

# *From the Editors*

Nancy Blanning and Stephen Spitalny

In the early 1980s when I entered the Waldorf kindergarten as a (dare I admit) untrained, wide-eyed teacher with the best of intentions and “a good sense for kids,” the *Waldorf Kindergarten Association Newsletter* was a godsend. The few volumes available were treasures, and I collected them all. The rich body of published resources we now have was then only a dream. The newsletter was the primary source of songs, stories, circle activities, festival celebrations, and practical activities. Additional articles with insights into early childhood development and Waldorf pedagogy enlightened me: “so-that’s-why-we-do-what-we-do!” The newsletter offered a collective opportunity for professional development of its readership and was a first link in creating a teaching community.

That humble newsletter begun by Joan Almon grew into *Gateways*. In the last ten years under Steve Spitalny’s editorship, it has become a professional publication asking for clear thinking about our practices. We must be able to distinguish true anthroposophical representations of our pedagogy from “Waldorfisms,” things we have come to accept as part of Waldorf early childhood work without truly knowing their origins. In this vein we have become challenged to do our own research and deep study.

Through these years of *Gateways*’s evolution, the Waldorf Kindergarten Association became WECAN—the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America. It, too, has expanded and evolved to embrace the breadth of the different domains of early childhood. WECAN endeavors to hold the threads of work with parent-child, birth-to-three, nursery, mixed-aged kindergarten, extended care, parent work, and diversity and multiculturalism. Study of first-grade readiness and transition into the grade school has appropriately linked us to our colleagues in the upper school also. Awareness of and support for our international sister programs across the globe has grown for us in recent years.

The width and scope of Waldorf early childhood concerns expands almost exponentially.

This issue of *Gateways* includes wide representation of the diversity of our work and our commitment to understand both the practical and esoteric aspects of Waldorf early childhood pedagogy. Steve Spitalny’s article on the senses articulately considers how healthy sensory development for young children is critical for future intellectual, social, and spiritual life as well as enjoyable living in the physical body. Lisa Gromicko’s article on math in the kindergarten opens up appreciation of how the foundation for mathematical thinking is laid in the playful and practical things we do each day. . Work with our youngest children, birth-to-three, is featured in the report on lectures given last June at the international “Dignity of the Young Child” conference at the Goetheanum. Thank you to Kimberley Lewis for sharing this content. International work is shared in Louise de Forest’s report on the early childhood conference held last July in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The diversity of our work in this continent is pictured in Laurie Clark and Patrice Maynard’s article on Waldorf-inspired early childhood work going on at the Pine Ridge Lakota Reservation in Kyle, SD. Susan Weber gives us a review of the new WECAN publication of Renate Long-Breipohl’s *Supporting Self-directed Play*, a deeply considered and researched body of work. To give us something to play with, this issue also includes a movement journey/circle to help us joyfully roll and gallop through the folk tale from India of “A Drum.”

Standing by itself is the recollection and tribute to Ronna McEldowney, “Tante Ronna” to her kindergarten children. She was a dedicated teacher, wonderful colleague, deeply committed anthroposophist, and deliciously outrageous free spirit when the moment called for it. We are so saddened at her passing and honored that she can be remembered on these pages in the beautiful word

portrait her dear friend, Janis Williams, has provided for us to share.

*Gateways* enters a new phase with the passing over of editorship. Thank you to Steve Spitalny for the ten years of service he has given to all of us through the journal. Future issues will strive to maintain the high standards of research and professionalism he has established. We also want to share inspirations of what we do in the classroom with circles, songs, stories, and festivals, which the early newsletters so richly provided. *Gateways* will endeavor to recognize and honor the different domains of our work, from birth (or even pre-birth) onward. The protection, encouragement, nourishment, and support the growing child receives in each of these stages are what grow the whole human being. We must keep constantly aware of this continuum to recall where the child has come from and to where he is going. We invite contributions in all of these areas and look forward with excitement to see what comes.

This publication needs to serve the needs of its readership, all Waldorf early childhood educators.

You will receive along with this issue a questionnaire which asks how effectively this is happening for you. Please fill this out and return it to us. The *Gateways* editing team and WECAN board are very eager for your responses.

You will also find an invitation to offer a new “face” to *Gateways*. We invite submissions for a new cover design to keep our thinking fresh and in pace with all of the changes we have seen in the scope of Waldorf early childhood work.

As the new editor of *Gateways*, I am honored, excited, and a little bit scared. I will do my best to not let my passion for “incarnational support” with young children (to lessen or eliminate the need for therapeutic work later in the child’s life) to overwhelm me and these pages. I pledge to make issues of this journal as lively, artistically practical, and anthroposophically deep as possible—which is just what the children need us to be as we greet them in our classrooms each day.

With warm greetings and thanks for the chance to serve our work,

*Nancy Blanning*

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As I was thinking about what to write in this, my goodbye *Letter from the Editor*, for some reason unknown to me this poem came to mind. I don’t know where I got it or from whom. And then I noticed the author’s name at the end. I just met Joseph Rubano for the first time this past summer while teaching a course in southern California. So thank you, Joseph, for these words of process and community, which somehow seem just right to start this goodbye letter.

