



The Older Child in the Kindergarten

2002 W
ECAN Survey Results

of

Established Waldorf Early Childhood Programs

Introduction

Each year the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America asks its member early childhood programs to complete a survey on issues of general interest and concern in the movement. In recent years, we have looked at childcare, birth to three questions, collegial relationships, the differences of children in our times, the burning issues that lie within our tasks and what's missing and abundant in our work. This past year we have sent off two mail-outs of a survey/questionnaire that have been directed toward specific questions relating to the older child in the kindergarten.

Approximately 215 questionnaires were sent out and 45 responses were received—18 from the Western region, 18 from the central region and 9 from the Eastern region. Because of the nature of the survey, the responses came from kindergartens in the Waldorf movement, which contain older children. All of the kindergartens were working with mixed age groups except for one school. Another school had two morning mixed-age kindergartens, which funneled into an afternoon class for older children - a step taken to satisfy government regulations for public-school grade-one-eligible older children. Approximately 30% of the groups surveyed contained children aged 3 or 3 1/2 to 6/7 and 60% of the groups contained children aged 4 or 4 1/2 to 6/7. One group enrolled children from age 2 and older. Two Nursery programs and one Home program also responded to the survey. 75% of the responses of those schools surveyed had aftercare programs with pick-up times ranging anywhere from 2:40 to 7 PM.

Please note that the responses recorded below are in no specific order, are recorded in the teacher's own words and are in point form to enable the best usage of paper. Many of the responses have been repeated frequently and attempts have been made to group similar answers together and to repeat them only once.

SURVEY RESULTS

ABOUT THE CHILDREN

Do you see changes in children since you have been in this field?

- More nervous, anxious, thin and pale. More children arriving with hyperactive labels. Less calm and round and rosy- cheeked children. The healthy, happy children are outnumbered.
- Greater display of restlessness, able to imitate less freely and fully. Boys have more difficulty finding non-mechanical or electronic images to model.
- Children, girls especially, are dressing in trendy teenage styles. More synthetic clothing is used.
- Children's play themes have changed somewhat—more TV, computer and video references and they play at being teenagers, robots and animals. There tends to be gender separation in the play.
- Difficult for teacher to bring children into form. Lots of testing of boundaries and transitions.
- Over-talkative with compulsive, "running-on" speech patterns often accompanied by limp arms.
- Tendency to be highly verbal and articulate. Strong in likes and dislikes.
- More tendencies to get stuck in silliness and animal play.
- More sensory difficulties and less mature movement for their age. Many children suffer from retained reflexes. Tendency for less mobility and less formed movements. The movements are less graceful and more choppy and automaton.
- Children want to be entertained and are less able to complete a task joyfully.
- More eating disorders, food allergies and sleep disorders. Children are tired, can't get to sleep properly, awaken during the night, sleep fewer hours and have trouble arising for morning routines.
- In need of more individualized attention and care (activities, privileges, and food choices). We see more children needing to be in the teacher's lap everyday and others who shy away from adults.
- More exposed to the outside world. Less dreamy and more informed, precocious, and worldly. "Bright, technically-oriented children with dormant heart forces"
- Inundated with media (TV, videos, radio, computers, billboards, CD's) and, therefore, less time for creative play, especially outdoor play. Even children from rural environments endure these burdens.
- Compassionate, polite and have the possibility to be conscious of others.
- More special needs children with physical, emotional and behavioral difficulties. There are many more social difficulties. Children come to the school with strong biographies already and incarnational challenges.
- "Children are healthier physically and socially if the parents have begun working with the Waldorf School before their child comes to the kindergarten at age 4. Others mostly come to us less protected and with physical health problems and are less capable of healthy social interactions"
- Don't know how to play imaginatively. "Sometimes I have to show them how to play". Some of the children who have come to us after age 6 have never been able to enter into the creative play in a quality way.
- Monday mornings are difficult.

