

Letter From the Editor  
By Stephen Spitalny

Dear Readers,

In the aftermath of the tragedy of September 11, there has arisen the realization that North America is in fact part of the world as a whole. There is no membrane that separates North America from the rest of the earth. The interconnectedness cannot be denied any longer. And this world situation presents a great opportunity for a turning point in world history. It is an opportunity to reexamine values and reflect on beliefs. Rudolf Steiner described as a necessary step of humanity's development the individualization of the human being to the point of isolation and total separation of each from the other. The next step is then to reach out and form connections, to form a new community based on free, creative activity. He called this the consciousness soul stage of human development and it is upon us. Surely we all have experienced the deep loneliness of our own inner experience, our separateness from our fellow human beings. Now is the time to reach out and create a new community that puts the children at its center. Something we as individuals can offer the children is our own idealism and the values we hold. Of course we do not instruct the children in our values. But we can live out of our values and ideals, and these will serve as an example for the children and will form their own moral core as they grow up. We can reevaluate our own values and consider how early childhood education is in fact moral education. In these words from the Child Study Association of America in 1954, I believe the current situation is aptly described:

*"In all times, in every generation, the community has counted on the courage of individual men and women to maintain significant beliefs and pursue common goals. Individuals in turn have looked to one another and to the community for mutual support. Now, as the community widens to a whole world, and united action is demanded on a huge scale, the need for personal courage and strength becomes ever more urgent. The scene we live in and the problems we face seem remote even from those of a generation ago; they are startlingly new and sometimes overwhelming. It is no wonder courage often fails us. Yet people throughout the world do carry on their daily lives with unbelievable courage. They are heartened by the conviction that the great majority of their fellowmen share with them the task of finding new sources of strength to meet the demands of the day. What is this quality of courage? What are its sources? How can parents preserve their own strengths and communicate them to their children? How can they keep their own integrity and sense of individual purpose in a world that call for collective purpose and unified direction?"*

At a recent conference on "The Dignity of the Young Child," in Dornach, Switzerland, Dr. Michaela Glöckler said, "The tragedies of our time distract us from meeting children with the undivided attention of humanity." The experiences of the past months can be a distraction from meeting the needs of the children. It is important to be aware of what is going on in the world and to connect with our own feelings and thoughts about the world situation. In the midst of that, the children need us to attend to them, to look after their needs. They are the hope and the future. How can we guide the children toward being freethinking adults who live creatively, compassionately, and peacefully? It is this task that is being asked of us more than ever. We must live in this time of uncertainty and difficulty and find the joy in the process of change, change both in the world and ourselves. The old is falling away, each and every day, and the new must be discovered and embraced.

In this issue, we share two articles from the Alliance for Childhood that speak to the needs of the children of today. Their work is an example of the collaboration possible and necessary for the children of the world. There are also several articles looking at aspects of development and ways to support that development, specifically the realms of bodily uprightness and hand grasp from Bonnie River and Ingun Schneider. Nancy Mellon presents pictures of organ functioning in relation to story. And from Helle Heckmann we have some thoughts on the weaving together of the year through festivals.

Of particular importance for the young child, perhaps for all of us, is the imaginative realm of story. Imagination is the antidote for the extreme intellectualism of our times. We include several stories in this issue, and some thoughts on storytelling as a therapeutic means. Of course the intellect is a great gift. At the same time it can be an obstacle to connecting with the world, with children, and with each other. The intellect is a cold, isolated place, yet it is the springboard toward imagination. The realm of imagination is filled with warmth, movement, and color. It is the land of possibility and potential and “what if.” And it is a modern path to come to terms with reality and move toward uplifted visions of the future.

Last issue included a request for comments and questions from you, the readers. We want to create a letters to the editor section, a forum for ideas to share with our early childhood colleagues. I am happy to say there were several responses to this request. Please send your comments and questions, your brief thoughts and research areas to me for possible inclusion in future issues. Perhaps we can create more of a forum for ideas among us as early childhood colleagues. And especially those of you who work with the youngest children, we need your perspective in upcoming issues. I close with a verse from Rudolf Steiner that was included in last issue. It offers focus on what the young children are looking for from us who surround them in their lives.

*May light stream into you that can take hold of you  
I follow its rays with the warmth of my love  
I think with my thinking's best thoughts of joy  
On the stirrings of your heart.  
May they carry you, May they cleanse you.  
I want to gather my thoughts of joy  
Before the steps of your life,  
That they unite with your will for life,  
So that it finds itself with strength  
In the world,  
Ever more,  
Through itself.*