hope and one's reality, as it is experienced. "What do you do, as a parent, when you do not yourself see that the world is good, beautiful, and true?" I asked.

Come to acceptance or take action.

Acceptance or action.

White and privileged, I labored for the next several years to move my family from a desert megalopolis to the green mountains of Vermont, the whitest state in the country on a per capita basis, where the Waldorf bubble of the good, beautiful, and true stayed intact for me.

My child lived a life that was good, beautiful and true. The children in my care did the same until a visiting parent poked my Waldorf bubble by asking,

"Where are the brown children?"

My classroom had brown dolls and a dark-skinned Madonna on the wall. My classroom was "beautiful" in aesthetic terms, or so I believed, as it was "good" and "true" as well with materials and furnishings that checked the boxes for inclusion, multiculturalism, and diversity. But in this moment a mother from India speaking Marathi to her husband who translated to me in English—while looking down at the floor at his black leather shoes to hide his discomfort at her question—told me in plain terms: "I see one thing and one thing only. I see whiteness."

Another Decentering Story: A Black Parent Perspective

Two black early childhood educators held a conversation on social media. In the flow of words exchanged there arose a picture of a Waldorf world that is not good, beautiful, and kind for all children. Not all children experience our classrooms as places of belonging. Not all families feel received with a gesture of warmth and acceptance.

The belief bubble of many listeners burst, hearing about a teacher and parent of a son who went to a Waldorf school for one year and left because the mother realized, not unlike the mother from India, that the world of the school was not "good, beautiful, and true" for her son.

Another Story: Why Not?

Would you use this song in your classroom? Why? Why not?

Mentors from the Spark Teacher Educational Institute asked this question of a group of teachers, mostly white, during a professional development workshop, "Teaching in Solidarity with Black Lives," held last summer. The song in question, "Which Side are You on, My Friend," is rooted in the hills of Kentucky and was sparked by a 1931 miners' strike. After Florence Reece, mother of seven and wife of a miners' union organizer, was terrorized in her home by Kentucky lawmen, Florence tore a sheet off the calendar on the wall and wrote this song. This song, written in protest and rage, spread throughout the union movement. It then was adapted and adopted during the 1960s by the Freedom Singers in a call and response form.

I heard this song in this form. Call and response. Singing into the ether.

"Which side are you on, my friends, which side are you on?"

"Freedom."

We sang this song together. And again, the simple question was asked, "Would you use this song in your classroom?" Why? Why not?

The experience of this workshop and the question posed about this particular song took me back to a time when I was an untrained teacher. I had been asked to step up and hold a class. I did not know anything Waldorf. I did have a pressing and urgent need to connect with the eighteen children gathered around me for circle. In the absence of a Waldorf knowledge base, I turned to a song that I knew would bring me and the children together. Steady rhythm that invited hand-clapping, slow and steady to bring heartbeats into unison; rich repetitive consonants. The song came from South Africa. I knew it as sung by Ladysmith Mambazo.

And the song did what I needed it to do. It brought the children and me into relationship. Only now through this work with those educators asking, "Why not?" do I see that a song in our classroom offers an opportunity for bringing the good, beautiful, and true that is connected to the wider world.

This is not unlike a sister teacher in southern China who sings, "We Shall Overcome," as she goes about her day with many children in a home-based program.

Sometimes in our vulnerability as teachers striving to do the "right" thing, we ask the wrong questions. Sometimes we need to reach within and look beyond ourselves to find the truth.

Finding Truth, Beauty and Good in the Everyday: A Daily Practice of Positivity

Do we see the world as "Waldorf teachers" or as people who participate in the world as all-sensing human beings? How might we be and see differently in order to find connections that are meaningful for a wider circle? These are the questions that we are living with in this unusual time. I find that opportunities arise in unlikely places, as in the following story.

Human breath rose in a steamy puff on a startlingly cold fall morning from a figure twisted and hunched over a walker. Long strands of gray hair swung in sync with labored steps. Glasses slipping, lenses fogged, a plastic shopping bag swaying from the grips of the walker met one's eyes. The observer's gaze traveled downward to receive the depths and truth of this man's burden.

Metal rods replaced the bone, muscle, and flesh of what had been legs. Trotting next to the man was a small black dog. Looking beyond the surface observations of a disabled person walking his dog on a morning is a lesson about perspective: the goodness, beauty, and truth in our world is inseparable from its pain and injustices. That day in the classroom—Michaelmas morning—the children heard a story of this early morning Michael, a story of courage, of conquering darkness, and sharing the beauty of selflessness.

Final Story: An Enduring Essential Truth Revealed

A father perched on a child-sized chair for his child's parent-teacher conference. He came to this country as a political refugee from Rwanda. Another family, the mothers of an adopted brown skinned child, had paid for his child's tuition so that she might attend school. The father dressed, as he always did when talking to his child's teacher, in a crisply ironed dress shirt tucked into trousers. He held his tall angular form in an upright posture despite the lilliputian chair. A warm beaming smile penetrated through the formality of manner.

"My daughter corrects my English now and wants to speak English at home! Not so much Kinyarwanda."

His daughter had started school speaking no English and not speaking at school at all for the first half of the year.

The father laughed, bemused at the reality of this truth.

"I see my daughter is learning to become a good person here. To be a good person. That is what we want. That is what is important to us."

"That is what is most important to us."

An enduring essential truth of our work and one embracing of the strivings and hopes of all: To be a good person.

Questions Calling

How are we attentive to the possibilities for touching the world in an all-sensing way that expands the parameters of our "Waldorf world" in which all may feel that they belong? This is not just a matter of curriculum. This is an invitation to participate in the subtleties of our daily lives in order to do what we need to do. This has always been true but is particularly potent now.

The questions that are arising may seem densely impenetrable, but they need not be. We only need to look at life as our point of entry. Our point of entry is startlingly simple. We all have moments in our lives, indeed in our daily lives, that are portals into new connection. In every encounter lives a story. In every story lives a point of meaningful connection that allows our map of the world to be wider. Interest is more powerful than love. Taking a compassionate interest in others is a healing gesture towards others, and the doing of it is healing for ourselves. A soul habit for the "new normal" awaits. ◆

Stephanie Hoelscher *teaches a mixed-age kindergarten in central Vermont. She has a spouse, child, two unruly dogs, and many chickens. She feels called to connect her anthropological orientation for listening and observing with her work as a Waldorf teacher.*

Opening the Conversation on White Privilege and Racial Justice

~ Marieke Duijneveld

When Nancy Blanning asked me to write something that could work as an avenue to open the conversation about white privilege and racial justice in the Waldorf Early Childhood classroom, I was willing to try. I wish I could write something with answers ready for you, giving you a perfect outline of what to do. The only thing is, I do not have those answers. I am struggling with this huge dilemma of how to bring the topic of white privilege and racial justice in a Waldorf, age-appropriate way into the classroom.

What should one do with comments of children, in moments when you are the least prepared, regarding racial injustice? Like that one autumn morning in my classroom. . .

The sunbeams shone through the apple tree under which the children were playing intensely. Some were still humming the mood-of-the-fifth songs we had sung during circle time. In my rocking chair, making felted balls, I was sitting next to some boys who were working on a building project. The healthy oatmeal was bubbling on the stove, spreading a smell of cinnamon. We were in our lovely kindergarten bubble, and the world was good, so good. . . Next to me, the boys had a conversation about their building project. One boy didn't agree on the place where the garage was built. He looked at me for help and I told him that sometimes things do not go the way you want them to go. "Yes," agreed the other boy.

"Life isn't fair, like the police who are killing all the BLACK people. Right, Ms. Marieke?"

POP went the bubble.

I hesitated. Could I ignore this comment? Of course not! I didn't want to ignore it and yet, I had no idea how to react. Where's the list of dos and don'ts? Shouldn't I keep the world a good place? Did the other boy know that the police had killed Black people? Should I focus on the good people and the good police officers? But I didn't want to ignore the truth. I didn't want to do injustice to people of color. We, as a society, have been doing that for too long.

But wasn't I, as a Waldorf teacher, supposed to create a world that is good and beautiful and true? Killing innocent Black people certainly doesn't fit in that picture. What does it mean to create a world that is good in a world that feels—and is—not always good? How do we acknowledge what has been said, the reality and truth and the seriousness of it, and give reassurance that the world is good and beautiful and true? How do we say that it is true that bad things do happen, and how do we find our own voices to speak up about them?

I remember the kindergarten teacher of my children telling the children about a child who was in the hospital. Yes, it was not going well with the child *and* there were so many good doctors helping him. And she focused on that, but didn't leave out the hard part. She was finding goodness in a situation that seems not good at all. Was that the way to go for this comment? In Waldorf early childhood we often talk about the bubble we are creating, the safe heaven where life is good, beautiful and true. We think of the children as too young to be confronted with the outer world. But wouldn't it be much more helpful for them and the world (the Black community in this case, who is not represented in my class) to bring the outer world into the bubble in a safe, good, true and beautiful way? What does it do to our children in these new times if we ignore what is living in them and what is living outside their world?

Meanwhile the boy was still looking at me for confirmation on his comment. I stumbled over my words: yes, some policemen have forgotten to be good and true, but there are many people who know this and try to help. Being a White woman with little experience regarding this topic, I managed to say something like, "Indeed, some Black people are being killed by the police, by White people who still need to learn a lot about why they are on earth." And I added that there are a lot of people who are standing up against this unfairness. Done, this should do it! Or?

Here I am, a White woman, and from Europe, very innocent about race in the US. Raised to be colorblind (well, there wasn't any other color than White in the town where I grew up, to start with). But I have learned a lot since moving to the US. I attended trainings that I thought I didn't need, but found out I needed very

much, like the course, "Undoing racism." This was eye opening to me. I read articles and books, talked with colleagues. And our school started working together with Alma, a consulting group on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion issues, to try to tackle this topic together.

In our school we worked on our classrooms, looking at our pictures on the wall, dolls, gnomes, angels, books for children to read. Often only white people are being represented. So we changed that, brought in dolls with darker skin tones, books that represent white and black people joyfully together in normal circumstances (not in traditional costumes or in Africa, but here in the US, hopping on a bus for example). I changed my angel into a brown angel after I heard a discussion between two children (Black and White) if angels are white or black. I am careful if I tell a story to not use black as being bad and white as being good. A dear friend told me: Children of color need a mirror—to see themselves reflected, and white children need a window—a window into the world of people of color.

After the comment of the boy and my answer, I felt I needed to do more. But what? Bring up the conversation to the whole class? There would certainly be a lot of children who hadn't heard of this, and wouldn't it be too harsh to suddenly hear this? Weren't we Waldorf teachers supposed to not discuss things, but bring topics in stories and puppet shows, preferably with pentatonic lyre music?

Later that week, having had some more time to think about the subject, I wanted to create a story, maybe using symbols, that would certainly be very 'Waldorf'. But I have learned to not use symbols regarding this subject because, when we use animals or inanimate objects, it alleviates adult discomfort about discussing racism and prejudice and the harm they cause. In this case children learn best through concrete experiences. So what could I say?

I ended up creating a story about a Black woman who went to the bakery to buy a loaf of bread. But the baker didn't want to sell a loaf of bread to a person with Black skin, so he shut the door. Maria, in heaven, who was waiting to come down to earth with her child of light, had seen this. She asked Saint Nicolaus to go down to earth and open the heart of this horrible baker, so later, the child of light could fill it with love and light again. And so it happened. And when the heart of the baker was filled with light again, he apologized to the Black woman and opened his door for her. Snip, snap, snout… Well, the story is, of course, not all told out.

Was it right to bring in Saint Nicolaus, Mary, and the child of light as helpers? Besides being religious figures, they are also clearly White people. Would I do even more harm with that? Couldn't I find a person of color who would change the heart of the baker? I have also learned that we (White people) should not ask people of color to find the solution to the situation we are in. White people should stand up and work on this. Additionally, while telling the story to the children, I forgot to mention that the baker was White, a very important detail! I wished I could ask someone: Is this the right way to do it? I don't want to make any mistakes! But my dear colleague said: "It's better to make mistakes than to do nothing!" With that comment in mind, I am trying to find answers to the many questions I have, as a White woman in an almost all-White classroom.

The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. warn: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." We are being called to break the silence for Waldorf early childhood education. Asking questions is a beginning. ◆

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Alma Partners is planning to publish an e-book of pedagogical stories on DEI issues, written by early childhood educators, in late Spring/early Summer 2021. The intention is to help early childhood educators and parents within and outside the Waldorf movement answer children's questions about race, gender, sexuality, learning differences, and other kinds of diversity, with greater ease and clarity. Please send inquiries about publication guidelines to ***connect@almapartners.net*** *no later than April 30.*

Alma Partners is a consulting group of Waldorf-connected teachers and administrators who offer support to schools and communities to work with issues of diversity as described above.