- More asthma and breathing difficulties.
- Parenting skills have diminished. There are less stay-at-home parents. More families where both parents are working longer hours.
- Lower senses are not healthy. Many children have sensory overload. Many more touch sensitivities and needs as well as movement issues. Sensory integration has become a key word in our work.
- Hearing and speech difficulties have multiplied.
- Children tend to question and challenge the teacher. Can be more willful and 'aggressive/assertive' towards the teacher. Children tend to be more demanding and less respectful and less responsive to the instructions or modeling of the adults who care for them.
- Premature sexuality spoken and displayed.
- More parents are coming with an inclination to limit TV and an awareness of the importance of a rhythmic home-life. Thanks to our Parent/Child program!
- Children are more individual and have a heightened awareness of themselves, others and the world .
- Children are more socially awake but, yet, they have a hard time joining into group activities in a free and unselfconscious way. There seems to be a premature astrality in growing numbers of children and a weakened etheric constitution.
- Children are treated like adults with lots of explanations and choices.
- Busy parents bring us daycare children who have socially adapted to early childcare environments by developing some defense mechanisms. They generally have experienced lots of stimulation and it's hard for them to give it up (i.e. toys and games promoting achievement, winning and media, including computer games).With shut off feelings and a worldly attitude they seem less able to benefit from the kindergarten curriculum. Children can already have had many childcare providers before they come to the kindergarten.
- More children from separated parents. Adopted children arriving with unknown backgrounds.
- Children tend to be less active in their doing—their will life. They are not exposed to as much real work in and around their homes (dishwashers, gardeners, housekeepers, briefcase-carriers etc.) .
- Challenging behaviors require more individual attention, guidance, consultation with parents, referrals for special help (therapeutic eurythmy, O.T.'s, anthroposophical Dr.'s, and mainstream consultants).
- There are more stay-at-home fathers who are the primary caregivers - sometimes while also trying to work out of the home. Many mothers have home businesses also.
- Earlier physical maturation .
- Children's lives are driven by today's hectic pace (car travel for long distances, busy parents and many extra -curricular activities).

ABOUT THE CHILDREN

To what extent are the children in your care enrolled in other extra-curricular activities?

- Most of the respondents indicated that some of their students were enrolled in extra-curricular activities. The numbers varied from 25% to 90% of the students being engaged in after kindergarten activities. Some teachers indicated that they worked to inform the parents so that they

were able to diminish the hours of scheduled after school classes for the children and increase their playtime at home. Below, is the list of these activities reported by the teachers and recorded in their level of popularity.

- Swimming, gymnastics, creative dance, soccer, skating and ballet .
- Hockey, karate, baseball, basketball, skiing I snowboarding, piano, riding lessons, singing.
- Music, violin, drama, yoga, pottery, climbing.
- Massage, computers, little readers, theatre, Japanese, guitar, library, math and literacy, and Saturday museum day camp.

Encouraging Comment: "We asked a movement teacher to come and speak to the parents about the value of movement in the early years. This helped the parents to be more trusting of the fact that spontaneous play in indoor and outdoor, non-structured environments can supply the children with what they need. We found that the more the children came to us from the Parent I Child programs, the less that these extra classes happen."

What are you observing about the change-of teeth in the children of today?

- 75% of the older ones have lost one or two teeth before the kindergarten year has barely begun.
- It's erratic. Some are early and some are late.
- It's important to look for the guideline of the six-year molars rather than place too much emphasis on the losing of the baby teeth.
- I see many four and five-year-olds, sometimes threes, with loose teeth but the teeth seem slow to get out of the mouth.
- Adult teeth seem to be already visible when the older children are losing their first teeth.
- More children are having dental interventions - teeth pulled by dentists, improperly developed jaws, cavities and rotten teeth and caps. Adult teeth are sometimes seen growing in before the baby teeth have loosened.
- Is there a correlation between an early change-of-teeth and over-exposure to media or early awakening? What is the relationship between the second dentition and the age of puberty?
- The loss of teeth does not necessarily coincide with the six I seven year change. Four-year-olds are losing their teeth but they are still four. Can we say that the change-of-teeth still signifies the birth of the etheric?
- Nothing seems consistent. Some are very early and others have not lost their teeth at seven or later.

WORKING WITH GROUPS OF CHILDREN

According to your experience, what are the benefits and challenges of having the older and younger children together in mixed-age groups or placed in separate groups? Which do you prefer? Why?

As mentioned above, there was one response from a teacher who favored age groups arranged in separate classes. The benefits she expressed were.

