
From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Waldorf education is approaching the culmination of its one-hundredth anniversary. Events have been held around the globe, celebrating the spread of this deeply rich, humane education to far corners of the earth. Our mandate as educators is to support each individual child's development in wholeness of body, soul, and spirit. Doing so benefits not only the individual, but the whole of society by bringing us toward creating a healthy social life. There is truly much to celebrate.

Waldorf education also stands at a threshold upon entering into its second century. We have before us an exciting—and daunting—task of considering where we have come from, evaluating what we have solidly developed as a foundation to carry into the future, and discerning what needs to change in order for us to be responsive to the signs of the times.

For us in early childhood work, this threshold invites us to take stock of the life “curriculum” of **what we do** in our nurseries, kindergartens, and care settings. A starter list could include play; artistic activities; stories and exposure to language; circles or ring-times; movement indoors and out; practical work; rhythmic daily tasks of cooking, cleaning, tidying; experiences with nature; birthday celebrations; and festivals.

Next comes the conversation around **why we do these things**. What stands behind what we do? How does each activity “foster and tend” healthy physical, emotional, and social life for the children? What is the benefit of doing each of these activities today? How are the children supported for their future development in body, soul, and spirit in both obvious and subtle ways?

Waldorf education is sometimes characterized as “old-fashioned, sweet, and quaint” but lacking relevance for our times. A next step called for is to ask ourselves if this is true. Are there practices that have become Waldorf-isms? *We do what we do because this is what we do. We do it this way because this is how we have always done it.* Where do we see the essentials embodied in what we do? Are the practices basically sound but “dusty,” or, more seriously, not penetrated with our understanding of what the goal is for our children? Is the way we are offering experiences to the children inviting and engaging, meeting their needs, and honoring the multiplicity of diverse family, racial,

ethnic, religious, and gender expressions in our world?

What needs to be re-thought and renewed? What should we consider, study, and discuss in order to find the right path into the future?

Finally come the action steps, through which we affirm what is good and solid, see what needs changing, and take steps to change it. This and future issues of *Gateways* will be working with this process of ongoing evaluation and transformation.

The lead article you will read is a letter distributed by the WECAN board describing the dedicated work the board has undertaken to recognize blockages to inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) in Waldorf early childhood education in North America. The question stands as to what it means to offer a universally relevant education to all human beings regardless of geography, language, religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, and gender. Our children and families are rightly insisting that these matters stand at the forefront as we step toward into the next 100 years and beyond.

After this huge and serious call into the future, the main articles gathered for this issue are both seriously pedagogical and practical and carry us back into the familiar territory of the classroom. Each article looks at Waldorf practices we value and hold dear, but which individual teachers have felt called to evaluate and modify.

The first offering begins with a consideration of language and images in traditional (fairy) tales. The Rocky Mountain/Southwest Region invited Nancy Mellon—teacher, storytelling expert, author, and therapist—to speak on how we can find relationship to the traditional Grimm's and other tales while we live in our times of “genderism, sexism, racism and other -isms.” She discusses language and archetypal, spiritual pictures that stand behind words and images that have become stereotypes, stirring legitimate questioning about these stories. This is not a stone-walling defense but a discussion of how we can think about these questions and take new steps into the future.

The needs of families with infants and children under three are calling to us with an ever-increasing insistence that leads us towards the future. Heather

Church, Canadian WECAN board member and coordinator for Birth-to-Three work in North America, shares content from the CARE I colloquium held in Dornach last June. How pregnancy, birth experience, and the early years for both child and parents can be supported was the theme of this conference attended by teachers and doctors, along with caregivers from many other vocations. Birth-to-three activity has thankfully been carried on by valiant pioneers in the last decades. This conference (and others to come) marks a commitment to carry consciousness and structural support for this critical developmental time.

Homelessness and poverty are growing, a social ill of our times. An article from Ilana Jakubowski, graduate of Eugene Waldorf early childhood teacher training, tells us about a free, drop-in Waldorf-inspired children's program for homeless families in the northwest. Here stands a model of new initiative to reach toward inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

More time in nature is something everyone is striving to provide in our programs. Forest kindergartens are happily proliferating. The Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork in Colorado followed this impulse to create a new model—what they call a “hybrid” program that blends the advantages of both outdoor and indoor activities. A description of this innovation is provided by Baruch Simon, one of the two lead teachers in this program.

The next article gives us pure celebration. In excerpts from her final research project for her Sunbridge teacher training, Julie Anne Voss warms and enlightens us with an understanding of the use of modeling beeswax, beeswax candles, and honey in our classrooms and homes. The social structure of the hive offers a model for cooperative social life as well.

The next section, *Transitions*, calls us to a different sort of celebration. Rena Osmer, beloved teacher and colleague, crossed the threshold into the spiritual world in October. Tributes to her are shared by Cynthia Aldinger and teaching colleague, Charissa Johnson-Routhier. If you knew Rena, you will smile at these remembrances. If you did not have that good fortune, you will wish that you had shared some of your life with her.

The birthday celebration in the kindergarten is one of our mainstays. These are celebrated similarly and quite differently, depending upon the teacher,

the age of the children, and school tradition. Two teachers, Jessi Lisell of City of Lakes Waldorf School in Minnesota and Lori Daniels of the Denver Waldorf School in Colorado, both saw a need to modify their celebrations. They describe what they appreciated in their previous celebrations and how they felt the need to create a different emphasis for the children and families. This is likely to inspire (and perhaps provoke) some interesting conversations.

The International Early Childhood Conference at the Goetheanum last Easter was the first event to usher in the Waldorf 100 celebration. The full conference of 1100 attendees brought together teachers from all around the globe. Encounters among teachers from different countries grew into links of connection that extended beyond the conference itself. Such a link was formed for Stephanie Hoelscher, teacher from Vermont, and two programs in Asia—one in China and another in Myanmar, where she journeyed last summer as a mentor. She brought her expertise and experience to help these programs and came away with riches and insights of her own, which she shares with us in two vignettes.

Our *Book Reviews and News* section begins with a review of Sharifa Oppenheimer's *With Stars in Their Eyes*, a valuable new resource. Written primarily for parents, the book is also a compilation of mainstream neurological research that scientifically confirms that what we do in the kindergartens builds the brain.

Featured books from WECAN include *Tell Me Another Story*—see the For the Classroom section for a sample of its wonderful contents—and new editions of the keynotes from the *Transitions* conference at the Goetheanum and *Education—Health for Life*.

I am very excited to share the news that *Understanding Child Development*, a long-awaited translation from the German original, is now available. It provides a broad, thoughtful, and in-depth compendium of essential Steiner references in the areas most relevant to our work as early childhood educators. Thoroughly researched and updated, and citing modern research studies, this volume is an absolute must-have for our libraries,

I wish everyone renewed inspiration, commitment, and courage to carry Waldorf education into the next 100 years. With sincere intention and “the ever-present help of the spiritual world,” we can do it. ♦