Reimagining Story

~ Stephen Spitalny

It is time for a serious look at the stories we tell young children and a sharpening of the focus of our lens for detecting embedded messages and images that don't meet our values. In this day and age it is especially important to consider how cultural dominance and racist stereotypes, as well as shaming, blaming and punishment have crept into stories. These messages do not resonate for me with intentions of creating a future world of compassion, love and harmony.

Once upon a time, when I was first traveling the road toward becoming a Waldorf kindergarten teacher, it was commonly advised not to mess with fairy tales, not to change them because they are ancient wisdom encapsulated in story form. I accepted that and later even at times admonished students in my adult courses not to change those fairy tale gems from the past.

The basis for that thinking is that so-called "fairy tales" are, in fact, symbolic representations of received spiritual wisdom that perhaps only an initiate had the credentials to modify. That wisdom had been received by various shamans, initiates and the like, from the imaginal sheath that surrounds the earth. These wisdom stories have been received by wise and spiritually opened people all over the world, and through them the spiritual archetypes incarnated into the flavors and tastes of the culture of which the initiate was a member. What the stories share is the truth of the striving to become a whole human being of body, soul and spirit. The stories are rich in symbology and can be decoded by recognizing the archetypes and extrapolating to the various aspects of the developing human being.

In the long-ago times, these stories were told around the fire, at the hearth. They were told to adults to give them tools for their own future development. First told by wandering bards, minstrels, or shamans the general public received these stories and began to pass them on, as well as to embellish and enhance the stories. Each story evolved based on the regions it travelled through, and on the style and culture of the tellers. The stories offered seeds for enlightenment, and possibilities for gathering strength and moral fiber to face the challenges of their own lives.

These wisdom stories are populated by ordinary seeming people who prevail against obstacles in their path, usually placed there by those with more power than they have. There are usually elements of cleverness, compassion, or courage that are required for the resolving of the obstacles. In the plot and characters of the story, one can discover many aspects of the human being. I think of the character and situations within a story as aspects and experiences of an individual human being. All the characters are inside all of us. These stories do not depict outer physical reality, rather they give pictures of inner development, images of the path of becoming truly human and uniting the various aspects of ourselves and pictures of the functioning of the human body.

Often the three sons or daughters can be thought of as representing three aspects of the human soul. Seven of something is likely in reference to the seven planets; twelve, to the zodiac and its influences on the human being. The elements are pointed to when there is four. Or perhaps five is related to the elements? Perhaps three is connected to thinking, feeling and willing? Sleeping and waking, cosmic/dreaming and grounded/awake to the earth—maybe this is what two of something can be referring to in a story? To go into stories through the door of archetype and number can be very useful, but it is a personal exploration. There are no recipes, there are no "correct" interpretations, there is no "one-and-only way" to understand a story. Once explored, a story may, next time, become something else for you. As Joan Almon once said, "Stories don't like to be pigeon-holed."

At the dawn of the age of materialism, at the beginning of the era of the printing press, the ancient wisdom tales began to be collected and entombed in the printed word. What had been living, evolving story beings, now became codified. They became lifeless corpses of their former selves. Before being printed, these "fairy stories" were a "rolling literature" (as Marina Warner has put it) and they could and would be infinitely adapted and modified. The age of materialism could not accept these wisdom tales as having value, and in industrialized societies, the term "fairy" stories arose to belittle

these powerful tales, and to announce that they were at best fit for children.

I have a great passion and a deep personal connection to so-called fairy tales, from many countries all around the world. I collect collections of stories and hungrily peruse the contents searching for ones that I connect with and that bring forth the images I want to offer the children. I think it is essential that a teacher offer stories that meet the diversity of the world around us. People from everywhere are everywhere. And, if one thinks that reincarnation is a possibility, or a reality, people from everywhere have been "otherwhere" before. There are five continents, innumerable islands, approximately 200 countries and uncountable, unique cultures. To help make this world a better place, let's all learn some stories outside of our familiar story comfort zone! Often we can discover a connection to stories of our own family ancestors. What about stories that arose on the local land on which we stand?

While fairy tales do not depict physical reality, the images can perpetuate stereotypes of disempowerment and can create and perpetuate implicit biases. Many, not all, of the traditional European fairy tales have young, male heroes. What if we made sure to create a balance between male and female heroes, between young and old characters who become the one that succeeds? Does the wicked person always have to be an old woman or a step-parent? We need to explore the old stories and be sure for ourselves that the images do not perpetuate unhealthy stereotypes while at the same time making sure the stories message the values for which we stand. To do this, we have to do our own personal openminded exploring, and we have to be open to listening to the thoughts and experiences of others who may have different perspectives, including parents and colleagues. (For help, refer to Steiner's Fifth of the Six Basic Exercises.)

I have often heard a complaint from parents and adult students that the endings of the stories are too harsh, the retribution is excessive. And I have explained those complaints away, first, by mentioning that the story is a depiction of a spiritual reality, and is not meant to be thought of as a physical happenstance. Second, I have often quoted British essayist and mystery writer G. K. Chesterton who wrote in *The Ethics of Fairyland* about the magnitude and violence of the retributions, *Children being innocent prefer justice, grown-ups being sinful prefer mercy.*

And still I have wondered. We are teaching the children *on many levels* when we tell a story. I have come to a place where I think it is important that we offer examples of compassion and non-violent resolution. If we continually offer violent retribution as the resolution or redemption in stories, then where goes hope for compassion and peace in the world? I think it is high time to find and tell stories that offer compassion without violence and punishment, stories that picture kindness and justice.

Somewhere along the way, perhaps one or two hundred years ago, the "rolling literature" of stories came upon an obstacle which hindered growth, development and enhancement. It is time to get the ball rolling again. I think stories are longing for their infinite updates. It is time to rewrite fairy tales, or better, allow them to live again.

In our time, it seems more important than ever that we offer teaching of compassion and hope, of love triumphing over evil without violent punishment for misdeeds. It is time to hear stories of different family constellations like children with two moms or two dads. There are evils of our time, perhaps different from those of the past. There is an unhealthy focus in culture on physical form and beauty and an idealized version of perfection. Can we help to counter that with images of inner strength and wisdom and integrity, and leave off description of outer physical form? Can we bring stories to encourage love and protection and creative solutions for our planet and the life on it which faces rising challenges and risks of extinction? Embedded in many stories are images of power structures and racial bias that we need to become aware of, and through our retelling undo the inherent racism.

- Penetrate through the imaginal language of the story to the underlying archetype and truths.
- Identify the elements of the story that do not serve your values.

- Make changes to serve your values while staying true to the spiritual messages conveyed by the story.

When I first heard the story of *Shingebiss* as a beginner kindergarten teacher, I was struck by the words describing how the North Wind was like a "squaw breeze" to the little duck. Those words troubled me and made me question the value of the story. I realized this Native American story had been written down by a non-tribal member and the author's bias was embedded in the telling. But there was still something very special about that story, so I kept seeking a better version, coming from the culture out of which the story sprang. I eventually found a version truer to the traditions of the Ojibwe people, and I breathed a big sigh of relief. From that version, and some elements of the version I previously was familiar with, I created a version that felt good to be telling to young children, and to people of all ages.

I am not suggesting we go over each of the polished gems and old standbys and rework them for political correctness. I am not suggesting a free-for-all of redoing the classics to make them more palatable. The various media have done that and I think it didn't go very well, and is generally not very satisfying. What I am suggesting is to consider if changing certain aspects could in fact enhance a story while keeping true to its underlying spiritual messages.

One classic story I tentatively approached with my editor's red ink was the story of *Jorinda and Joringel* from the Grimms' collection. It is a story that has always been both an attraction and a mystery for me. I shared one of my early rewrites with an elder colleague who spurred me on. She suggested that the wicked old woman could be a wicked old man. And she too appreciates that in this story about disenchantment, the blood red flower simply makes it impossible for the woman to do magic any more, without further punishment. It is so important to offer images to all about the possibilities inherent in their humanness. Flexibility in relation to the old stories is particularly important in our current stage of human cultural development. In my changed version, the boy and girl have been renamed, the girl must free the boy from his enchantment, and the wicked old woman has become a man. [This story is available at ***chamakanda.com/articles***].

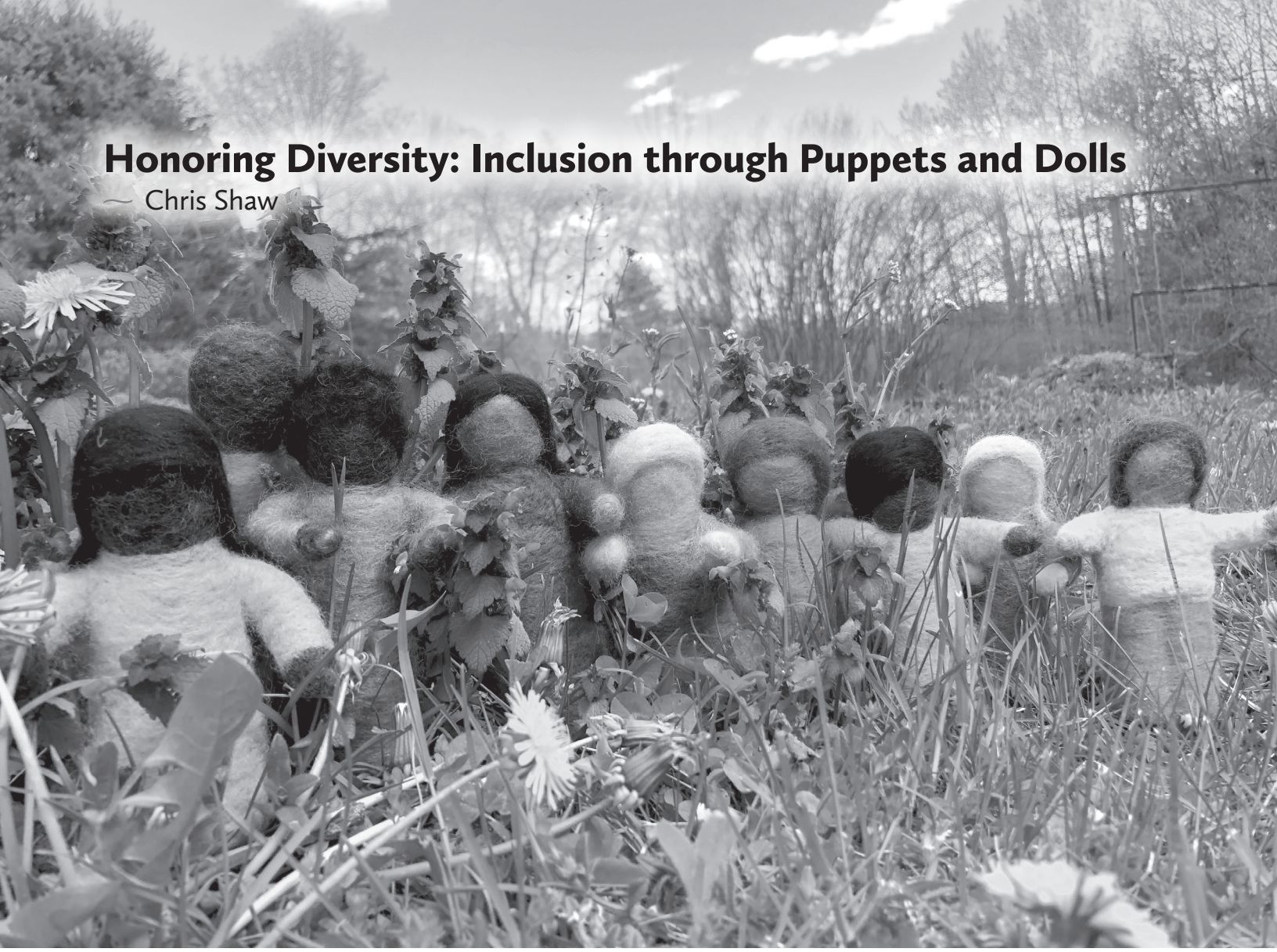
In the closing lecture of the foundational course for the first Waldorf teachers in 1919 (*Study of Man*), Rudolf Steiner pointed to the importance of filling ourselves with the power of imagination. Steiner said that it is equally important that the imaginations are true. If the imaginations the teachers are teaching from are true, then teacher must have the courage to rely on those imaginations, the courage to be free and independent in thinking and still to unite themselves with true imaginations instead of false. The teacher must therefore have courage for the truth. And this courage for the truth which the teacher develops must go hand in hand with a feeling of responsibility towards checking the truth of imaginations.