- This interfaces better with our local institutions and the understanding of the general public.
- Same-age groupings make the range of activities and play more uniform. It is easier for the teacher to cater to the group's needs.

Challenges

- Same-age groups can experience competition, sibling rivalry and become trapped in repetitive play scenarios.
- "Older kindergarten children can become too loud, aggressive and wild when they are all in one group together. Where's the softening agent?"
- "It's difficult to have 20 children all going through the bubbling pot experience of the 6-year-old change all within one year."

All of the rest of the respondents favored the mixed-age grouping and, below, please see the benefits and challenges that were stated.

Benefits:

- The younger children are able to stretch their abilities and the older ones are able to nurture and help to look after the younger children. It can be like a loving family environment where the children have consideration for each other's abilities.
- "I prefer mixed-age groupings after the age of 4. After January, I work differently with both the younger and older children. The younger children help the older ones from becoming prematurely hardened. "
- This can provide an extremely valuable experience for the single child. The heart forces and will of the older child can be engaged in helping the younger ones and the younger ones can role model the older children while still being encouraged to be their own age .
- The younger children learn from the older children and the older children feel important when they are able to help. This broadens soul capacities. The older children help the younger ones to be good-natured about their immaturity and the younger children feel less vulnerable when they are supported to enter into the routines with less adult intervention. Trusting relationships can be built.
- Needy children have more chances to form friendships in mixed-age groups.
- Younger children temper and soften the older children. There is a greater possibility to remember innocence and care for it.
- Younger children look up to the older children and aspire to future privileges. In their looking forward to the opportunities to do these things another year, they help to carry enthusiasm for the kindergarten curriculum. Yearning for future events helps them to grow into the capacities to achieve them.
- Good play relationships are formed in the children's kindergarten interactions that influence harmonious play in the grade school playground in later years. The Grade one students already have formed strong bonds with grade two and next year's upcoming grade one class. Mixed age groups help to build tolerance for individual differences and thereby help to reduce competition.
- Mixed-age groups provide children with the advantage of staying with one teacher for more than one year usually.

- The older and younger children balance each other out. When the older children go through their six-year-old change/crisis, the younger children re-ignite the older children's excitement for beautiful, lively and fanciful play.
- It's easier, as a teacher, to meet a variety of individual needs and the children don't get so easily stuck in certain kinds of play. "The younger children are the leaven for the group. They make things rise. Same-age groupings begin with the grade school journey."
- Mixed age groups provide greater diversity. There is a great disparity between the developmental stages in early childhood and children are able to find their equals in a group spanning 1 1/2 to 2 years. This also helps the teacher to receive more accurate signals as to the proper placement of the Grade one ready child.
- A first born child in a family has the opportunity to be the younger child in a mixed-age group and the youngest child in a family could be the older child.
- Courtesy and social rules become important (i.e., wait for the younger ones to get dressed).
- Teachers stated repeatedly, "the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages"; "the benefits outweigh the challenges," etc.

Challenges .

- Balancing circle, craft and story needs for the different age groups. However, with a 1 1/2 to 2 year age span, then the task is easier. Children can be combined and/or separated at appropriate times, especially when two colleagues are working together and can share this responsibility. Younger children can look forward to the accomplishment of the older children's focused tasks in the year(s) to come.
- Older children can become aggressive and model inappropriate behavior for the little ones.
- It's challenging for the little ones in groups of 22 or more. More teachers are needed then. Group sizes of 16 to 18 children are more appropriate if younger children are involved.
- Teacher has to work with imitation and authority at the same time. It can be shocking for the little ones when the teacher becomes more authoritative.
- The mixed age group benefits only if activities can be structured so that there is enough movement and real meaningful work and adult presence for the older children. If these are not strong, then the little ones can be overwhelmed. A balanced age distribution is also important.

How do you work with the older children within the mixed-age group when they move into the time when they have a need for authority? .

- "We step up to the plate."
- "I stand with an upright posture and give simple directives in a clear voice, often looking them in the eye. I begin to be more direct when clarifying situations with the older child. I either speak to them directly at the time or quietly away from the group when appropriate. It also helps to speak to the eldest and get them on board."
- Sometimes I have to start right away in September. It's a mistake to wait until January if the need arises sooner for individuals. It's OK to say "No!" Firmness and certainty in the face of the older child's challenges is essential. The attitude (not expressed, of course) is: Yes, I'm so glad that you are in first puberty but you still have to participate in circle."

