

Introduction

Letter from the Editor
By Stephen Spitalny, Editor

Dear Readers,

Who are you, the reader of this newsletter? You may be a kindergarten teacher, or early childhood caregiver. You may be an interested parent. One unifying theme for all of our readers is an interest in the young child. We carry such questions as; who is the young child of today and what are her special gifts and challenges? We have taken up the task of supporting the development of young children through nurturing and protecting them. Our enthusiasm and joy surrounds the children with warmth. This newsletter exists as a resource for sharing and kindling each other's enthusiasm. And so we start this issue with a call for articles and letters from you, the readers, who are involved with young children day-to-day! Articles describing your own research and observations, special activities or circle times you have created, festivals you have celebrated, and suggestions for inner working of the teacher all are being sought by this publication. Your contributions benefit our whole movement. Even a letter to the editor with questions or comments may spark someone else into action, so please share your thoughts and questions in these pages.

Since September, many have considered their own situations in connection to the whole of the world. In so many ways, humanity is more connected than in the past, and there is so much going on in our world that needs our attention in service of the needs of the young child. This is not a political newsletter, yet I cannot but urge you to speak out on behalf of the future so our individual and collective voices can be heard by the policy makers who are our elected representatives. One important situation is the current US government's proposed early literacy programs for pre-kindergarten learning. As an educational movement, as well as an association with a mission to protect and nurture the young child, it behooves us to not only be aware of possible legislation, but to become part of the dialog that will help to shape national policy. The Alliance for Childhood will soon release a paper entitled 'Children from Birth to Five' that is signed by many well known names in education and child development including David Elkind, Jane Healy, and Frank R. Wilson. From the paper:

"The key to developing literacy and all other skills is to pace the learning so that it is consistent with the child's development, enabling him or her to succeed at the early stages. Ensure this initial success and the child's natural love of learning blooms. Do not doom him to failure in the beginning by making inappropriate demands and he may well be unable to overcome the resulting sense of inadequacy..."

"Recent research confirms that early cognitive development is inextricably linked with physical, emotional, and social development. All grow out of early relationships with family and care-givers..."

"As the Institute of Medicine's report, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, states, 'The policy issue is therefore not one of getting children ready to learn, but rather one of appreciating that they are born to learn and crafting policies and programs that actively build on their considerable capabilities'. Children love to learn. This love needs to be fostered at home and in early care and education programs..."

I recommend reading the entire paper when it is available as it clearly articulates a pedagogical approach to the young child that is not academic and it offers specific policy recommendations. Perhaps this paper can support us as individuals in our contact with our representatives in Washington about other approaches to increased literacy. As Helen Caldicott says, "We each are as powerful as the most powerful person in the world."

Helen Caldicott, MD, (www.noradiation.org/caldicott/) is the founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility and after hearing her speak recently I must add my brief thoughts on the following subject as well. If our focus is the development of the young child, then it makes sense to protect the world in which these children live. The US government is on a course of increased research and development of nuclear weapons which not only are dearth for millennia, but also fuel the nuclear arms race worldwide that had been sleeping for a number of years. There is also the stated possibility of these weapons being used on a "limited" basis. There is no such thing as limited use of nuclear arms! On behalf of the children, I urge you all to voice your thoughts on this subject to your representatives as well. The children are the future and they can be the inspiration for our work in the present on many levels.

I again close with this verse from Rudolf Steiner that gives attention to what the young children are looking for from those 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.*