It is time to write new stories. And it is time to set the old stories free. ◆

Stephen Spitalny *has been a kindergarten teacher at the Santa Cruz Waldorf School for many years. He has written three books and many articles on early childhood, and writes for his blog (**chamakanda.blogspot.com**), as well as offering workshops, mentoring and consulting. Steve's main credential is as a parent and grandparent. Steve's website - **www.chamakanda.com***

Honoring Diversity: Inclusion through Puppets and Dolls

— Chris Shaw



In our Goldfinch early childhood class at the Hartsbrook School in Hadley, MA, puppet making has become the culminating project for the rising first graders. These older children often grow restless at the end of the year, becoming distracted, chatty, and sometimes a bit silly or mischievous.

In Waldorf education we want the children to be fully ripe and ready for first grade before moving on. Expressions of boredom signal this readiness. This is a good sign but means that teachers have to meet those children with projects and activities that challenge and keep them engaged. They want something new and more complex which the younger ones don't get to do. Puppet-making fills this bill.

For the past few years the Goldfinch children have made their own table puppets during these final kindergarten weeks. It is a bittersweet time because, as their teacher, I get to invite those oldest children to sit and sew with me during play time each day. I get to listen in on their conversations, which often turn to next year, their new teacher and first grade. I get to joke with them and express that I will miss them. These are special intimate moments of contact with each child.

The first year we made table puppets like the ones I use for puppet shows. I let the children choose the skin tone they preferred. I offered them peach, tan, and a deep brown. As most of the children in the class had peach colored skin, it made sense that they all chose that fabric. But I said most, not all of the children had peach or "white" skin. For the one child in the class with beautifully brown, glowing skin also chose the light color.

This did not add up. Why would he choose to make a puppet that looked like his friends and not himself?

In my own ignorance, I assumed that children would be attracted to skin tones that matched their own and that of their parents and caregivers. Research shows that babies show preference for faces with skin tones that match that of their caregivers. But once they are exposed to dominant culture with different skin tone, preference changes and the children become attracted to the skin tone presented in dominant culture. In the United States and other western countries, dominant culture means white. In fact, studies show that when children are exposed to dominant culture, their preference for whiteness increases and preference for brown and black faces decreases, regardless of their own skin tone or that of their family members and caregivers. And, most disturbingly, all of this is imprinted into children before they turn seven. That means that a child of color in my class will most likely learn to prefer white skin over brown.

This is a weighty and disturbing observation. How can a white teacher with a predominantly white class welcome black and brown children into the classroom, knowing that this environment will probably disrupt the children's preference for their own physical characteristics? Being in my class would be harmful to a black or brown child's self-esteem. And, as a white teacher of white children, how was I to help expand the choice for brown and black skin tones when dark skin remained a minority in the classroom?

What I realized could be done was to offer images of people with a variety of skin tones in other ways. Picture books, toys, and the artwork hanging in our classroom are all good places to start, but puppet shows are offered all the time with our own hand-made puppets. Making changes with the puppets has been an easy solution. Since that time, I have created many puppets of as many varied skin tones as I can find. When the children make puppets, they are all given the same rich, chocolate brown skin cloth and crown the head with black hair. Their choice comes in deciding the color for the clothing and hair length they want.

The children love these dolls. In fact, the first year of making this change, I overheard a white child in my class say to another white child, "I love my puppet. I am going to pretend it is my baby." And the other child replied, "You can't have a baby that color. You have to have a baby that looks like you." To this the first child wisely replied, "No. If I marry someone with brown skin, my baby will have brown skin". "Right," replied the other child. "I forgot."

This example reveals that children do love all skin tones and need to experience them from a very young age. Attitudes and judgments against differences develop much earlier than we have realized. The world is not all white. White dominance is a social construct that we want to disempower. Children will recognize the goodness in all expressions of humanity if given the chance to experience differences in a mood of celebration. Through these adored puppets, children showed that they are happy to see the variety of skin tones and love them all. ◆

Chris Shaw *teaches in a mixed-age, outdoor kindergarten at the Hartsbrook school in Hadley, MA. She loves animals, spending her free time with her pets, wandering the forest with her dog, and tending to a large flock of unruly, free-range chickens. She is passionate about uncovering the ways Waldorf education can learn and grow in solidarity with Abolitionist teaching.*

Building a Bridge of Trust: Supporting Imitation with Mindful Verbal Practices

~ Jane S. Philipson

"Two 'magic' words indicate how children enter into relationship with their environment. These words are *imitation* and *example:* The Greek philosopher Aristotle called human beings the most imitative of creatures. For no age in life is this truer than for the first stage of childhood, before the change of teeth." (Steiner,18) All that we know, therefore, about the young child as a total organ of sense and the relationship of the unconscious will-forces to the business of sensing, perceiving, and imitating, would intuitively support Steiner's admonition that we teachers be adults "worthy of imitation."

In their article *Imitation, Interaction and Recognition: Communication between Children and Adults in the Waldorf Kindergarten,* Arve Mathisen and Frode Thorjussen posit that we can expand and further enliven the existing picture of imitative work in the kindergarten by considering the role that authentic, intentional and reciprocal communication—*in the right measure*—can play in meeting the incarnating child in the early years. In this view, incorporating warm recognition and reflection of a child's statements and observations can support a more successful integration of that child's imitative experience:

> *"In [Rudolf] Steiner's educational lectures, there is a strong focus on the role of imitation during a child's first years of life. According to Steiner, imitation provides important impulses for childhood development and later manifests itself throughout life as a source for independent thinking and sociability. However, imitation in Steiner's oeuvre is mainly presented through an emphasis on the responsibility of adults as role models and through explicating the processes children undergo when they imitate adults. There is little discussion of mutuality and interacting communication between children and adults. This article focuses on why interaction, recognition and mutuality should be given a more prominent position within Waldorf kindergarten pedagogy […] The idea is that these perspectives may inspire an expanded understanding of imitation and a reconsideration of what is at stake in the interaction between children and adults. The argument is that Steiner's statements regarding imitation will not lose their significance, but that an element of dialogue and response can be added and thus enrich the understanding of human and material encounters in the Waldorf kindergarten." (*Mathisen & Thorjussen, 18*)*

As I move more deeply into my work with infants, toddlers and their parents, and continue in my role with mixed-age groups of kindergarten through fifth graders, I have frequent cause to reflect on the question of this interplay of *example*, *imitation,* and *verbal interaction*. In the case of the parent-child work, there are several layers to consider: One is the negative impact of a constant barrage of speech and commentary on young children's being and ability to live into their imitative nature, and, conversely, the extraordinary benefit of learning to *simply be quiet* in their midst. Another is the conscious, mindful, and judicious use of verbal interaction that invites the child into a relationship of trust, imitation, cooperation and respect. Mathisen, Arve, & Frode advocate for this in the context of Waldorf kindergartens, but it is a practice already inherent in the RIE/Pikler approaches to caregiving for infants and toddlers. Elements of the work of Dr. Emmi Pikler and Magda Gerber are finding a happy and natural place in a growing number of Waldorf parent-child programs, making this question even more relevant.

In a world of ever-increasing sensory overload, it is a strong emphasis in my teaching, and that of my colleagues in the parent-child work, to gently encourage the adults to cultivate a practice of sustained quiet observation. It is no small accomplishment for many of them to spend a mere 10-20 minutes in stillness, just quietly being present to the children in

their midst. It is a worthy accomplishment, indeed, on several counts.

Once they overcome the habitual drive to talk, move and *do*, most parents express gratitude for this quiet sanctuary to just *be* in the presence of their children, to watch, and to breathe. It is an absolutely astonishing idea for many that they need not respond verbally to every statement, gesture, action or query from their child. They are learning—by *example* and by *imitation*—to create space for their little ones to live fully into the sense-impressions of all that is around them.

In our parent-child *Mornings Together* classes, the basket of many-sized colorful felted balls is an endless source of wonder and recognition for the youngest friends, as are the cupboard doors in our little cottage. With sustained time to explore, uninterrupted by adult chatter and direction, yet held in reverence by their parents, the toddlers' intrinsic drive toward these archetypal play encounters is a joy to behold. Week after week, they approach the "refrigerator" with delight and anticipation to find each familiar item within, just where it was the time before. As they enter the classroom each morning, I can almost always predict to which activity each friend will go. Henry, for example, will always make a bee-line to the cottage kitchen to cook—an activity which his mama tells me is a big part of their family life together. Robin will go straight for the basket of little bears in the upper left corner of the shelves. She will swaddle, nurse and rock them faithfully.

From this predictability in the environment comes trust. This trust and the repetition of experience nourishes the seeds of imitative activity. It is as if to say, "I know that behind that door will be the banana. When I can find the banana, I can feed it to the baby doll…" In this example, it is precisely the practice of *refraining* from habitual and often reflexive interaction, verbal and otherwise, that not only supports the child's encounter and experience of the objects and images in their surroundings, but also sets the stage for imitative play to unfold.

This quiet observation time also becomes an opportunity for parents to observe the children's innately wise, purposeful threads of activity in a longitudinal way. The moment to moment activity of a toddler can appear quite random when seen by the adult as a brief snapshot in time, which is so often how children are observed in the busy-ness of daily life. The experience of watching their children without



interruption gives parents a new lens through which to contextualize their children's activities. Of course, most every parent finds their child's imitation of adult activity to be cute and charming, but when seeing it through this new lens—with some gentle coaching—many parents come to understand this "child's play" as so much more. I hope that offering a window into its deep importance becomes something for them to carry home and integrate into their own parenting wisdom and choices, now and in the future.

One example of such a realization for a parent occurred just this week. She quietly watched her child climb into the rocking boat and out again, probably six or eight times in a row. She later laughed and said to me, "I am just amazed that she does that over and over… I would find it so boring!" I said something like, "Ah, yes. You and I do the dishes over and over again because the dishes need to be done, and we know what happens if we don't do them. Some of us find it boring. For us, the imperative comes from without. Avery is coming into her body and learning about its relationship to the earth (and, though I didn't say it then, is supported by her connection to the spiritual world). The imperative for her comes completely from within. She will never tire of it, she will simply keep doing it until she is finished, and then she will move on to the next right thing." I could see from her nod of recognition, that mama was moved to consider this



new perspective with significant interest.

While the above is not specifically an example of imitation, it does speak to the power of inviting parents to see their children with new eyes, and to the value of giving parents the opportunity to imitate and learn from another trusted adult. Often in my own teaching, I recognize echoes of my wise mentors and early role models in my words, physical gestures, songs or story-telling. I strive to pass along these gifts to the parents in the classes that I hold, and in doing so, cultivate in them the disposition to bring a habit of respect and quiet reverence for their child's innate drive to discover, wonder, and imitate.

In his book *The Creative Word,* Daniel Udo De Haes writes:

> *"How is it that children, who experience so deeply this inner relationship with their surroundings, can wonder so fervently at everything that they perceive? Later we shall see that it is precisely this recognition [of the heavenly] which calls forth such wonder. It is the inner experience of wonder that we observe in young children as they marvel at the world. In order to form a somewhat clearer picture, we could perhaps compare this 'marveling at the familiar' with the surprise that we would feel if, upon arriving in a strange country, we were to meet only intimate friends who, oddly enough were clad in native costume […] Allowing toddlers to be completely absorbed in their surroundings enables them to perceive archetypal images. So here we see—in its purest and most archetypal form—like being assimilated by its likeness." (15)*

On the one hand, in my work, I advocate for this verbal restraint in the presence of young children, and on the other, I also do my best to model a deliberate and intentional use of calm and respectful words in a tone that says to the children, "I see you, I respect you, and I invite you to participate in this experience." This is a place where Waldorf pedagogy meets that of Magda Gerber and Dr. Emmi Pikler and brings to bear precisely the opportunity for enriching Steiner's picture of imitation which Mathisen, Arve & Thorjussen suggest in their abstract (cited above).

