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## From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

This Fall *Gateways* issue we again dedicate to Celebrations of Life and Supporting the Life Sense. There are elements in life we know help support and encourage this “sense of well-being.” These include rhythm, predictability, reduced stimulation from the environment, good nutrition, warmth, contact with the natural world, harmonious relationships with the people around us, and a surrounding mood of optimism and peacefulness. Waldorf education strives to provide this for all our children. And wherever there are children, Waldorf education is called upon to provide encouragement to the child’s seedling life-sense that it is safe and good to be in the world.

Yet here is the paradox. We long for idyllic situations for all children, but our destinies put us in the hardest places—roaring big cities; war-torn countries; situations of poverty, abuse, and neglect; and always, the rush, nervousness, and overstimulation of modern life. The life-sense is threatened both by the lack of nourishment for body and soul and by over-indulgence that saturates but does not satisfy. Dr. Michaela Glöckler has suggested that the children of our time have resolved to incarnate into difficult lives because they knew that Waldorf education would be there to support their life-sense. We have to figure out how to do this in even the least likely, least desirable, least supportive circumstance. The children are depending upon it. So this issue of *Gateways* shares examples of how different teachers have approached these questions through their thoughtfulness, creativity, and ingenuity. We have to work with what we have and figure out how to bring the best of what we can to the children, no matter what our community or geography.

The first article you will read is reprinted from the most recent issue of *Kindling*, the UK Steiner-Waldorf Early Childhood journal and sister publication to *Gateways*. The last issue was dedicated to “Resilience.” The question posed in the issue was, “What makes it possible to bounce back from trauma, disappointment, hardship, abuse and neglect, loss and challenge?” The issue offers many pictures of supporting children so their resilience—and a healthier life sense—can grow. The article featured is “Adopted Children in the Kindergar-

ten” by a parent, India Cante. Her story of how she and her daughters’ Waldorf kindergarten worked together to create a safe place for her traumatized adoptive daughters is very moving and instructive. We will have more and more of these children in our classes in the future. But what struck me as so important to share with *Gateways*’ readers is that the approach of care and consideration offered to these girls is an archetypal reminder of how we would want to approach each and every one of our children. There is hardly any human being walking around today who is not traumatized in some large or small way. All children are hoping to be understood and accepted. Even our healthy, privileged scalawags have brought along some incarnational wrinkles they hope we can help them work with.

Being accepted and respected is essential for all of us. Our parent community is also looking for a healthy life-sense and sense of well-being. West Coast teachers Stephanie Skinner and Helene Brodsky Blake offered a workshop last year at Rudolf Steiner College to explore positive ways to invite parents into Waldorf culture and community. They also compiled a questionnaire which asked of teachers what kinds of interactions were most successfully received by parents. The warm-hearted outreach from these teachers is inspiring, and the suggestions are useful and practical. Included is a craft project they have done with parents that you may want to consider adding into your plans for upcoming parent meetings. What we do to encourage warmth and health with our parent communities supports both the individual and community senses of well-being. Stephanie and Helene’s contribution widens the whole picture of the life-sense for us.

And there are places like Brooklyn, where the Waldorf school stands right on the edge of an “undesirable” neighborhood that provides scenes we would prefer that children not see. But this is where they live. How can a sense of well-being possibly be supported in such an environment? Brooklyn kindergarten teacher Meggan Gill shares with us the picture of their urban reality with its challenges and its unique offerings. There are opportunities to interact with nature everywhere; we just have

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to seek them out. The dense urban setting with shops and shopkeepers offers chances for community and relationship that those of us living in more homogeneous suburban settings might envy. I think you may feel this way when you read Meggan's story about her class's visit to the shoe repair man. This article helps us appreciate that there is no single "right way"—there are rather many right ways to present our education that are just different.

In a different setting in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, kindergarten teacher Rose Maynard began to question whether her class was too exposed to open space and sky on their weekly nature ramble. Her consideration of the children's experience led to making some adjustments to this outdoor portion of their week. This peek at another kindergarten's possibilities and challenges gives more food for thought.

Helle Heckmann's classic book about her pioneering Copenhagen early childhood program, *Nøkken*, has been republished in a new, expanded format. To give readers a peek at its content, you will find the excerpt, "The Power of Imagination." Here you will find examples of how children's interaction with nature can enrich and expand the children's capacity for imagination. The adult's sensitive response to the children's observations and questions is also critically important, as illustrated by Helle's examples.

