

---

# Tending the Fire

## *The Forging of the WECAN Early Childhood Research Group*

The lighting of a single candle may bring clarity to a meeting. To light a candle in the presence of the children gathered around the table for snack brings an unspoken reverence. Watching the flickering flame of a story candle suspends time and encourages an anticipation broken by a human voice speaking, “When did it happen, when did it not?” The burning candle shines as soul and spirit made visible.

Waldorf early childhood teachers are masters of enkindling fires of soul and spirit. We bring attention and intention to breathing life into the many sparks of light that come to us, sparks which can grow into glowing embers of soul warmth radiating outward. As tenders of the spiritual hearth, we need to be attuned to sensing the needs of others and the environment in order to keep our flame steady and sustainable. How can we extend a circle of warmth during this time of a global crisis of extraordinary dimensions?

Last spring the pandemic brought the world into a shared place of anxiety and vulnerability. Fear raged and consumed our forces. The metaphorical fires of our communities fueled existential, practical, and socio-economic questions about the nature of our work with children and families. The WECAN hub rose up from this worldwide, viral wildfire. The hub quickly became a central point of connection, information, and support for teachers across the continent. Our sole early childhood representative on the Pedagogical Section Council posted on the hub. She wanted us to know about her questions on the sense of touch in creating trust and relationship and to invite others to join her in the task of bringing forward research questions about what is essential at this time. This spark of invitation enkindled the creation of something new—the ad hoc Early Childhood Research Group.

Six teachers came together to form this group. As individuals, we are diverse in biography, geography, and interests. Our shared point of intersection is feeling called to better understand and support the

*Rise up O flame  
By thy light glowing  
Show to us beauty,  
vision, and joy.*

nature of our early childhood work in this moment and into the future. Our initial point of inquiry was to ask, “What is needed at this time?” Our hope was that by sharing our experiences and finding new, meaningful connections we could all gain a deepened sense of the essence of our work, reinforce our core values, and give rise to new inspiration and the inner strength to meet the challenges of our times.

The research group meets regularly and sees its task as discerning the right questions to ask in order to support our colleagues in a shifting landscape of needs. Our first wave of work focused on the theme of a healing education for all. Motifs of hope as a tonic for the future, care as an antidote to fear, and a call to broaden and open our perspective were guiding themes in our writings. How can we bring into our daily encounters Steiner’s aphorism, “Interest is more powerful than love,” as a soul habit for the “new normal”? The group’s first virtual discussion sought to illuminate how taking a compassionate interest in others is a healing gesture for others and ourselves.

A second wave of work brought attention to practical concerns about working outdoors with children. The research group helped to hold a two-part virtual discussion on the topic. Experienced outdoor educators offered reflections and recommendations. This discussion sparked attention on the need to support the inner work and vitality of the teacher, which led to another virtual discussion on the spiritual and meditative foundations for our work, well-being, and movement forward.

The third wave of work is rising with the tides of the times. The fuel for fires of inspiration, clarity, and new growth live within each of us and most powerfully with all of us. Please share with us your needs. Please tell us your stories, so they can spark the questions that are waiting to be asked. The Research Group can be reached at: [research@waldorfearlychildhood.org](mailto:research@waldorfearlychildhood.org). ♦