- Different and more expectations of the older ones than the younger children. Lots of crafts, handwork and projects. Also longer outside playtimes, longer and more involved circles and stories, complicated fingerplays, and more cooking and baking.

- I separate the younger and older children for some special activities like painting, woodworking and foreign language time. My assistant goes with the younger ones.

- More complicated and "real-work" tasks like chopping down trees, sewing, basket-weaving, building, tending fires, and farm work. The younger children tend to be in their own world and they play as they watch.

- We have daily jobs (e.g. compost, dishes) and sometimes they run errands to the class next door.

- Help prepare and set out lunches. Prepare soup all on their own, (with minimal adult help).

- Give more responsibilities—taking notes to the office, help tie the shoes and zip the coats of the little ones and help them get ready for outside. Help set-up and tidy-up activities like painting and drawing, cleaning dishes, mending toys, etc. It can be effective to assign small tasks in ones and twos so the children can practice helping one another.

- Provide challenging, well-supervised outdoor activities—climbing trees, rigorous hikes, special wood projects, building paths and gardens, games like “Mother May I?” and “What time is it Mr. Wolf?,” bean bag, and ball activities.

- More complicated circles and stories are joyfully embraced by the older children. The younger ones either "space out" or are held and protected by the interested enthusiasm of their older peers.

- Teachers need to feel self-confident and know what they want to see in the situation and then give clear expression of the boundaries and expectations in a straightforward way - not authoritarian but rather matter-of-fact and not singing instruction in the mood of the fifth. This will also give the younger children a sense of security to see that the older children are not permitted to overwhelm them or destroy the mood of the kindergarten.

- Be consistent from day to day and follow through with your directives.

- Adults need to offer REAL challenges to the older child in the short term but also long term projects that engage them in goal-oriented work.

- "Sillies" at circle time can be responded to by having the children do it again later with the teacher by themselves. Or perhaps they need to sit on the watching chair because they might need to see how "we" do it. The teacher could matter-of-factly say, “You've probably just forgot that we do it this way. You'll remember when you watch us." Lavender hand washes help to settle the children.

- Not all 7's need authority in the structure of the kindergarten. Observe and know the children well.

- The teacher must have a sense of joy that salutes this new phase of development that the older child is going through. Stand beside the child, not opposite him/her. This new stage of beckoning authority can be accompanied by a sense of companionship between teacher and child.

- Play is still the most needed, enticing and healthiest aspect of the kindergarten for the older child. Draw them into a focused project or the maintenance work of the kindergarten for a short period of time. Then they can observe the other children playing and be drawn back into their play.

- How about some new and exciting props—a carpenter's bench that can be used all day, a sawhorse, a water pump at the sandbox, skipping ropes, canes, boards, moveable toys, etc.

- The older children love to dramatize the stories and help with puppet plays.
- Some project ideas: felting, making stilts and skipping ropes, picking and drying herbs and helping to make teas, making boats to sail later in the river, weaving, sewing puppets or dolls, lantern making, lyre/kinderharp playing, making houses and then dressing wooden peg people for them, fingerknitting and sewing rugs for the houses and making needle books.
 - Stay ahead of them—not in speed, but in intention. Help them to transform their play when they get stuck. When they flounder in the stage of finding the objects or forms which they need to serve the new "ideas" they are having, help them find the props they need.
 - "Sometimes the 6-year-old has a period of difficulty around this time, known as "the first adolescence." It is comforting for them to have the younger children around them playing while their own hands are busy with a project". Somehow, they balance each other out.

What is going well in your work with the older children?

The survey asked for realizations and techniques that have been successful. Please note that some ideas have already been mentioned above.