In "Awakening Intelligence," Janene Ping shares with us her research and exploration with other mainstream thinkers who acknowledge and work with Social/Emotional intelligences as well as the cognitive domain. She states in her preface that she entered into this study through a WECAN grant to see how our anthroposophical view of the child and these mainstream views connect and perhaps enhance one another. The sense of well-being has emotional and psychological ramifications as well as physiological ones. When the whole human being in body, soul, and spirit is acknowledged and supported in development, the life-sense in its more subtle expressions has a better chance to "hum." Thank you to Janene for the article and for taking a step out into the larger research world on behalf of Waldorf early childhood education. The future is calling for us to become part of this conversation in a bolder and more decisive way.

One of the ways the life sense is supported is through meaningful rhythmic events that repeat through time. This helps the human being, and espe-

cially the young child, have confidence that there is some predictability in life and that some things can always be depended upon. We see how our children love the rhythm of our days and weeks. The bigger expression of this rhythmic flow in time is the festivals we celebrate. An article by former *Gateways* editor, Stephan Spitalny, calls our thinking to task on a subtle but terribly important question about festivals. An online conversation last fall around Martinmas prompted him to compose this article about "The Question of Saints" in the kindergarten. Steve's contributions as a kindergarten teacher are marked by his insistence on being true to the essential archetype which stands behind each experience we bring to the children. Whether Saint Martin or the mention of any saint belongs in our kindergartens is a question he considers. Prepare yourself to perhaps be challenged about some familiar practices. We have to think our way through whether we are celebrating archetypal universality or tradition in our festival life. For our celebrations to deeply nourish the life-sense, the images must be true.

Though Waldorf education came initially to the US in the late 1930s, Waldorf early childhood as we know it today really began to burgeon in the early seventies with many intrepid teachers we know by name if not by reputation. Many of these courageous souls are reaching the threshold of retirement (whatever that might mean to a Waldorf teacher). *Gateways* wishes to reflect upon and honor these North American Waldorf pioneers. It is helpful to learn what has happened over the past decades to bring us to where we are as an educational movement. The treat you have in store this issue is an interview with Joan Almon, in which Joan reflects on the pioneering necessities of the early years and the remarkable accomplishments that now benefit us. She also challenges us to think about "What's next?" for children, for Waldorf education, and for our relationships with the mainstream world and other expressions of Waldorf education. Joan's thinking is big, wide, and inclusive. Her example is inspiring—as well as full of lots of fun.

For the Classroom includes a reprint of Steve Spitalny's lantern story from *Tell Me A Story*. In his article he speaks of stories that include archetypal images rather than specifics. This story gives us a good example of what that means. There are also movement vignettes to weave into circle times. These

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were shared by kindergarten teachers Linc Kinnicutt, Jennie Salyer, and Gergana Minkova during a professional deepening course where participants wrote movement imaginations to support specific sensory aspects of incarnational development. We hope you and the children will have fun with these.

A new feature is a page about Resources. WECAN is now sending out an electronic digest of “Research, Studies, and Articles of Interest to Waldorf Early Childhood Educators.” We thought it could be helpful to have the topics listed from the digest in our issues of *Gateways* as well as electronically. This page will also remind our readers of what is posted on the WECAN website as Resources for Teachers and Parents. WECAN colleagues have been submitting research that is too long for *Gateways* publication but which stand as very helpful resources for us to explain and validate from mainstream perspectives what we do. More about that will come in the Spring issue.

The theme for the Spring issue is one that is challenging, but is knocking loudly at our door—questions of gender. We have been giving consideration to the needs of boys. What is boy-ness? Is it biological, neurological, or fed by societal expectation? How do we help boys grow well and not be mad at them because they don’t act like girls? What is girl-ness? The same questions apply but with the counter consideration of how can we encourage girls to be confident and assertive without being like boys? Added is the great mystery confronting us of transgender children. What is biology? What is “gender” anyway? What is destiny? What is individuality, in ways we may have never considered before? As you can see, the field is wide open for contributions of your questions, experiences, insights, enlightening research, successes and challenges. Submission deadline for the Spring issue is January 15. Please let us hear from you on this topic and any other topics you are eager for *Gateways* to explore. ♦