Janet Lansbury describes this use of respectful communication in her article, *How to Talk to Your Newborn*:

> *"Speak to her authentically, honestly, slowly and in simple language about the real things happening to her and her immediate world. Respectfully inform her a bit in advance about events, changes (like being picked up or placed down), and uncomfortable or new experiences. Acknowledge the sights and sounds in her surroundings, especially when her expression indicates she notices. Most importantly, make an intensive effort to understand what she is communicating and then acknowledge these thoughts and feelings. When in doubt (and there's almost always doubt), ask."*

Of course, carefully chosen rhythmic experiences of language, gesture and song, rhymes, finger plays and simple stories for the youngest children already have a well-established place in Waldorf early childhood education. These teacher or parent led experiences invite imitation through the experience of playful, healing movement and sound. I have been bringing the Wilma Ellersiek finger play "Oolla Woolla" to the children in my classes each week as we sit around the snack table. There is something truly special in the nature of these verses, which are admittedly a bit odd to adult ears. I have been quite surprised at

how quickly even the youngest among them begin to imitate this simplest of "stories." After the second class, one parent shared that she was rocking her 20-month-old child to sleep one particularly tricky night and that after finally falling asleep in her arms, the toddler opened her eyes and began chanting "Oolla Woolla, Oolla Woolla…" before drifting off to sleep again. Apparently this scenario played out several times more before the child finally fell asleep for the night. Another mother said that she was amazed to observe her child imitating the verse and hand movements in her car seat on a long drive to Southern California, after only two classes together.

Of course, the shared enjoyment of rhymes and songs builds connection and relationship, but the addition of deliberate, simple and respectful speech in the context of caregiving rhythms (diapering, dressing, bathing, and grooming as practiced in the RIE and Pikler approach and described by Janet Lansbury, above) and in putting simple words to a social encounter—referred to as "sportscasting" in RIE circles—adds an element of reciprocity and reflection to the relationship that deepens trust and invites not only imitation, but anticipation and participation in these tasks from even the youngest of infants.

To this end, though I intentionally leave most of the direct physical interaction with the children in my classes to the parents, when I have occasion to interact in a physical role with a child, I make a point to verbalize slowly and quietly what is about to happen: "Maggie, I am going to move your chair closer to the table now. It will help you reach your sunflower seeds." After some weeks of repetition, when she is physically able to do so, dear Maggie will inevitably take hold of her own chair and move herself closer to the table. This practice of compassionate communication around a caregiving task has a quality of dignity that supports imitation and elicits participation by the child.

It is quite a different gesture than becoming the object of an expeditious diaper change or hasty face-wiping. Similarly, calm, matter of fact, minimalist commentary can be of benefit in moments of frustration or conflict between children or when recognizing an apparent need or urge: "You were holding the dump truck and Numa took it out of your hands. Come, let's find another one."

It can be said that importance of providing children with regular opportunities for organic, sustained play and exploration, undisturbed by verbal clutter and over-engagement, and the need for calm, authentic speech related to the child's immediate experience are, in some ways, two sides of the same coin. Both practices are rooted in respect and they support a healthy engagement of the young child's imitative nature. The first creates space for its unfolding, while the second enriches it, as Mathisen, Arve & Thorjussen suggest, by building a bridge of trust between teacher or parent and child which deepens the experience of imitation through a gesture of reflection and reciprocity. While there is no question that we can happily turn down the dial on the indiscriminate chatter which can so assault the senses and impinge on the consciousness of the young child, I am also deeply interested in considering how, as early childhood teachers, we might stretch the mindful verbal practices arising from the work of Emmi Pikler and Magda Gerber upward into the nursery and kindergartens, and bring them to bear on the traditional pedagogy as we strive, always in our work, to be "worthy of imitation." ◆

Resources:

- Lansbury, Janet. "How to Talk to Your Newborn."*Janet Lansbury: Elevating Childcare.* Originally Published Oct. 9, 2014, https://www.janetlansbury.com/2014/10/how-to-talk-to-your-newborn/ Mathisen, Arve and Thorjussen, Frode. "Imitation, Interaction and Recognition
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The Art of the Transition

~ Roxanne Gregorio-Anthony

As a Waldorf teacher of children anywhere from eighteen months to four years old, I spend a lot of time establishing rhythm in the classroom and having conversations with families about rhythm. Just the other evening at a parent gathering, after discussing bedtime rhythm challenges, I found myself lost in that slightly dissociated way of proselytizing about rhythm, yet again. Sometimes I just get so fired up because I have been down that other road; I have seen what lies there. And I really want to help.

I was a parent for nine years before my youngest son was born. I raised my eldest very similarly then to the common parenting practices that I come across in my class families. I asked my child what he wanted to do next, I gave him lots of choices, I negotiated getting into the car seat, I had elaborate bedtime rituals and wound up lying down with him for way too long. I played with him instead of having him learn to play by himself. From his infancy, I tried to fill his mind with all the knowledge I had to give him. I was exhausted. When my younger son came along, thankfully I found a book about how to get my infant to sleep through the night called *Babywise*. And yes, my youngest did sleep through the night from six weeks old. The key to the *Babywise* method was, you guessed it, rhythm.

There are so many great articles and books written on the use of rhythm in a Waldorf early childhood classroom and in the home. Kim John Payne and Helle Heckmann are two of my favorite authors on the subject. Heckmann has written *Slow Parenting* and *The Five Golden Keys* and Payne has written *Simplicity Parenting* and *The Soul of Discipline*. I will attempt to briefly summarize what they have so eloquently written on the topic of rhythm, as rhythm and transition are so intertwined. Suffice it to say that rhythm is what human beings respond to in a natural "pre-wired" way. The rhythm of a beating heart is one of the first sounds that is heard by a fetus. When young children have a rhythm to their day and week that is pretty much the same, they know what to expect, they know what comes next. This dissipates anxiety and creates a happy mood in the child.

To follow up on my own experience, the *Babywise* book had generated some links to Waldorf education even though the two are generally unrelated. I hungrily devoured all the online Waldorf early childhood resources available. Eventually, I was able to take a position as an assistant teacher in a Waldorf school. There I got to see all that I had read put into practice with a large group of children. All I had read and had been attempting at home with inconsistent success, was solidified for me: "Rhythm is magic!" "Work is magic!" "I don't have to play with my child all the time!" I also saw how the teacher was always striving to facilitate smooth transitions from one activity in the daily rhythm to the next. I eventually became a lead teacher and have learned through many trials the art of the transition. This is a key tool for maintaining rhythm in the day and managing challenging behavior. This was the part that I gained by working in the classroom but that was not as easily gleaned from other resources.

After having so many recent conversations with parents about daily rhythm and weekly rhythm, I realized that I had neglected to mention transitions as an important aspect of rhythm. I had forgotten that this was the hidden gem! Many questions arose in my parent body, after they had worked so hard to establish a solid rhythm in their home during the COVID-19 shelter-at-home time, about difficulties in getting their child to go on to the next thing.

This art of the transition that one learns when working in a Waldorf early childhood classroom is a very different thing from mainstream transitions. It consists of *practical steps* and *energetic steps*. Mainstream transitions usually consist of a practical step or two only, and can often be jarring. For example, there is the ubiquitous clapping game. *Clap Clap clap-clap-clap Clap Clap Clap*...then everyone does the same clapping all together. When everyone is clapping, the lead teacher has attention. Other times a teacher may use a shrill whistle to get everyone's attention and announce what comes next. Well, this might work in sports or for older children, but for young children

any type of loud interruption in their play can be quite jarring. When children are disturbed in this way, they are abruptly brought out of their imaginative play or their dreamy half-consciousness and brought up into their head space. Then there is heightened anxiety and lots of questions. The more the questions are asked and answered, the more the anxious energy spirals.

If the adult looks at a watch and sees that it's 10 a.m. and just announces loudly, "OK, everybody, it's time to go outside, get your shoes on," they should be ready for a challenging time. For most children, an abrupt shift like this could actually lead to a melt-down or hyperactivity. Then the next hour or two is colored by an outburst or by chaotic energy.

In the Waldorf early childhood setting, there is the practicality of the teacher's awareness of time and the practicality of the teacher's knowledge of what comes next in their daily rhythm. But since this is a rhythm, and not a strict schedule, a bell doesn't go off on a phone and then the teacher starts the tidy up song.

When things are coming toward that transitional moment, the teacher instead senses the mood in the room. Depending on what she senses, she may slightly shorten or slightly lengthen the current activity. A teacher can feel when the free play portion for four-year-olds and under-three-year-olds is winding down. In my experience, 45 minutes to an hour for three- and four-year-olds is enough. Two-year-olds and under have less stamina for this out-breath of free, self-directed parallel or interactive play. So dependent on the group mood of how the play is moving, this portion may slightly lengthen or shorten. The teacher may sense that the transitional activity may need to be gone through very slowly and softly to quiet some of the energy in order to transition through to the next activity. Or the teacher may feel that the tidying transition activity can be a little more upbeat and slightly quicker (never loud or super-fast).

Once the teacher senses the transition should begin, she does not announce anything but carefully and consciously puts away the handiwork, cleaning supplies or cooking utensils she has been busy with and begins to slowly tidy up a corner of the room while not immediately impinging on the play space a child is in. She has a melodious song that is used every time for this task of tidying up. It can even be a hummed tune, but it should not be overly loud, just loud enough for the children to hear. The more beautiful, melodious and pleasing the song is, the better.

In the Waldorf world, music in the mood of the fifth is the optimal type of singing done around and with small children according to Rudolf Steiner. In *Gesture Games for Autumn and Winter*, Eleanor Winship writes in the preface that "mood of the fifth music stays floating in the realm of early childhood—still intuitively connected to the cosmos and to nature. Similar to medieval chant, which also floats, the melodies waft as a gentle breeze, while the rhythms are also not yet 'of this world.' " Songs in the "mood of the fifth" hover around A, moving only a step to B or down to G, while keeping A as the center.

Be assured that the children have probably noticed on the periphery the teacher's movement to put things away and tidy up. They have also felt the shift in her energy and consciousness, away from the task she was engaged in and toward this new work. Then they will hear the song as she continues to tidy around them. They end their play and imitate the work to tidy up. If they seem to be resisting by playing harder at the play (the cow is really banging down hard on the wooden floor now) or they start running around, the teacher or assistant teacher will calmly and gently put an arm on their shoulder and use imagination to enter the play they were or are still in, "The cow is really tired and wants to go back to the barn."

The teacher is steadfast in energy and in strength of will that she and the children are all tidying and she is facilitating the mood and energy of the room to gently help the children to ride the wave of this transition. She may continue to give imaginative ideas to the tidying, such as, "The trains need to go back to the station" and then she drops some in the basket and hands one to a child to drop in. It is usually better to navigate any challenge from a child during

the transition with an adult's help through song and imagination. Then the next activity can be entered into more peacefully. The teacher may use a short song or verse to end the transitional activity. "All is tidy, all is clean, thank you for your work." Then a song may be used to begin the next activity.

At home instead of school, the next activity might be putting on shoes and a coat to go outside for a walk. In this scenario an adult might say, "All is tidy, shoes are hiding, where O where are the shoes?" This might lead to a happy little game with the adult to find the shoes and get ready. Helping a young child to get dressed to go outside is an in-breath activity where an adult can provide help as needed in an adult directed way. Circle time is also an in-breath activity, where the activity is adult-directed. So, in moving from the out-breath activity of self-directed play to the in-breath activity of circle time or getting dressed to go outside, the key is that the caregiver has not pulled the children out of their imaginative consciousness into the adult world of schedules and consequences. The adult who holds the rhythm is meeting them in their world of imagination and song, not insisting they be pulled into the adult world. This is the art of the transition, and in some small way a protection of childhood.

It requires a conscious look at your day and week with your child. It requires adult homework of sitting down and writing out all the must-dos each day and the like-to-dos each day, while keeping in mind the breathing in and breathing out rhythm. Then imagine fully what you would like the transitions in between activities to look like. For example, "I am seeing my child rise up from playing with the barn and then gathering all the animals to put them away." Be very detailed in your imagining. As Kim John Payne says, "Imagination activates the will forces." When the children know you are fully committed to what is being asked, they feel the confidence in your energy and move with you.

Transitions are hard for everyone, especially young children. They count on their adults to co- regulate with them through such times. Moving from free play to going outside or to circle time are just two examples of working artfully through transition, but the concept can be applied to all transitions with the child.

I am not a fan of using timers, because once again it pulls children out of their developmentally-appropriate consciousness into the adult world where time is a concept. If you need an alarm to remind you, it should not be one the child can see or hear.

The adult should definitely be watching the time, but cue the child through physical movement and energy shifting in their will forces and consciousness. This is what the children are very attuned to at this age. The adults should move through the transition the same way each time. Adults get bored with repetition, but young children thrive on it; they know what to expect and feel safe. As the child grows toward the age of seven, the teacher can begin to "play outside the box" now and again, and have a day here or there where a holiday trip or an emergency necessitates an abrupt transition. Since the child has built up confidence and assuredness in their parental relationship, in teacher relationships, and in themselves through rhythm, they will be better able to manage. And then the next transition on that topsy-turvy day, can be a more artful one, and the child will be back on track.

