

From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

A human life is a great panorama, one that extends even beyond the thresholds of birth and death. As we are privileged to know through Anthroposophy, the intention of development begins long before the physical birth—even before conception—and extends after physical death. The in-between time that we call “life” is marked by rhythmic, seven-year phases leading to the transformation of consciousness and consolidation of new capacities and strengths.

We early childhood educators are naturally most interested in the time from birth to seven, and our focus on even more specific stages within this phase has greatly intensified in recent years. The first kindergartens cared for children from about three-and-a-half to six, with the oldest turning seven. Now, to these “traditional” mixed-age kindergartens are sometimes added two- and three-year-olds; other groups provide special care for very young children from birth to three; and we have separate nursery groups of three- and four-year-olds. At the other end of the spectrum, in Europe and some parts of Canada we see “Grade Zero” and Senior Kindergartens with only six-year-olds. We see “specialties” emerging, as we concentrate our study to learn as much as we can about the age group in our care. This is our mandate as early childhood educators.

But as we specialize, our concentration can cause us to lose touch with the complete picture of the growing child. Concentrating upon a more age-focused view can divide the child into chronological slivers. The child turning four is still the same child on her birthday as she was as a three-year-old the day before. The six- or seven-year-old entering first grade is likewise the same child he was on the last day of kindergarten the previous spring—though continually growing and changing toward becoming a full-fledged school child. The chronological age does not make the child instantly ready to sit at a desk. Like the mainstream world, we need to constantly hold in mind that *the child is flowing in a developmental stream* rather than resting in confined segments.

Knowledge of previous development will help us to understand the child in this moment. Knowledge of the gesture the incarnational path leads toward will help us anticipate for the future. We can better help to prepare the way, whether the child will remain with us or pass into the care and guidance of another teacher.

Toward this end, this issue of *Gateways* is dedicated to the theme of **Continuity of Development**. It is important that we understand what phases and points of awakening the children have moved through up to the moment when they come into our “specialty.” It is important that we know what they are moving toward and preparing for after they leave our group. This way we can help each one stream toward the future and pass with greater ease through developmental transitions that can pose challenges for the child—and for the others around them.

Understanding of the child’s path to incarnation can also smooth the major transition from kindergarten to first grade. It is a gift to the children if we can develop a caring transfer with the first grade teacher. Study of this transition with our grade school colleagues can help develop a collaborative picture of the child we see leaving the kindergarten and walking through the door of the first grade classroom in the fall. What is an objective picture of the child? Deepened knowledge speaks objectively. Teachers in both kindergarten and the grades can benefit from a sharing of our different perspectives.

There is an additional challenge facing the educational world now. Increasing pressure is coming from the mainstream world to enroll children in grade school at younger ages. This pressure is especially heavy in Europe and is also impacting Scandinavia. To protect the children, their childhood, and their future health, we must become as articulate and knowledgeable as possible to explain the nodal points when transition consolidates into true maturation. The children’s future will be put at risk if their developmental needs are ignored.

A momentous event is being prepared for the week before Easter, 2015 in Dornach to address these questions. **Transitions in Childhood—from Birth to Fourteen**, a world teachers' conference, will be hosted at the Goetheanum, bringing together educators working in Birth-to-Three, Kindergarten, and Grade School and Middle School. We will have the concentrated opportunity to learn more deeply about the whole continuum of development through the nine-year-change and beyond, up to the beginning of adolescence.

A more detailed announcement of the conference is on page 29 of this issue. Please work to send at least one Early Childhood educator and one Grade School teacher to attend from your schools. This conference, sponsored jointly by the International Association of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) and the Pedagogical Section, is groundbreaking in bringing so many aspects of the child's education together.

In the year leading up to the conference we will be dedicating this issue and the next *Gateways* to this important theme, in order to help refresh and expand our picture of incarnational development. In this issue, the lead article is provided by Claus-Peter Röh, co-leader of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum. He offers an overview of the whole range of the child's development and how we teachers can develop more astute and sensitive observation skills through Anthroposophy. Susan Weber then describes the often-unrecognized vulnerable state of the three-year-old in a limbo-land between toddlerhood and preschool, while Daniel Udo de Haes offers insight into how the world "speaks" in archetypal images to the very young child. Stephanie Hoelscher gives us some lovely peeks into the world of her nursery class, with actual examples of children displaying their intense commitment to grow up and out into the wider world. The four- and five-year-olds, the heart of our mixed-age classes, are Lisa Gromicko's focus. How do we sufficiently enjoy and honor who they are? Finally, Louise deForest reminds us of the nature and

needs of the six-year-old growing toward first grade.

"For the Classroom" includes two contributions by Laurie Clark, who gives examples of how she supports the sense of taste and nutrition with snack in her classroom, followed by a delightful movement circle inspired by the honeybee. A song by Ilian Willwerth that adds new fun to the activity of jumping rope is also included, from the recent WECAN publication *Merrily We Sing: Original Songs in the Mood of the Fifth*.

Continuing the musical theme, another recent publication, *The Mood of the Fifth*, edited by Nancy Foster, is featured in a book review. This book has articles from colleagues who have deeply studied this musical domain so important to our work with young children. There is something for everyone—from the basic introduction to what *mood of the fifth* is through more detailed considerations. Thanks to Jill Taplin and our UK sister journal, *Kindling*, for making this available to our readers.

On a more somber note, there is a tribute to Monica Grudin, an early childhood educator from New Paltz, New York, who crossed the threshold this last Michaelmas. She was a wonderful colleague deeply loved by her sister teachers and community, and *Gateways* is privileged to honor and celebrate her life in this way. And so, this issue of *Gateways* truly spans the panorama of life. We go from the three-year-old "stepping away from the Madonna's cloak" to passing through the gateway of death with Monica, assisted and honored by her loving community.

If we were each asked, "What is the most important time in a child's education?" and answered honestly, we would likely each say, "The time that I am teaching!" And we would all be right. Each moment *is* the most important—at that specific time and place in the child's development. If this issue of *Gateways*—and the next issue this autumn, which will feature more informative and inspiring articles—helps us appreciate that life is a stream of "most important times," continually building upon one another, then these pages will dance with happiness. ♦