- Listening well to the children and providing them with play-enhancing requested materials.
 - Building with real adult tools. Fine motor skills as well as large motor skills need to be used.
 - Simple riddles at snack time (What am I?) and string stories for transitions.
 - Pairing them up with the younger children for chores and walks. Long walks help to blend and harmonize the class.
 - Create opportunities to be with and talk to individual children (during walks and handwork etc.).
 - Longer creative playtimes and lots of raw building materials (logs, ropes, planks, tables). The older children love to test their strength by hauling things or building up high things and then climbing up to sit on the top of them. Allow the creative usage of toys and furniture.
 - For very challenging hikes or adventures, we separate the children and the younger ones stay on the playground while the older ones venture off. Sometimes we bring together the older children from two different groups for a movement— challenging circle or a more involved story.
 - Older children tend to want to lead or be the boss. Give them opportunities to share this role and make it OK to have first, second and third bosses, etc.
 - Meeting with the parents and preparing them for the six-year-old change. "It is essential to build good rapport and communication with the parents of these older children. The parents need to know what to expect about first puberty: that their children will complain that they are bored at school, that they'll become silly or rebellious, that this is a challenging stage but it's important that the children go through it before they enter first grade. Parents of bored children can become afraid that their children should have gone on to first grade and the parent's uncertainty and uneasiness can have an effect on their children. If they know ahead of time what to expect, then they will feel more comfortable and confident and this will support the child's school experience."
 - Complicated movement games and obstacle courses as well as jump ropes, stilt walking, balance boards, teeter-totters, swings, and tire swings.
 - Places for the children to find treasures deep in the sand or mud.
 - Animals like bunnies and chickens to nurture.
 - Being authentic and joyfully serious about activities and having a real enthusiasm for the older children helps. Also showing a sense of humor but still maintaining a gentle firmness.

- Supporting the older children's pride in being grown up enough to "know the ropes" of the kindergarten and their abilities to help the younger children. Use of humor in circle material and stories. Add new polarities to circle material after the circle has become familiar.
- Telling longer stories from time to time, with "little" stories (suitable for younger children too—e.g. cumulative stories) interspersed. "I use a rhythm of telling the main story, the longer fairy tale, over a 3 week period, along with a shorter story (cumulative or humorous, or perhaps a nature story) woven in. "
- Traditional circle games harmonize the social development of the whole group.
- Having limits and "rules of the land" like kind words, kind ways and gentle hands helps to set a tone for the play. "In this land we are all together" or "How can Sally help you in your game"—comments like these help to encourage inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. I move around in the playtime and try to be available in an attentive, present way. I expect and give respect.
- The meditative work about the children and families becomes essential.

What is not going well in your work with this older age group?

- It's difficult to bring specific projects or is the play more important?
- How can I be more prepared and effective in dealing with boy energy?
- How can I keep the play positive and going well? There are trying emotional flare-ups and the silliness tries my patience.
- There are no formulas or techniques that will work for ALL first grade ready children.
- The packed lunches from home Jello puddings, cheese strings, cookies etc.). Children play with their food, clown around at the table and there is much TV and movie talk at lunchtime.
- Working alone. It's difficult to observe the children in circle to identify retained reflexes, midline challenges etc.
- "In some years, the need for authority and boundaries is so intense that there is very little time left for content."
- Needy parents. Parents can also have a hard time relating to the 6-year-old change and want a return to the sweetness of their child like he/she was when younger.
- Loudness of the older children.
- The children keep me on my toes. I have to be "on" all of the time.
- How do I deal with children who have had inconsistent or too few boundaries, or have been coddled at home and who are now interfacing with a teacher who expects more of them? Their reactions can be violent with hateful language and aggressive behavior.
- What about children who need extra attention? (I have found that a third person helping with artistic and craft activities, frees me up to be more available to the needy children.)
- How do I fit all of the curriculum possibilities in?
- Help! The going home transition time is wild!
- Difficult questions about our other EC programs. Is it appropriate to have young children in care until 6 PM? What about training and a livable wage for the After-school care person?
- How to meet children who have real difficulties with overexposure and over-sensitivity to media?