Drawing out these transitions and making them artful is part of the slow parenting that needs to happen when you have a little one. Their behavior will show you when and where you need to go slower in your transitions. Behavior is a way for a child to communicate. As we adults are continuously expected to move faster and more efficiently, it becomes harder but even more more important to give children what they need most in today's busy world: our time and our energy. ◆

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A Comparison of Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia in the Early Childhood Years

~ Renee Schwartz

As a progressive educator with training in three European methodologies—Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia—I'm often asked to summarize them and share their similarities and differences. Here some notes from my perspective.

All three of these methods have an emphasis on beauty and order in the classroom space. Socialization between children is encouraged. Teachers are supported in their professional development and expected to be highly reflective practitioners. Student progress is measured by checklists, portfolios, or narratives instead of grades. The curriculum is largely student-led.

An essential tenet of Waldorf early childhood education is the understanding that the young child learns through imitation.

In Waldorf education, the early childhood years are completely play-based. Traditional academic subjects are not offered as part of the curriculum, although they are supported by many activities done with students. For example, although mathematics is not formally taught as an abstract subject, children learn to count through games, finger plays, and cooking activities. In fact, many schools bake bread or make vegetable soup each and every week. Student interest in formal topics like reading instruction is responded to quietly, spelling or writing a few words that the child asks for. It is considered healthiest for the child's overall development to wait until signs of grade school readiness emerge before academics are intentionally introduced. A Waldorf early childhood program emphasizes plenty of outdoor and indoor creative play; open-ended toys such as play silks and wooden blocks; and storytelling. Children also have artistic experiences including coloring and drawing, watercolor painting, beeswax modeling, and seasonal crafts.

Waldorf classroom items are child-sized, made with natural materials such as wool and wood, and are usually handmade. The walls are painted beautiful, warm colors and subtle, aesthetic touches greet the eye. The cycle of the seasons drives many of the stories and activities, including rhythmic celebration of festivals year after year. The children are thus guided in staying connected to the natural world around them. Circle Time is a daily gathering for the whole group and includes songs, movement verses, and story. The teacher carefully prepares for this by memorizing each part of the Circle. The Circle is done for several weeks, giving children time to internalize each component. Beyond that, much of the day is for play.

An essential tenet of Waldorf early childhood education is the understanding that the young child learns through imitation. The teacher is a purposefully engaged adult who cares for the environment by moving quietly and calmly in the space, often doing household tasks in the classroom such as sewing or baking and more vigorous things like woodwork, gardening, and fiber crafts, for example. In their play, the children imitate what they see and hear to "digest" these experiences and feel within their bodies how to move, to work, and to interact with others in social life. Imitation is the children's means for exploring and coming to understand the world. Stories picture the events and processes of daily life. Explicit explanation and instruction will have their time in the future. The early childhood teacher is committed to protecting and holding a space for children to simply enjoy being little and to find their way into the world in an unhurried way.

A Montessori classroom is likewise filled with low open shelving and wooden items. Children are given child-size authentic tools (such as small vegetable brushes for washing vegetables or small lawn rakes) and do real work (such as watering the classroom plants or caring for the class pet). Practical

Life, including the social Graces & Courtesies, is an important part of the Montessori curriculum. Children learn table washing, silver polishing, and how to do various kinds of fasteners on their clothing. There are also Sensorial materials which help hone each of the senses—touch, smell, taste, temperature, vision, etc.

A Montessori environment seeks to give the child as much independence as possible, as this is considered respectful to the child. Montessori classrooms are based on a foundation of three things: a prepared teacher, a prepared environment, and freedom with responsibility. The classroom is itself considered to be one of the teachers, and activities are set up which children can do independently once they receive a lesson. Children are expected to plan their own day: choosing activities which interest them, getting them out carefully, completing them correctly and without disturbing others, and putting them back properly on the shelf. Teachers move about the classroom, giving frequent one-on-one or small group lessons to students as they are ready for new concepts or new materials. The teacher documents what each child is working on. Work is placed on a tray or on a woven cloth mat so that each child's workspace is delineated from another's. Children may work alone or with friends. They practice self-regulation by balancing the variety of activities they do in a day, not disturbing the work placed on someone else's tray or mat, and getting the materials out and putting them back correctly. There is no emphasis in Montessori on free imaginative play. The Art experiences given to children are often Artist Studies where students learn to identify the work of different great artists based on their style.

Montessori classrooms are based on a foundation of three things: a prepared teacher, a prepared environment, and freedom with responsibility.

There are math and literacy and geography materials in a Montessori early childhood classroom, which the children are given lessons on and expected to put into their daily plan. The lessons have a set progression. For example, the Sandpaper Letters would come before the Movable Alphabet. One popular literacy activity is the Farm. A farm scene with a beautiful farmhouse and animals is in one corner of the classroom and this would, at first glance, look quite similar to a Waldorf play material. In Montessori, however, the children use a Movable Alphabet (each letter of the alphabet carved of wood or written on an individual slip of paper) to spell the name of each item on the farm. The child would place an item, such as a sheep, on the mat and lay down the wooden letters or slips of paper to attempt to spell the word. The advantage of the Movable Alphabet is that a child can easily change his or her mind and replace some of the letters with others while spelling. The children would then check his or her work to determine if it is correct.

In Montessori classrooms, each classroom material or lesson is referred to as a "work." Dr. Montessori observed that, when given the choice between free play and working side-by-side with adults engaging in or mimicking their purposeful work, students chose the latter. Therefore, she set up her school environments to meet this desire for work that was authentic and true. Similar to Waldorf, Montessori programs for adolescents often try to take place on a working farm. Dr. Montessori also believed that children should be given scientifically accurate facts (explained in a way suitable to their age) and the correct nomenclature for all terminology from the very beginning. The first lesson for the first day of Grade One is the Big Bang.

Math materials include large wooden cabinets of Colored Bead Chains used for skip counting, as well as Golden Bead Material for making numbers and doing computation (unit beads, ten bars made of ten

unit beads wired together, hundred squares, and thousand cubes). These materials are very concrete, since a thousand cube is literally the size of a thousand of the golden beads. Dr. Montessori believed that if a material was broken or missing some of its pieces it should be removed from the classroom until it was repaired or replaced. She felt the children should be surrounded by purposeful order at all times.

Geography lessons include making landforms and water features using trays with pre-made high and low places to which colored water is added. A favorite is the Colored Globe of the Continents, which shows each continent mass simply as a color; prior to this comes the Sandpaper Globe which shows the difference between land masses and water by having the landmasses made of sandpaper. In this way the child moves from a more concrete tactile experience of the globe to a more abstract visual experience.

Dr. Montessori, the first woman doctor in Italy, was a well-regarded Italian pediatrician who was asked to create curriculum materials based on her expertise in child development. Every series of materials which she designed moves carefully and sequentially from more concrete to more abstract. Montessori classrooms are mixed-age within a three-year span, corresponding to what Dr. Montessori termed the "planes of development" of 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12. Teachers give students the next lesson along the progression towards abstraction within their own schedule.

Although Montessori and Waldorf early childhood classrooms are both open and tidy, allow students to move around and socialize freely, utilize natural materials and child-size tools, the closed-ended nature of the Montessori materials, the emphasis on academic work, and the responsibility of each child to plan his or her day are the key philosophical differences.

Reggio is famous for the "hundred languages of children," where every possible mode of artistic and creative expression is considered equal to the other and encouraged.

Reggio Emilia falls somewhere between Waldorf and Montessori on many of these points. This is a good fit for families who want an artistic, child-led model that also incorporates the possibility of direct academic content.

Reggio is famous for the "hundred languages of children," where every possible mode of artistic and creative expression is considered equal to the other and encouraged. Respect for the child, curiosity and wonder, and joyful learning are key. Like Montessori, however, this freedom of choice does not result in a disorganized free-for-all. The curriculum is completely child-led and designed to unfold over time at a thoughtful pace. The center of a Reggio school is the *atelier*, which is like an enormous, beautifully organized shared art room for all of the classrooms, which encircle it like the spokes of a wheel. In the *atelier* is the *atelierista* who is a trained artist. Each classroom has two teachers, one with a background as an educator and a second with a background as a professional artist.

Multiple classroom teachers are absolutely essential in Reggio because of the high importance placed on documentation. This documentation takes place in many ways and is used to encourage reflection on the part of the teachers as well as the students. Children are often photographed while doing their work, such as painting. The photograph of the work process and the painting itself would then be paired together. The child would, on a later day, be shown the painting and asked an open-ended question like, "What do you remember about this?" Whatever the child says would then be written down. Beautiful wall displays are created along the hallways in a Reggio school, with student artwork alongside the photos of the artistic process and their own words. The art displays would be based around a theme that the children are studying, such as shadows or self-portraits.

The theme in question is studied for many weeks and in many ways; it is usually chosen by observing the students at play and seeing what their interests are. An example may be puddles on the playground. Puddles are explored and observed in many ways with the teacher documenting and reflecting the growing ideas of the children. This documentation is key to Reggio curriculum development. At night the teacher is expected to read over these notes and base the next day's activities on them. It is easy in the hustle and bustle of the classroom to miss the tiny details of a child's thoughtful words. When this is written down and then read later, the teacher has time to decide what tomorrow's activity should be to best develop the curiosity and interest further.

The new activity of the day is often called a "provocation" since it is designed to provoke further discussion and engagement with the ideas of the children. The currently popular idea of "loose parts" play is inspired by Reggio. A provocation may simply be a pile of pieces of PVC pipe, or some other open-ended material. As the children engage in the new provocation, the documentation cycle begins anew. In this way, the curriculum is child-led and ever evolving. The teacher follows the children but is also a leader and a guide, helping them to explore their ideas.

There is heavy emphasis upon allowing students to express their ideas in as many ways as possible. Using different art materials allows a child to explore an idea in a new way. Self-portraits may be drawn, sculptured in clay from the drawing, then as a paper collage based on the sculpture, etc. Unlike both Waldorf and Montessori, Reggio is a model which was developed strictly for early childhood. There are no requirements for how academic content should be presented in a prescribed sequence according to the plan for the Grades. Children use writing, counting, graphing, and so on as some of their hundred languages. Of the three pedagogies discussed here, Reggio is the most open to technology in the classroom. Audio and video recordings, student use of iPads, and so on would all be included in the hundred languages and are very much seen as useful for documentation.

A Reggio classroom is full of students busily learning and exploring while the teachers observe and reflect. No pre-determined lessons are part of the curriculum and no topic is off-limits. Art is key and at the forefront of creating understanding. Compared to Montessori, with its carefully constructed group of materials and strict lessons on how one works with each material, it is much more open-ended. Compared to Waldorf, with its emphasis on free imaginative play in the early childhood years, it is much more academic. Students in a Reggio classroom are encouraged to follow their interests and are carefully guided to go slowly as they form their ideas in depth. Academics such as reading and mathematics are not off the table; they are considered one of the many ways of interacting with new ideas. In this way, it seems that Reggio Emilia stands between the polarities of Montessori and Waldorf education.

All of these methods share in common their deep respect for the child. The view of how to support and enrich a developing child is different; the end goal of a balanced human being is the same. Waldorf early childhood teachers are often asked to explain the differences between Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia since parents sometimes cannot see the differences at first glance. They are all European methods with classrooms bursting with color and beautiful things begging to be touched, loving adults who are carefully guiding the children's development in a thoughtful way, and happy children moving around, talking together, and eagerly entering into their chosen activities of the day. I hope that this article has helped shed some light on the underlying philosophical differences which underpin each, as I have observed them in my many years of teaching. ◆

Renee Schwartz, MS *has been trained and taught in both Reggio Emilia and Montessori programs; but Waldorf has always been dearest to her heart. She is completing her Waldorf handwork teacher training through the Applied Arts Program in Chestnut Ridge, NY. She is a curriculum writer and Waldorf homeschool consultant (**waldorfcurriculum.com**).*

For the Classroom

Diversity Stories for Spring and Summer

~ 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. Two of four seasonal stories appeared in the last issue of *Gateways*; here are two more.

Burkes' Farm (Spring)

On a farm, located on the Virginia Eastern Shore, lived a small group of animals. There was a Chincoteague Pony named Sage, a miniature pony named Rue, and two twin sister goats named Crimson & Clover. Clover was born first, and knew herself to be the big sister. There was also a rooster named Claude, and too many chickens to have individual names, but all were recognized by Claude when they pecked close alongside him. What was amazing about this group of animals is that Rue, the miniature pony, thought himself to be a Chincoteague Pony, while Sage, the Chincoteague Pony, thought he was miniature pony. Crimson just was happy to be a sister to Clover, no matter who entered the world first. And Claude and the chickens were happy moving about near one another, in the rains and sun, as they looked for food, or gathered closely together for sleep.

