

From the Editor

Nancy Blanning

In 1989 there was an important event for American Waldorf early childhood educators. Many of the European “greats” came to North America to present a conference. The group included Werner Glas, Freya Jaffke, Margret Meyerkort, Bronja Zahlingen, Elizabeth Moore-Hass, and Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen. I attended this conference with anticipation and excitement. I had been in the kindergarten long enough to begin to realize how much I did not know or sufficiently understand about our work. And here were experts assembled to tell us how to do it the right way. It was so bewildering, then, to hear these deep, anthroposophically-steeped, experienced Waldorf educators express differing, even contradictory, views in their presentations. The styles of puppetry could not have been more different. How could anyone collect these differing pieces into a coherent picture of Waldorf kindergarten?

My initial shock and disappointment were ultimately replaced by feelings of heady liberation mixed with sober responsibility. I had been naïvely hoping for someone to tell me what to do and was shown that there is no “right” way, no “recipe” for what will serve the children in our care. The freeing part lay in realizing that there is no single way—there can be many. These master teachers were sharing the diverse ways they had found to manifest essential truths in their classrooms. The sobering responsibility part was the reminder that we must each constantly deepen understanding of the foundational indications for Waldorf early childhood and how these can appropriately and truthfully be expressed in our classrooms. Whatever a teacher embraces from another’s suggestions or which grows out of her or his own inspiration and creativity must be authentic and true.

I am re-experiencing these feelings now as the new editor of *Gateways*. There is excitement and joy in the opportunity to bring pictures of the width, breadth, and diversity of our work—parent/child, small-group home programs, birth-to-three, nursery, mixed-aged kindergarten, extended care, and parent work, to begin

the list—all of which WECAN embraces in its membership. To gain inspiration from other’s ideas and delight in new movements, songs, and stories will be so enriching for all our work. Each offering from our colleagues will describe how the essentials of Waldorf education are expressed in that individual program. Yet each will also be situation-specific—dependent upon the educator, the age-mix and needs in the group, and the regional and cultural expectations in which the program lives. We need to hold this in mind as we consider what will suit our own situations.

Now here comes the sober warning. There can be a tendency to think that if something is in print, it must be true. Here is where the “responsibility” part is echoing in my ears. As we publish different educators’ experiences and views, each will be describing its truth for that teacher and group. We may also encounter contradictions. What one teacher has found just right for her or his group may not be appropriate at all in another setting. So our personal responsibility is to thoughtfully discover where the threads of truth lie that validate each experience and consider what will be true for our own situations.

It was with these thoughts, which are important for each of us to read, that I had wanted to end this editorial. But I was afraid my prose might not be compelling enough to carry every reader to the end. So consider that we have begun this meal with a tart glass of lemon-water to wake us up. Now we can get on to the substance and elegance of the meal.

The subject of **movement** is in the air. While it was not chosen specifically as a theme for this issue, much of the content revolves around how helpful and essential physical movement is for young children. We begin with the first part of a masterful article by Renate Long-Breipohl, “Movement with Soul,” previously published in the British Waldorf/Steiner early childhood journal, *Kindling*. This is such a well-researched consideration of movement development in children that we would like every reader to have this as a reference to refer back to often. This first part deals

primarily with infantile reflex patterns and therapeutic approaches to help these mature away if too long retained. The second part of the article will appear in the fall *Gateways*.

Movement was also the theme of the East Coast WECAN conference this last February. Jane Swain's presentation on movement development in the child from birth to three, and the part reflex patterns play there, enlightens and expands the picture that the first article begins. Laurie Clark's presentation follows about life in the mixed-age kindergarten. Looking at how so many children "get stuck" at times of transition, she describes ways she has found in her kindergarten work to assist these children both in practical ways and through the soul embrace of the teacher to pass through these thresholds. An article by a colleague teaching in Denmark, Christine Christiansen, pictures the practical and movement experiences she has found suitable for a very young group of under-three-year-olds.

The topic of movement also figures internationally in the theme for the World Waldorf Early Childhood conference to be held in Dornach the week before Easter 2012. Brigitte Goldman describes for us the questions the IASWECE planning group is considering for this gathering, including the question of how movement assists the incarnation process of the individual "I" into the physical body. International work is further described by Louise deForest's article about last autumn's IASWECE gathering in Budapest and the early childhood work going on there.

A serious opponent we see to children's healthy incarnation through active movement and engagement in the world is our society's obsession with media. Lauren Hickman, director of Waldorf Early Childhood teacher training at Rudolf Steiner College, shares the "best practices" her master's degree research found in approaching parents on this issue. This will supply us with more practical tools for interacting with parents with this challenging subject.

For your pure delight, we have a Michaelmas circle written by our Mexican colleague, Sol Velasquez, translated by Louise deForest. Two vignettes that colleagues, Franca Bombieri and Sarina Cirianni-Jones, have created to bring more movement into their circles are included. You will also find an excerpt from the *Movement for the Young Child: A Guide for Euryth-*

mists and Kindergarten Teachers by Estelle Bryer, soon to be republished in a new edition by WECAN. And for a bit of whimsy, on this page we have a tribute to earthworms by former *Gateways* editor Steve Spitalny.

Putting together each issue of *Gateways* will be both a joy and challenge with the mixture of freedom and responsibility that surrounds each issue. It is also a huge practical task. The easy part is mine in getting to select the content for each issue. The huge part is managed by Lory Widmer, our copy editor. She is the technical genius and practical wizard who determines how much content an issue can hold. She also handles copy-editing, layout, and printing, with the help of Melissa Lyons and Janet Baker in the WECAN office, and Rich Cichoski at Alphagraphics in Pittsburgh, PA. Without them, this journal would not be in your hands right now. Thank you!

The choice of content in this issue has been guided in part by responses received from the *Gateways* survey. Thank you sincerely to each respondent. And guess what? Many responses contradicted others. It will be a work in process to distill the common threads of what is essential to include in these volumes. Please offer descriptions of your experiences and research that you think will be helpful to colleagues, imaginations, circles and movement vignettes, and practices that have strengthened and enriched your programs.

I hope that this issue will provide food for movement, both within our inner selves and with the children outwardly.

**The earthworms dance with a wriggle and a slide;
They make tunnels in the soil and let the air inside.
Plants like the air; it helps their roots.
When the roots are healthy up grow the shoots.**

**The earthworms dance with a wriggle and a bend—
Soil goes in the front and comes out the other end
Worms even turn the compost into soil
But they have to stay wet so they don't boil.**

**A worm is so little and crawls along the ground;
If it weren't for the worms no farms would be around.
The earthworms are dancing night and day.
They are busy, busy helping in so many ways.**

—Steve Spitalny