- How do I accommodate the needs of children who are special needs and/or behavior difficult and who take lots of energy, dominate the mood of the class and are challenging to understand for first grade readiness.
 - Exclusive play of the children where other children feel left out.
 - Children who are so awake that the magic is gone. Skeptical responses.
 - Boy energy; large groups; lack of focus for long play times; animal play; teasing and annoying of others; and wild, chasing, roaming, pillaging, hoarding play.
 - It's difficult to work with the children nowadays without the support of the parents. Children often don't arrive on time. It seems that the children dominate the parents.
 - It's difficult to work with children who don't seem to imitate as freely and/or don't trust adults.
 - They tend to show more "body geography insecurities"—they can't stand up, sing and find their fingers all at the same time. It's a struggle for children to actively engage in group-times when they have been taught by media to be passively entertained.
 - The challenge of disciplining during group activities. One child feeds off another. There can be a lack of respect for the adults.
 - Working with assistants is a difficult task. Lack of teacher attendance at faculty meetings and parents at parent / teacher evenings. Where are the dedicated adults?
 - Children who show excessive silliness and loud voices, exclusiveness and "clubs". It's infectious.
 - Isolation and lack of collegial camaraderie .
 - Children who don't play but interrupt the others.
 - Finding research from non-anthroposophical sources for the dual income, high-achieving parent body who want to make sure their older child is appropriately placed.
 - Lack of cooperation from the parents regarding children's clothing, routines, bedtimes, and nutrition.
 - Health department demands and government regulations.

TRANSITION INTO THE GRADE SCHOOL

Although the cut off dates ranged from April to December, the majority (75%+) of the survey responses listed a May 31 / June 1 cutoff date. Some schools said they also take a close look at March to June birthdays, especially those of boys.

What is your first grade readiness procedure?

Established schools reported a definite procedure for. shepherding .the children into grade one. Some were more elaborate than others were. One comment stated that the children proceed into grade one by following the cut-off date alone. Another school reported that their assessment process and the subsequent report had become so stressful for the parents, children and faculty that they were questioning its benefits. This teacher reported that she was going back to observing the children in their natural classroom setting rather than setting up separate out of class screening appointments. However, most schools reported being at varying stages of setting up clear. effective assessment procedures that are still under revision.

There also seems to be different practices at varying schools as to whether a remedial teacher or the kindergarten teacher works with the assessment. This seems to vary according to the resources that the school has. There is also the underlying question of whether it is better for the kindergarten teacher who has observed the child more regularly to develop the skills of carrying the grade one readiness assessment rather than bringing in a remedial person, unknown to the young child, to do the assessment. One school reported that their remedial teacher has regular weekly contact with the kindergarten classes and this makes it easier for her to do the assessment each year. Below, please see some of the other responses to the above question.

- A first grade readiness evening is held after January, the assessment procedure and what we look for is explained, and then we begin to do the assessment with the children.
- Before school ends, we have the grade one teacher candidates visit the kindergarten classes.
- An extra lesson assessment is playfully done. This, along with the Person / House / Tree drawings are viewed, shared and discussed with the new first grade teacher, the kindergarten teachers and representatives from the College Student care committee.
- The lower school hosts a grade one readiness parent evening in January. The kindergarten teacher presents the children to the grade school faculty and makes recommendations as to who should go on to grade one. The teacher also brings the children who are borderline as a discussion to faculty. The lower school helps with the assessment. On the last day of the spring term the kindergarten children go with the existing grade one teacher for a story. Sometimes, if the next year's grade one teacher is already hired, then he/ she can tell a story to the children in the grade one classroom.
- In September, we begin speaking to the parents about the great change that will occur with the children in their kindergarten / grade one transition year. In the October / November parent interview slots we speak to the parents specifically about their child, especially if there may be a question about their child's readiness. In addition to hosting a meeting to discuss the six-year-old change and what the parents can expect, we begin to look for these changes in the children and we have a checklist that we work from. Then, in January and February, we have a grade one readiness session with each child. The kindergarten teacher(s) play games that check for physical developments such as sidedness, dominance, balance, stamina etc. and then the teacher(s) complete a standard form which states these things as well as observations of the child's social, emotional and memory development. Then the teacher meets with each one of the children's parents to discuss the recommendation of whether or not the child will go on to grade one. There is also a parent evening where the children's person / house / tree / drawings are displayed. At this meeting some of the developmental changes needed and the curriculum for grade one are discussed. After this meeting, there may be extra discussions with parents about readiness.
- "I go by instinct decide "by gut feelings." I'm usually right after all of these years but occasionally, I ask the school doctor to help."
- We have an assessment team consisting of one kindergarten teacher, one early grades teacher and one admissions person. The early childhood faculty works together in carrying the children.
- The kindergarten children visit the first grade in the spring during main lesson. We have a first grade readiness group which observes the children, looks at drawings and hears the kindergarten teacher's observations. April and May children are sometimes kept back. Some

families are asked to agree to supportive measures in order for their children to go on into grade one.