They were happy in the day-to-day activities and adventures on their small farm. And many small animals and songbirds would often be close by. One day a turtle emerged from the lake, and came upon the family of animals. She was more at home in the water and moved slowly on the ground. She was different, yet she wanted to play with this new group of animals, who were very different from her.

"Oh no," said Sage. "Oh no, said Rue. "Oh no," said Crimson. "Oh no," said Clover. "Oh no," said Claude. "Oh no," said all the chickens that were too many for individual names. In unison, they said, "We never play with turtles, for we know what you do, and that you do not have very kind manners!"

The turtle closed itself in its shell and thought for a moment about what they had said. Some turtles may not have kind manners, she thought, but many do. Then, without thinking too much more, the turtle put her head back out and asked, "Do all the animals of your kind all have kind manners?"

Each one conversed with one another, first the ponies, Sage and Rue, then the goats, Crimson and Clover, and also Claude and the too many chickens for individual names. Then, with some serious thought, they replied, "We really do not have an answer for that, because we just know only each other. There may be others like us with not the kindest manners. In fact, what we said when you first entered into our farm was unkind. We would really enjoy it, if you, too, came to play."

From that day forward, new friendships, and most of all, new understandings were formed. As other animals of all kinds—deer, chipmunks, squirrels, robins in spring, crows in the fall, and rabbits throughout the year—would come to play in the little farm, none would be turned away.

As the seasons merrily moved on, Sage, Rue, Crimson, Clover, Claude, and the too many chickens with individual names, never would turn away other animals when they came to visit. And the turtle named "Welcome" continued to live and thrive on the little farm.

The Shore (Summer)

The sun had been very warm for most of the summer. While it rained from time to time, the air, and the sand in particular, remained very dry. Their first day at the beach was just the answer for this family, just the answer to cool themselves immediately from summer's never-ending heat.

Shore birds and tiny crabs would run back and forth quickly, in and out of the water, to keep their

tiny feet from becoming too hot. And the back-and-forth movements of the crabs kept their heavy claws from sinking into the water-soaked sand, as the waves crashed upon the beach. Up above in the blue sky, seagulls could be heard calling for food and for each other.

The laughter of so many children also floated over the ocean sands, and the day seemed to endlessly follow each new moment in the sun, accompanied by the sounds of the watery waves.

Not too far off, especially if you looked directly into the dancing surf, you could make out the silky silhouettes of dolphins surfing incoming waves along the ocean shore. A little boy, who was holding his mother's hand, pointed to the shimmering images not too far off in the distance.

"Mommy, what are those?" he asked, quite curious.

Mother looked out into the ocean, and with a smile, said, "Why, they are dolphins."

"Dolphins," thought the little boy, as he spoke out loud. He continued to watch how they leaped in and out of the water with joy and playfulness.

Seashells were gathered in a bag, and Father soon joined them on the surf's edge. "What a delightful day," said Father, "a full day. Let's pack up our blankets and head back home." The little boy, while holding both his parents' hands and being lifted up and down into the cool, blue, ocean water, laughed and giggled.

And, as his parents drove him back home, just before falling asleep, the little boy thought of all the wonderful sights he had seen on his first day at the beach with his family. Smiling and recalling all the encounters a day at the beach can bring, he thought that the world was full and wonderful! ◆

Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton *has been co-lead teacher for Nursery and Parent-Child classes at Acorn Hill. Also with a background in interior design, she loves to work with plant-dyed textiles. She is a member of the WECAN IDEA committee, working to affirm and create diversity in our classrooms. These two stories are examples of diversity stories she is creating for a seasonal treasury.*

Birthday Story for Martin Luther King

~ Jessica Oswald

Once there was a big angel and a little angel. The little angel helped the big angel as they worked in heaven. They would float from the sun to the moon to the stars, always helping. The little angel's favorite work was to mine for jewels in heaven. The little angel loved the shiny red, blue, green and yellow jewels and how they sparkled.

Sometimes, while the little angel was working in heaven he would peer through the clouds and see the earth. He saw many beautiful things: big mountains, sparkling rivers, tall trees, children playing. These sights made him happy. But he also saw some things that made him sad and mad. He saw grown ups who were not being good and true in their hearts. They were being unkind and not making fair rules for everyone.

The little angel said, "I want to work on the earth." "Yes," replied the big angel. "It is time for you to go there. You have very important work to do on the earth. I want you to know it will not be easy for you there. The wind will blow hard and it will sometimes be very cold.

"The jewels you found in heaven will help you in your work on earth. The red jewel will bring you courage to face all of the challenges you will have on earth. The blue will bring the love needed to help others listen and find strength. The green will bring patience so you never give up, and the yellow will bring joy and happiness. All of these things you have inside of you, but the jewels will be a reminder of what you already have."

So the little angel took the jewels and then prepared for his journey down the rainbow bridge to earth. He went to the top of the rainbow bridge and looked in each treasure chest. In the first the angel picked earth skin. There were so many beautiful colors to choose from. Some were dark, as dark as walnut, others lighter like maple, or peach. Some honey, some amber, others deep, rich red like the earth. This little angel chose the color of a black walnut. Then, in the next treasure chest the angel chose hair. Just like the first treasure

chest, there were many beautiful colors and styles. There were as many colors as in the first chest. Some as white as the white birch, others as dark as the night. Some straight, some curly, others thick or wavy. This angel chose thick, curly hair as dark as the night sky. Next, the little angel opened the third chest and picked just the right color eyes for himself. They were a rich brown and from the last treasure chest the little angel picked a voice that was deep and wise.

And so it was time for the little angel to say goodbye to his big angel. He slid down the rainbow bridge. And there a mother and father were waiting for him. The mother and father were overjoyed that a child had come. They could not decide what to call him, but the angel whispered into their ears and said, "You shall call him Martin Luther King, Jr. For he will be a good king to the people."

Today we celebrate the birthday of this very important man. Even though he is no longer on the earth, we still remember all the good deeds he did.

He was brave and strong and true. He said all people must be treated fairly and with respect no matter what color skin they chose to come to the earth with.

And we still remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because our work in making this world a better place is not done. We still have to remind people that everyone must be treated kindly, fairly, and with love.

And, do you know, each of us has gems that sparkle inside of us? Red for courage, blue for love, green for patience, and yellow for joy and happiness so we can do good work for everyone. ◆

Starting as a parent 16 years ago, **Jessica Oswald** *has worked in Early Childhood in different capacities for the last 9 years at Green Meadow Waldorf School. Currently she is the Forest Preschool teacher and chair of the EC section at Green Meadow. She grew up in Brooklyn, NY and has somehow found herself spending her days with a wonderful group of children in the forest.*

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Through Our Daily Kindergarten Life

~ Laura Esposito

The following is a short excerpt from a bi-weekly news email to class parents that describes how Dr. King is remembered and honored through deeds as well as words in our culture of caring.

Dear Parents,

As we reflect on Martin Luther King Jr. and the events of this year, I'm reminded of King's words that everybody can be great because everybody can serve in some little way, regardless of age, ability, or other differences. From early childhood through the grades, it is woven into our curriculum for children to develop their unique character and qualities, to let their light shine, and to encourage others to shine with them. King's beliefs are living day to day in the kindergarten from: "All are welcome to play"; asking if a friend is okay when they have fallen; giving and caring selflessly for plants, animals, classmates, and family; encouraging a friend to "Be brave!" when things are hard. The children learn by example, which is why it's so important for us, as the adults in the world, to always be striving to be worthy of imitation. ◆

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Laura Esposito *is lead teacher of a mixed-aged kindergarten class at the Kimberton Waldorf School. Her bi-weekly parent newsletters give families an intimate peek into the classroom in these times when access for parents is restricted. Vignettes offer parents insight into how the curriculum is supporting their children's development in body, soul, and spirit.*

Two Movement Imaginations

~ Betty Jones

Fisherman

Begin by standing in a circle

Heave-ho! Your nets to throw;	*Twist, fling arms out; twist back, fling arms in*
Fishermen, what will you catch?	*Pull nets in hand-over-hand*
Waves will roll, winds will call,	*Make rolling arm movements toward inner circle*
Fisherman, you've met your match!	*Make larger rolling arm movements*
Pull-tug, your nets like a rug,	*Pull on nets hard toward self*
Fisherman, make your wish.	*Make prayer gesture at heart level*
Slip, slide, what can be inside?	*Slide feet sideways; peer toward center*
Fisherman, you've caught a lot of fish!	*Pretend to hold slippery fish; dance for joy*

Creature Features

Slinking, creeping, Kitty-cat sly,
Watches the birds go fluttering by,
To pounce and catch one Kitty will try!
Hoppity-poppity from his hole in the ground,
Bunny jumps and leaps without a sound,
Until he stops to nibble greens he's found.
Slowly, carefully trods the tortoise old,
Carrying his house on his back so bold,
It guards him from harsh sun and cold.

Standing in a circle, children imitate a slinking and pouncing kitty-cat; pop up from crouched position and hop as a bunny, then stop to "nibble"; lastly, put arms behind back and stoop over while moving slowly as a tortoise.

A Child's Seasonal Treasury, written, compiled, and illustrated by Betty Jones, is available from WECAN Publications.

In Memoriam—Ann Pratt

Remembering Ann Pratt

Contributors ~ Alice Pratt, Mark Birdsall, and Susan Weber

Ann was born in Manhattan into a spiritually striving family. Her mother studied biodynamics in Europe as a young woman. Rudolf Steiner gave what was to become known as the "American verse" to her uncle Ralph Courtney. They were part of a quickly growing circle in Manhattan that created what is said to be the first vegetarian restaurant in New York City, and the first branch of the Anthroposophical Society. The need for healthy vegetables for the restaurant led the group to purchase farm land in Spring Valley, just north of the city. Here not only did the gardens grow, but also the arts: music, eurythmy, and theater were all a part of a burgeoning spiritual life there. It was here that Ann spent her childhood summers with her parents and sister, Charlotte Courtney Dukich. In her teenage years, Ann waited tables at what was then called "The Threefold Farm" (now the home of Sunbridge Institute) during summer conferences.

Ann's passion was eurythmy, and this started very young! Ann described her first eurythmy performance: she was only a little girl when she played the part of the mouse in the favorite nursery rhyme *Hickory Dickory Dock,* while Marjorie Spock was the clock. Imagine tiny Ann at the base of a very tall Marjorie clock! She carried this art form with her wherever she landed throughout her life. In every teaching situation, she brought eurythmy to those around her and her Antioch students remember those times vividly. Her own movement moved others!

Throughout her life, she planted herself in the service of anthroposophy, especially in Waldorf education. She was an initiator, one of those of whom Rudolf Steiner said that over her destiny in golden letters was written, "Be a person of initiative."

Ann's commitment to Waldorf early childhood education took root in Wilton, New Hampshire. Her husband Swain was a teacher at High Mowing



School, and Ann set out to create first a Waldorf kindergarten to then be followed by a full eight-grade Waldorf school. When Beulah Emmet, the founder of High Mowing, rejected Ann's request to create a kindergarten there (especially for the children of the faculty—a future initiative at Sophia's Hearth perhaps already expressing itself), Ann forged ahead to create it on her own. In 1972, the Pine Hill Waldorf School opened its doors in a small building in Wilton Center owned by local lawyer (and Pine Hill Board member), Charles Sullivan. Two years later the school, now growing rapidly and attracting dedicated young teachers from many areas, bought an old New England farmhouse at the end of the Bennington Battle Trail and soon extended from kindergarten to eighth grade.

