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## From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

By the time these pages of *Gateways* reach you, spring should be awakening with vigor. Renewed plant growth, baby birds, and other new little creatures will once again assure us of the loving relationship between cosmos and earth that brings new possibilities to birth. While spring and new growth always seems like a new beginning, all the work that has been preparing for this now-visible explosion of creation has been quietly preparing itself. There has been no fanfare to acknowledge the quiet holding that earth and sun and the elemental beings have done through the long winter months, when all is still and can seem bleak. But the relationship among these nature beings is dependable and something upon which we can rely.

Relationship between human beings is not so predictable or protected. Developing relationship among all peoples is complex and easily bruised by disinterest and inattention. In our current time, there are also artificial lures to entertainment, distraction, and dismissal of the other that bombard us every waking hour, if we so choose. The creation and nurturing of relationship are under threat.

Last fall's *Gateways* concentrated on speech. Dr. Lakshmi Prasanna and Michael Kokinos, the keynote speakers from the February, 2018 WECAN East Coast Conference, shared a picture of insight that the child's impulse to speak arises from a longing for and need to create relationship. The child gains mobility with walking, and a physical/soul space of separation results between child and parent. The child speaks to create a new connection, and the parent responds. There results a speaking/listening exchange between the two, which fills the gap with warm, invisible substance. This substance becomes the new bridge between child and parent. Language expands and becomes the bridge from person-to-person beyond our family as well. Through the vehicle of speech and language, we have the possibility to create new social life. If speech and language are misused, we also have the possibility for destruction and creating alienation rather than connection. How we understand and use language is very important.

The **Focus** articles in this issue carry on this picture of language and relationship building. The concluding keynote from Dr. Lakshmi and Michael is shared. They bring together the picture of congruence—how intention, attention, and the “match” between what is said with what is being felt and thought—make all the difference to whether our speech can heal or destroy. These ingredients are not visible, akin to the quiet preparation and holding that cosmos and earth do during the stillness of winter. *Gateways* is honored to share these speakers' concluding thoughts to complete the picture that our carefully chosen, intentional, warm speech can be a powerful, healing agent of change.

Holly Koteen-Soulé took us on an exploration of “Attention to Attention” in our society in the fall issue. The first part laid out the scene. Our attention is being diverted and subverted to distractions and virtual replacements for reality and truth. It is difficult for us adults, who have the maturity to resist. For little children, who absorb everything that comes toward them, the implications for how they are being affected are grave. In this issue, Part II of Koteen-Soulé's exploration shares inspiration for what we can do about this situation. We want the children to engage their will to resist being overcome by technological temptations. Holly reminds us that it is we ourselves who have to be the change we would like to see on behalf of our children.

How little children unfold, how they learn to use language and navigate the world, is beautiful to behold. A description of nursery-aged children by Ursula Ramos, nursery teacher at Desert Marigold in Arizona, takes us into the delightful world of these young children. She describes everything that is good about this world of little children. The children respond to what is good. When we see what they truly love, we can respond by creating and protecting this experience for them.

The subject of speech and word usage takes a turn in the concluding article of this section. Trice Atchison describes an encounter with other early childhood educators, some Waldorf teachers

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and others from mainstream programs. When a Waldorf teacher was asked how we support literacy development in the kindergartens, the answer was an off-hand, “We leave that for the grades.” Trice helps to remind us that we are doing *very, very much* with our kindergarten curriculum to support future academics, but we do not name it as such. She emphasizes that we must be able to articulate what is happening through all the kindergarten experiences and learn to use mainstream vocabulary to name them.

Going on to **For the Classroom**, Laura Donkel shares with excitement how woodworking and other practical work is offered to children at a school in mainland China. At the Waldorf school in Suzhou, outdoor practical work is daily fare for the children. Seeing the children’s engagement, discipline, and strength of will was an unexpected gift to Laura when she went to China as a school mentor. Accompanying photographs round out the detailed view of this program.

“Minka and Twilight” is a story of adventure and fun. It could also speak as encouragement for a reluctant child who is timid to dare. Author Mindy Upton, long-time early childhood teacher from Boulder, Colorado, created this original story of a boy and his family on the Mongolian steppes. It will be a treat for the classroom with its vivid, imaginative pictures of a place very different from but accessible to our children’s own lives.

**Reading the Signs of the Times** challenges us with an “op-ed” from *Gateways* editor emeritus Steve Spitalny. This heartfelt letter reminds us that the mission of Waldorf education is to include all and exclude none. Steve notes that many Waldorf festival celebrations fall short of this intention. Major festivals harken to imagery that has come from Western European Christian tradition. This article extends a call for us to create new festivals that affirm what is true and universal among all human beings.

There is activity within our movement and WECAN to move forward with questions of universality, equity, and inclusion. The WECAN publication *Seasonal Festivals in Early Childhood* (2016) is a resource to help us reconsider our festival celebrations.

This collection of articles was created to help us find our way toward inclusive experiences for all parents and children in our universal human family.

**International News** takes us on a brief excursion to the Waldorf scene in Spain. Thank you to Louise deForest for regularly reminding us of the diversity and healthy activity of Waldorf education around the globe.

In case you are looking for bedtime reading to fortify and inspire you for tomorrow in the kindergarten, we include three WECAN publications in our **Book Reviews** to recommend to your use. *Please, Can We Play Games?* by Ruth Ker is a rich compendium of traditional games that will extend every teacher’s repertoire. *Same Light, Many Candles*, by Carol Cole, is the moving story of work with homeless single mothers and their children at the Sophia Project in Oakland, California. These families were supported and nourished to health of body and soul. Stories such as these take us out of our comfort zone and stretch our understanding of what it means to serve others. Finally, *Child Development Year by Year*, researched and written by Holly Koteen-Soulé, is a succinct, must-have summary and characterization of child development from birth to age seven. It reviews the progression of development for us as teachers. This very affordable booklet is also a useful reference for parents as it objectively describes what behaviors and soul moods are typical at each age.

The *Gateways* coming in Fall 2019 will begin to take a deep look at “what stands behind” movement, speech, rhythm, practical work, artistic work, stories, and festivals to support children’s healthy growth and incarnation. And we want to take a further step to appreciate how each of these experiences pave the way to literacy, writing, and reading; number sense and math; logical thinking; and executive functioning. But in order to activate the potency of each thing we do, as teachers we must understand “what stands behind.” Your thoughts and experiences are invited to be shared on these pages. Please send contributions on this subject to [gateways@waldorfearlychildhood.org](mailto:gateways@waldorfearlychildhood.org). ♦

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