How do you deal with readiness questions on the part of colleagues or parents? .

- We have firm cut-off dates. We still struggle with parents who want their child to go on early.
- Excellent readiness articles by Joan Almon and Nancy Foster are given as handouts. Also, Jane Healy's, *Your Child's Developing Mind*, is a valuable resource for brain development quotes.
- Parents make the final decisions (enrollment pressures) BUT then there is a 6 week probationary period in grade one and the grade one teacher makes the final decision.
- We are proactive and talk to the parents about their children first. Conversations begin in the autumn about children who may not be ready. It's important to speak to the parents individually as the questions arise.
- If there is questioning, some schools have a grade school teacher, another kindergarten colleague, remedial person, school doctor, eurythmist, relevant consultant and/or care group observe the child and then sit with the child's kindergarten teacher while consultation happens with the parents. We support one another—mostly it works but sometimes the family leaves the school.
- Extensive child studies, assessment tests, zoo exercises, and visits to remedial consultants.
- Deep, listening and conversation with the parents mostly works if we have a relationship built on trust. For borderline assessments, we ask the parent if they can be open to the idea of their child having the opportunity of another year in the kindergarten and then perhaps looking at the child again in August. The teacher could also say that he/she would be open to seeing the child go on to grade one. This creates an open way for parent and teacher to carry the child between them.
- **Wise comments from a mentor:** "Schools with cut-off dates that are flexible, and who use June for their cut-off date as a general rule, seem to do well. Schools who hold children back longer (cut-off deadline in April or May) may have problems keeping the seven-year-olds involved in the kindergarten and may also have problems down the road when these truly older children go into the nine year change or into puberty before their classmates do. I have seen this happen in a few cases, where it became really problematic later on. Schools who send children on to grade one who are just barely six (cut-off dates in September or later) may have different problems—a class not completely ready for full-day first grade. I also experience that there is confusion around developmental readiness / ripeness for first grade as opposed to developmental difficulties, including learning problems, emotional and family distress, health problems, etc. I wonder whether we are keeping troubled children back in kindergarten who really need to go on with their peers and have their difficulties worked with along the way."

How do you pass the children on to the First Grade teacher?

There were varying responses about how the children were passed on. Some schools waited for the grade one teacher to approach the kindergarten teacher. Others had scheduled summer meetings with the grade one teacher where the kindergarten teacher, a care group, remedial teacher or first-grade formation committee met with the new teacher and passed on a description of the child and the grade one assessment information. Kindergarten teachers expressed that the transition went better when they made themselves available for consultation when the school year started as well. Generally, the grade one teacher met with the kindergarten children themselves over the summer at a picnic, parent-arranged gathering or at an open house in the classroom at school. A few teachers schedule home visits.

Some schools attempted to have the teacher present in the kindergarten class before the end of the kindergarten year so that the teacher could observe the children. One school had a parent evening in June with the new grade one teacher present. Also mentioned, were graduation ceremonies (sometimes accompanied by gift giving) at the end of the year with the parents present and, if hired already, the new teacher as well. One school had a ceremony where they finished the end-of-the-year-ritual with parents and children playing games and then being led by the new grade one teacher under an arch formed by the kindergarten teachers to the grade one class. There, the grade one class played a song for them on their recorders and then the new grade one teacher told a story to all of the children.

Most schools spoke of a first day of grade one celebration. The majority of responses spoke of the children coming to the kindergarten teachers the first day of school and then being led over to the grade one classroom door. There they would be received one by one by their new teacher. After all of the children were received and shown to their desks, then the teacher spoke to them as a group. Then they would be the last to arrive at the grade school assembly where their new teacher would tell a story to the whole school and either Grade 8 or 12 would give each of them a rose. One school spoke of their Grade 12 leading the children back to their new grade one classroom.

Some schools have a Class one study at the beginning of the year during faculty meetings so that the grade school faculty, especially the specialty teachers, can embrace the new children.