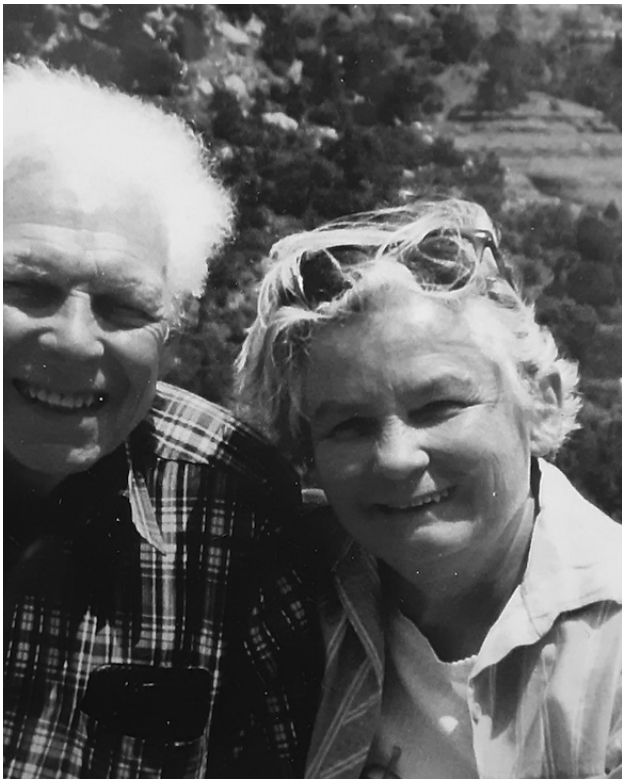
Then land was purchased across from High Mowing on Abbot Hill with a loan from the Rudolf Steiner Foundation (Social Finance—spearheaded by Siegfried Finser). Thus, the current Pine Hill building was built in 1973/74. In 1974 Ann was the Faculty Chair, Kindergarten teacher, a Board member and taught eurythmy to the early childhood students. Of course, she was also a full-time mother to her two teenage daughters! In the early 1980s, Ann stepped back from active classroom teaching and spent a year teaching and consulting at the Kimberton Waldorf School in Pennsylvania. The Pine Hill faculty meanwhile, assisted by regular visits from Alan and Mary Howard, began to offer a teacher training program in conjunction with nearby Antioch College.

When Antioch New England's nascent Waldorf teacher education program needed its second director in the 1985 school year, Ann stepped in to continue to build up this young seedling. She remained until 1991, when a call from a friend and colleague, Betty Staley, led her to Milwaukee to be the program implementer for the Urban Waldorf School, the first public Waldorf school in the country. From 1991 to 1993, Ann oversaw the Waldorf training of the founding teachers who came from both the local public school district and from a few Waldorf schools. She oversaw as well the program development in the school, a 96% African-American student body in Milwaukee's poorest neighborhood. In 1993 a change in funding allocation left Ann a difficult choice: leave Milwaukee suddenly (she and Swain had recently bought a residence) or go back into the classroom. So she became a kindergarten teacher again at age 61. It was a very trying year even for her, and the stress began to affect her health.

When the task in Milwaukee was ready for its next phase with others carrying on that work, Ann returned to Antioch in 1994. By then, the fledgling program



was ready to welcome its second faculty member; and Ann joined Torin Finser, who had become the program director after Ann left for Milwaukee. It was during these second Antioch years that she became a founding Board member of the initiative that became Sophia's Hearth Family Center. Together with Rena Osmer, Susan Weber and others, a new impulse was seeded and that seed was germinating—first at Antioch through a new design of its early childhood teacher education program, and later on its own. It



was the (at the time revolutionary) recognition that Waldorf education had a tremendous contribution to offer to the education of the child in the first three years. It became the first teacher education endeavor in the United States to create a program to prepare teachers for this new work with parents and very, very young children.

When 1998 found Ann stepping back from her Antioch responsibilities, she and Swain traveled to Sedona, Arizona where they pondered the possibility of retiring. But work again called her and for the next two years, she helped found "Pine Hill West" when numerous former Pine Hill School teachers found their way to Sedona to support the fledgling school there. Then 2001 marked a move to help build up the early childhood program at the Moraine Farm Waldorf School near Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Many moves were a signature of Ann's life, and this did not stop even when she entered her 70s. Moves to Spring Valley, Maine, and New Hampshire followed. In Ghent, New York she and Swain participated in the founding of the Camphill Ghent Community for older adults. And yet one more move took her to help the Housatonic Valley Waldorf School in Connecticut before she "retired" to the Fellowship Community in Spring Valley.

Her life was filled with eager responding to calls for adventure and to serve others always, perhaps underwritten by a feeling of restlessness. Her home seemed to be wherever she was called to come to work.

The death of her beloved husband, Swain, was still mourned in her later years. Ann ever continued to seek kindred souls in Anthroposophy with whom she could confide and share insights. In her eighty-second year, she returned to the Fellowship Community to live out the rest of her life. Though aging affected some aspects, her senses were even more astute, taking in everything around her in minute detail. Always perceptive and acutely aware of the inner life of others, she suffered or was lifted up by the thoughts of those around her. Her strong moral backbone seemed always to guide her to seek the very essence or kernel of truth in everything that she did in life.

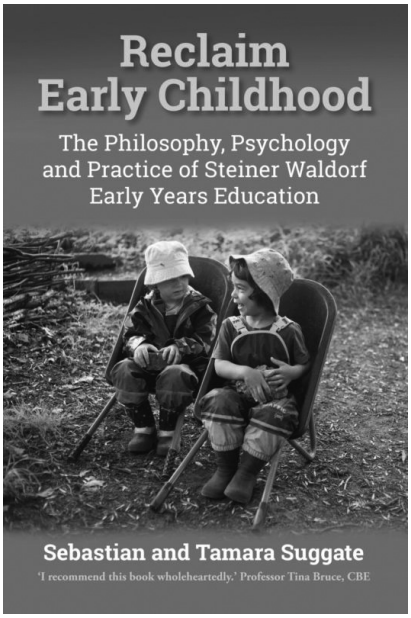
Ann helped to outwardly build many Waldorf initiatives, but her inner life was ever actively seeking in the house of her spirit. She was a lover of the sun, basking in its warmth and light until her death. In the early years, wherever she lived, she created beautiful gardens full of color and scent. Her family and friends remember her excellent cooking and her love and enjoyment in being with friends and family.

She will live on in memory as truly one of the Waldorf "greats." ◆

Book Reviews

Reclaim Early Childhood: The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Steiner Waldorf Early Years Education

By Sebastian and Tamara Suggate
Hawthorn Press, 2019
Reviewed by Bernhard Schmalenbach



The arrival of this book is most timely. The late Joan Almon contributed a foreword to this volume in which she stated: "In my 50 years of working with and for children, I have never seen a time of greater need to defend childhood, especially in the United States… There is a growing materialistic view of the world and this applies to children, as well. Rather than paying attention to the way children actually develop and then creating educational approaches that support the child's healthy development, the child is viewed in a machine-like way, and arbitrary goals for achievement are set as if one can simply recalibrate the child to perform tasks at ages we arbitrarily decree."

The rightfulness of allowing and protecting children's development to unfold in an unhurried way has been the foundation upon which Waldorf early childhood education has stood these past 100 years. Now questions in our demanding, fast-paced society challenge whether this view can still be supported. Is there modern research to validate this developmental approach and practices that surround and support the child in a Waldorf kindergarten?

The answer is yes. The following detailed review is kindly shared from the journal *Anthroposophic Perspectives in Inclusive Social Development*, where it was printed in March 2020. Bernhard Schmalenbach, professor and director of the Institute for Curative Education and Social Therapy at Alanus University in Germany, describes the book's wide and carefully researched content.

~ Nancy Blanning

Reclaim Early Childhood is the title of a recently published introduction to the philosophy, psychology and practice of Waldorf education, jointly written by Sebastian Suggate, empirical developmental psychologist at the University of Regensburg, and Tamara Suggate, psychologist and Waldorf teacher. The title alone makes it clear that the authors are not only interested in a presentation of Waldorf education but also in the commitment to "reclaim" childhood. For childhood as a period of the greatest openness and formative potential is endangered and often threatened. This is not only true in countries that suffer as a result of poverty, child labor and social as well as political constraints, but—in important ways—also in industrialized countries where a one-sided and superficial concept of "childhood" often prevails.

According to the authors, Waldorf education has the potential to stimulate a profound understanding of this phase of life and to provide concepts for the creation of appropriate developmental environments. The book covers a wide range of topics in a relatively small space (180 pages). It presents central anthropological principles and themes of Waldorf education. In contrast to classical concepts of aptitude psychology, these include the importance of sensory perception for child development, the various sensory modalities and their interaction, as well as the often-misunderstood concept of "will". These and other explanations form the basis for the presentation of a pedagogy which claims to provide an "education for freedom," understood in the sense of enabling individual and self-determined action over the entire life span.

It is noteworthy that the "basics" often described in a formulaic way in Waldorf education are reconstructed here in the light of significant developmental psychological research, not least that of the first author's working group on "Embodied Cognition": the significance of the educator as role model, the promotion of imaginative play, language and practical activity, the design of the spatial environment, the choice of materials, the relationship to nature, to mention but a few. These general principles are then followed through to the concrete practice of the Waldorf kindergarten and described clearly, with the help of numerous examples.

Connections are drawn to important concepts in developmental psychology such as salutogenesis or attachment. S. and T. Suggate also outline the relationship to other educational approaches with regard to similarities and differences (Montessori, Emmi Pikler, Forest Kindergartens, etc.) and attempt to develop a picture of Waldorf education that transcends cultures and worldviews. This is illustrated by three reports from teachers from kindergartens in Israel, Nepal and South Africa.

The book ends with a reflection on challenges for the further development of Waldorf education — those arising from the Waldorf movement itself, e.g. a dogmatic approach to its basics, as well as those arising from current social and cultural developments, such as the use of digital media and the paradigm of promoting cultural techniques as early as possible.

Of course, much of the content of this book has already been described elsewhere—but not in this form. The authors commit themselves to a phenomenological method and claim that this is appropriate to their subject. In this way they strengthen the phenomenological core of anthroposophy in particular, which is still scarcely taken up in the public consciousness or by leading authors on Waldorf education who are also oriented towards educational science.

But they also show that childhood is a period in which the perception and witnessing of what appears and shows itself is of the utmost importance. Without presuming to be able to take on the perspective of children, they try to trace the child's experience and to stimulate the reader to do the same. Through this, it becomes clear that supporting children has to do with "inner qualities" and the stimulation of forces, not with the external features or rules of the Waldorf environment, which are often invoked. In doing this, the authors give a "description of the becoming human being" from the perspective of Waldorf education, which always remains vivid, characterizing even complex connections in a few sentences.

The authors make it clear throughout that their presentation has an experimental character and remains provisional. They give adequate space to objections and critical perspectives. Their presentation clearly advocates for the concerns of Waldorf education without romanticizing it. Its language combines descriptions of everyday life, the review of a wealth of scientific studies, philosophical exploration and evocative poetic images, yet it always remains sober and down to earth. This leads to a text that is as rich in experience as it is reflective, fulfilling to a high degree the claim of providing an introduction to Waldorf early childhood education. Hopefully, it will find many readers and translations in the near future. ◆

Note: This review was originally published in the Journal *Anthroposophic Perspectives in Inclusive Social Development*, 3-2020, and is reprinted by permission.

Don't Look Away: Embracing Anti-Bias Classrooms

Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD
Stephanie M. Curenton, PhD
Tonia R Durden, PhD
Kerry-Ann Escayg, PhD

Reviewed by Laura Mason



Institutional racism has a tremendous effect on Black communities in the United States. For centuries Blacks had no legal rights, were considered property, and were seen as non-human. Blacks did not fully experience legal access and benefits until equal rights laws were passed just over 50 years ago. This foundation of racism still has deep ramifications today. As the authors of this book share, "It is the reason why people wonder whether black lives matter as much as others'—when for centuries it was clear to them they didn't matter at all."

Part of this terrible injustice lives in the realm of education. The public school system in the US was designed to exclude Black children. From the opening of the first school in Boston in 1635 until 1852, Blacks were explicitly excluded. After the Civil War, Black children continued to have extremely limited access until after schools were integrated in 1954. Even today, schools tend to be racially and economically segregated and Black children are still at a disadvantage compared to their White peers. Research demonstrates that teachers have different expectations for children based on their race and that the people who have power and influence over the educational lives of children in public schools are largely white (81%) and female (80%). I would venture to guess that educators in WECAN programs have even higher white and female representation. The history of education and the current data make clear why it is so critical for all educators, Waldorf early childhood educators included, to actively work toward the protection and empowerment of children of color today.

This slim but powerful book speaks to the importance of recognizing and addressing racism, bias, trauma, low expectations, and segregation, to provide an equitable early childhood education. It demonstrates how teachers can actively engage in anti-bias education with children in early childhood. Its authors explain the difference between equity and equality and that it is our role to recognize and meet the unique needs of each individual child for the sake of equity in education. Peppered throughout the book are definitions of terms that we are likely to hear, but may not fully understand, such as social justice, trauma-informed care, White privilege, institutional racism, and adultification bias. Each chapter also provides helpful reflective questions and activities to lead us to consider how our ways of working may be impacting the families we work with and the importance of taking up culturally relevant and anti-bias education. The book concludes with a list of over 200 helpful references and resources for educators.