*Who is my mother?  
Who is my father?  
When I am being created friend by friend.  
I don’t remember who I was without you.  
We have been tending fires for a long time.  
We are wanderers drawn by the light of those fires.  
Surrounded by darkness  
Emerging out of darkness.  
We enter into the sacred ceremony of each other’s lives.  
We sing, we dance  
Humbled by the power*

*Of each other’s presence, we pray.  
We become prayers for each other.  
We sing praises to each other.  
And breath by breath, thought by thought, touch  
by touch,  
Music rises between us.  
— Joseph Rubano*

This is a time for transitions. The definition of transition in my dictionary is *a movement, process or change from one position, state, stage, subject, concept, etc., to another*. Another definition relates to music: *a modulating passage connecting two sections of a musical composition*. These two taken together give the picture of a process of change that is connecting or linking two different things; a connecting of polarities.

A transition I want to mention here is the passing of a beloved colleague. Ronna McEldowney crossed the threshold this summer. She was especially well known throughout the western US and Hawaii. Her wisdom and humor touched so many of us and she will be sorely missed. I know we can count on her support

from the other side of the threshold.

After ten years, this is my final issue as editor of *Gateways*. I have both enjoyed the work and been challenged by it. I hope I have served you, the readers of *Gateways*, in ways that have supported your work with the young children of our world. Thanks to the Board of WECAN for allowing me the freedom to be editor as I have seen fit. Thanks to Lory Widmer for her wonderful work as copy editor these last few years. And thanks to Joan Almon, the previous editor of *Gateways* and past chair of WECAN, for entrusting the red pencil of editorship to me.

Thanks also to Nancy Blanning for taking up the mantle of editor (or is it the red pencil?). Best wishes for the work ahead. I look forward with interest to what new directions you might steer *Gateways*. I encourage all of you, the readers, to offer your thoughts *in writing* about your various interests and research areas to Nancy. She will not be able to be editor without your articles to edit and choose from.

I intend to keep writing, give lectures and workshops, and continue my work as a kindergarten teacher. I still have a mixed-age kindergarten of three- to six-year-olds at the Santa Cruz Waldorf School in California, and another school year has just begun. I have finished another of the numerous drafts of my as yet unpublished book, and plan to devote time to finishing it and getting it published. I am looking ahead to being involved in Waldorf early childhood work in new territories—Indonesia and Zimbabwe, and perhaps involvement in activities already underway in the surrounding regions. Please contact me with ideas and support!

A shortcoming I have in the realm of thinking and communicating is that I think my own ideas are right, and I have to work to remember there are other possibilities. I do strive for open-mindedness, and it is a struggle to have and present ideas without that feeling of rightness. My apologies for the times when, both in speaking and writing, I come across as if I know something. I am in the same boat with our dear colleague Margret Meyerkort who once said; *Just like you, I mean to do well.*

As editor of *Gateways*, I have tried to present a diversity of ideas and approaches, including some with which I didn't agree. I tried to reword articles that seemed to me to be presenting an "only possible answer." Some issues back we published an excellent article by Cynthia Aldinger entitled *The One and Only Way* and I have tried to emulate her thinking and be vigilant to ensure *Gateways* did not present any dogmatic approaches and

rigid answers. I have wanted *Gateways* to be a thinking-inspiring resource for the readers, not a warehouse of ready-made ideas. And I have wanted our pages filled with a living anthroposophy that observes the phenomena at hand and allows questions to live. Our own observing, digesting, processing, and thinking in relation to other's ideas, including the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, seems to me the one and only way forward. I hope you have experienced *Gateways* as a source of that openness and inspiration and it has given you both support and enjoyment.

In parting, I would like to again acknowledge the influence of the thinking of Rudolf Steiner on my work, and my gratitude for his ideas, but especially the practices for self-development and contemplation of ideas that he articulated. To honor the spirit and intention of what Rudolf Steiner gave us, I would like to offer in closing the following words from Owen Barfield from his book *Romanticism Comes of Age*, published in 1927.

*I cannot think it is unduly paradoxical to say that it is really a kind of betrayal of Rudolf Steiner to believe what he said. He poured out his assertions because he trusted his hearers not to believe. Belief is something which can only be applied to systems of abstract ideas.*

*To become an anthroposophist is not to believe, it is to decide to use the words of Rudolf Steiner (and any others which may become available) for the purpose of raising oneself, if possible, to a kind of thinking which is itself beyond words, which precedes them, in the sense that ideas, words, sentences, propositions, are only subsequently drawn out of it.*

*This is that concrete (the word 'concrete' may here be taken as meaning 'neither objective nor subjective') thinking which is the source of all such ideas and propositions, the source of all meaning whatsoever.*

*And it can only take the form of logical ideas and propositions and grammatical sentences, at the expense of much of its original truth. For to be logical is to make one little part of your meaning precise by excluding all the other parts.*

*To be an anthroposophist, then, is to seek to unite oneself, not with any groups of words, but with this concrete thinking, whose existence can only finally be proved by experience.*

*It is to refrain from uniting oneself with words, in the humble endeavor to unite oneself with the Word.*

*Stephen Spitalny*