What is the feedback that you receive from your colleagues in the lower and high schools about the effectiveness of your school's chosen cut-off date?

- Many comments like working well, colleagues very supportive and positive.
- There are special cases each year upon which we collaborate (summer birthday children, etc).
- The older the better. In grade 12 it is especially noticeable that the closer the young person is to his moon node, the more easily he/she will step into the future.
- Some teachers prefer that the more 'troubled' summer birthday children not be the oldest in the class because they can lead others astray.
- I get mixed reviews from my colleagues but the parents are happy; (April cut-off date).
- Some children have gone to grade one against our recommendations and have come back to kindergarten later to 'help us out.' Parents were allowed to make the decision originally.
- We changed our cut-off date eight years ago from March 15th to June 1st because some teachers felt the children were too ripe upon entering grade one when we had the earlier cut-off date.
- "We regularly talk about our cut-off date in College and faculty meetings. It has been expressed that Waldorf schools should get in harmony about this. Different dates cause problems for Waldorf students transferring from one school to another. Also, what happens when children transfer to 'regular' schools and are interfacing with public sector dates?"

Further Research

Do you have recommendations for areas of further research pertaining to the older child in the kindergarten? .

- More suggestions for 6-year-old projects. When are teacher-directed activities appropriate? .

- How do we meet the needs of the older boys? .
 - Collect data, ideas, techniques and curriculum material for 6 year olds and publish them.
- "I would love to involve medical doctors in a long range study of first grade readiness and how children are evaluated and how they fare later on in life. (A Waldorf version of the Uphoff and Gilmore study)" How about a high school alumni survey? .
- "Let's look at classes and see what it is like if a class has a wider age range as opposed to a narrower one. It seems to me that an individual teacher could benefit from tracking a child about whom there were readiness questions (which would mean detailed note-taking beginning in kindergarten or before). This would also mean maintaining contact with class, remedial and specialty teachers and observing in the grade school. It would have been useful to me in the kindergarten if I had observed more in the grade school for all those years I've been teaching."
 - Research paper investigating the benefits of the extra year in the kindergarten and contributing to a deepened understanding of the various effects of the birth of the etheric.
 - How do we make a more gradual transition between the kindergarten and grade one curriculum?
 - Complexities of creative play—what about social cliques and exclusion. Concrete suggestions for working through the difficult scenarios in the play of the older child.
 - Are motor skills changing? How do we look at children's drawings in our time?
 - Ideas for more complicated movement games and activities. Can we do more now to prevent the need for remedial education later?
 - Further research on the benefits of mixed-age kindergarten and/or same-age kindergartens. Documentation of when we are noticing the arrival of the 6/7 -year change. What is happening in the development of the soul of the child at this age? Share ideas for our work with the parents. Research and concrete ideas for working with special needs children.

Further questions and/ or Advice .

- "I would be careful about putting too much of a microscope over 'the older child.' They still benefit greatly from being part of a mixed-age kindergarten. I wouldn't be keen on separate 6-year-old classes. That is too much of a departure though some parents would probably like it."
- What about girls who don't start grade one until age 7 (or nearly so)—is there a problem, social or otherwise, if they reach puberty ahead of other girls in the class?
- What about children who turn 6 just before the cut-off date, especially boys,—how do they fare?
 - Please don't teach the older children to knit with knitting needles in the kindergarten.
 - Can someone let us know a source for good quality, real woodworking tools that are small enough to fit young children's hands? (a response printed in "Gateways" could inform all kindergartens) .
 - Male kindergarten teachers or finding a way to bring the male archetype to your kindergarten class will definitely make important contributions to the developmental needs of the older children.
 - "Education of the will seems so at-risk in our culture. I'd like to see more kindergartens become more 'real-work' based. The older children are inspired by this kind of work.
 - Parent and Child programs help to bring in enrollment and definitely make a positive difference in what we see in the development of the children in the Nursery and kindergarten.
 - How do we strengthen the lower senses when the higher senses are already so developed?
 - How do we raise salaries for ECE caregivers?

- Early childhood educators could consult more with the wealth of information in the field of spatial dynamics (Jaimen McMillan)

— Compiled and respectfully submitted by Ruth Ker, January 2003

(The WHSRP is grateful for the permission of Susan Howard to post this research.)