In Waldorf schools, we are well versed in child observation and this puts us at an advantage in recognizing the needs of particular children. However, we may have misperceptions about racial awareness in our students. Preschool marks the onset of the awareness of racial identity and even the youngest children in our care likely have some awareness of racial differences. Observing how the children are understanding race for themselves is important in guiding them. This book provides clear questions to assist in our observations of the racial attitudes of the students in our care, so they can be addressed

appropriately. However, the authors stress that it is first critical to understand and address our own bias, and they provide resources for doing so.

One thing that particularly struck me in reading this book was hearing that when the idea of anti-bias education was introduced over three decades ago, many educators questioned whether it would do more harm than good to introduce "adult" topics to young children too early. This is exactly the dilemma I've faced as a Waldorf educator. I have to ask myself if my commitment to protecting childhood is actually serving all students or if I've actually unknowingly caused harm, especially to children of color. Sadly, research shows the latter may be the case. It is with the utmost humility that I have embarked on the study of racism and anti-bias educational practices and I continue to discover ways in which I have fallen short.

Like many of you, my sincere interest in self-development makes it possible for me to embark on this somewhat painful journey. I encourage you to take up this book as a way to broaden your perspective and deepen what you already know. I think it would make an especially good resource to work with as a faculty or small study group. Ask yourself the hard questions, examine and adapt your practices; the children in your care, of every race, will likely reap rewards. ◆

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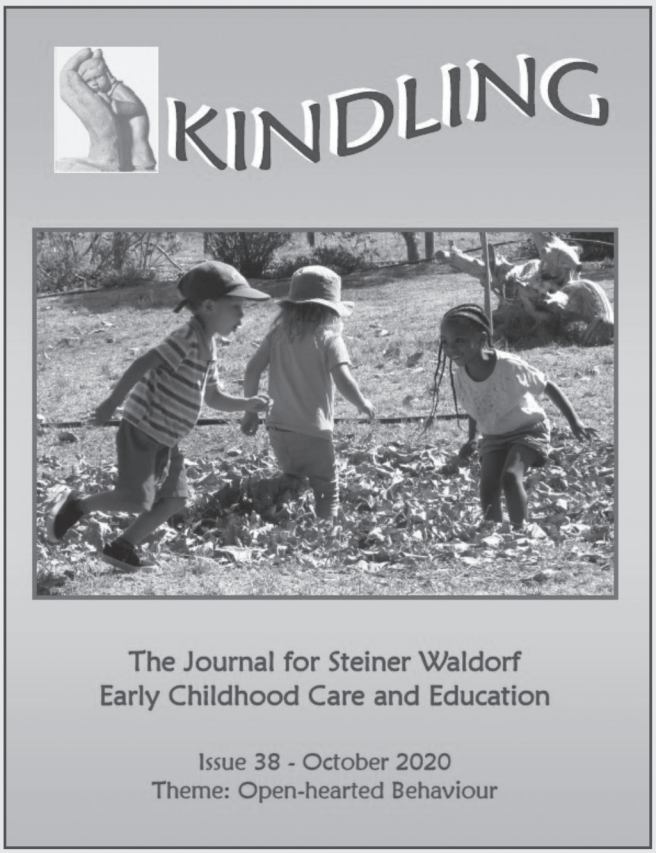
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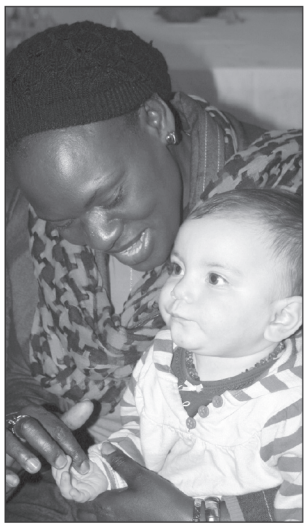
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- Celebrating Festivals: Connecting to Universal Truth with Chinyelu Kunz and Molly Brett (begins 4/7, CE hours)
- Learning to Observe Children with Mary O'Connell (begins 4/14, CE hours)
- Becoming Champions of Play with Judith Frizlen (begins 5/5, CE hours)

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- Creating Home Away from Home ~ A Course for Home Childcare Providers (CE hours)
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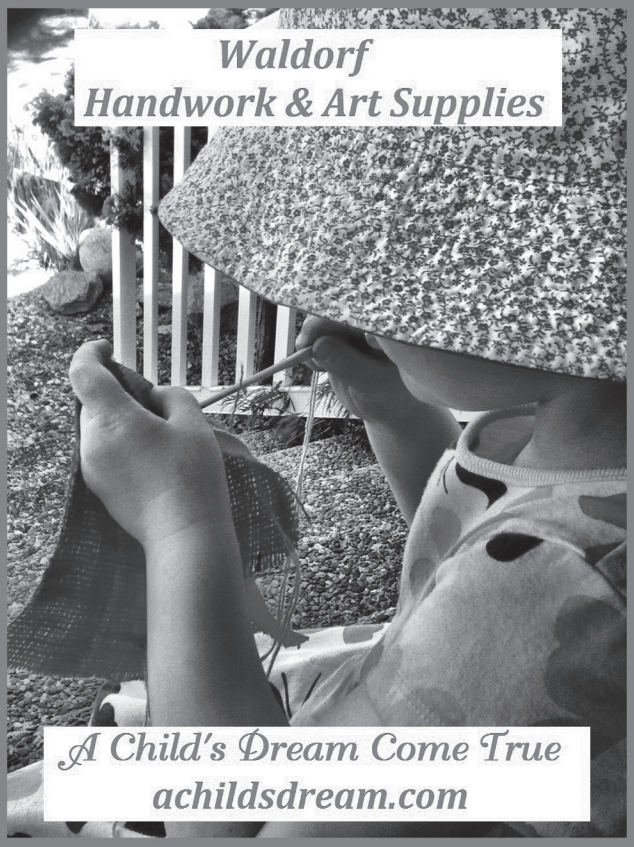
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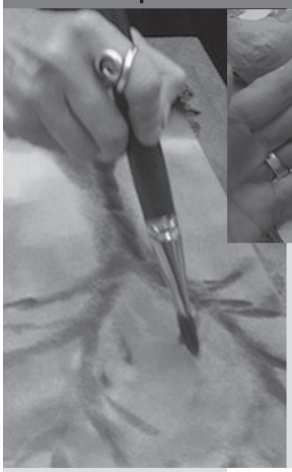




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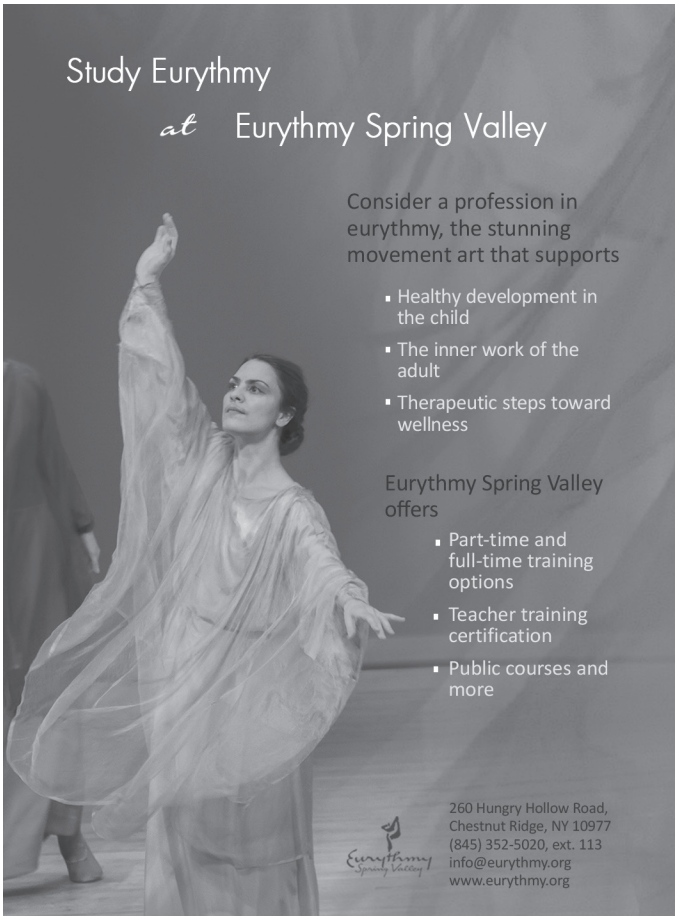
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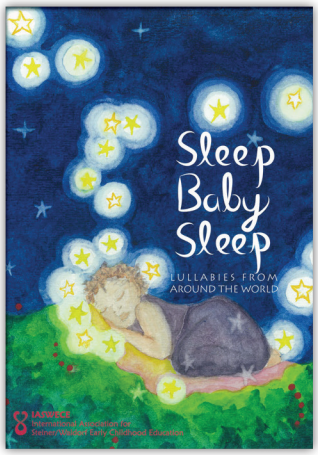
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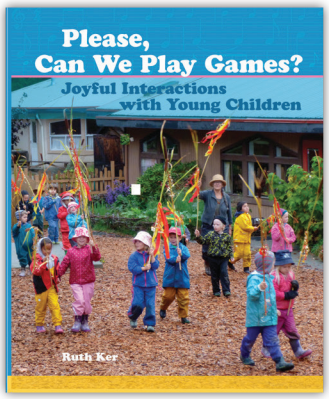
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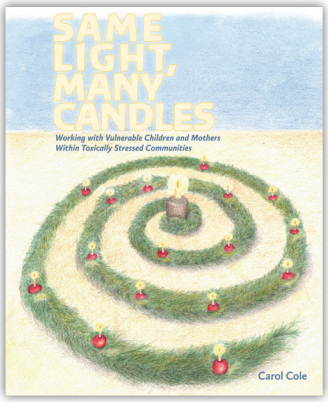


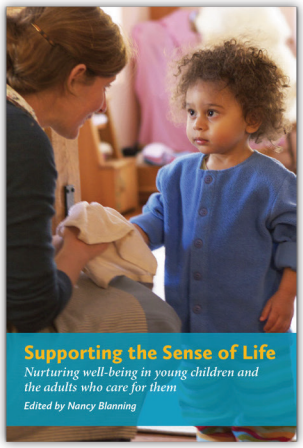
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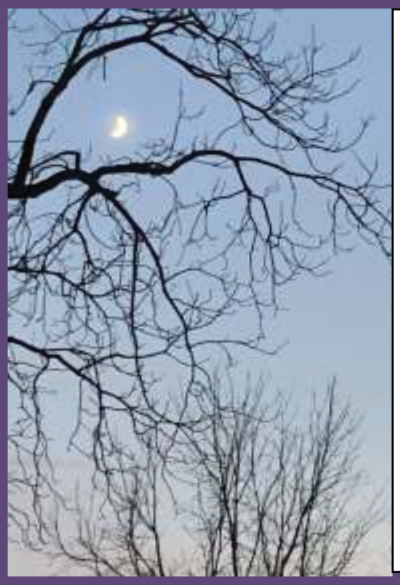
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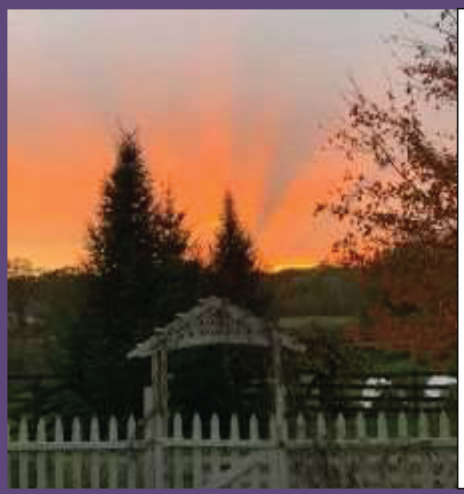
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Gateways
Issue 80, Spring 2021

Focus—A Call to Conversation

- 2020: A Year in Review
  HOLLY KOTEEN-SOULÉ
- Tending the Fire: The Forging of the WECAN Early Childhood Research Group
- School Contemplation: A Potent Tool for Waldorf Schools in Challenging Times
  LAURIE CLARK
- Reconsidering the Good, the Beautiful, and the True
  STEPHANIE HOELSCHER
- Opening the Conversation on White Privilege and Racial Justice
  MARIEKE DUIJNEVELD
- Reimagining Story
  STEVE SPITALNY
- Honoring Diversity: Inclusion through Puppets and Dolls
  CHRIS SHAW