

Book Review

Life Is the Curriculum

By Cynthia Aldinger

Lifeways through CreateSpace

Independent Publishing Platform, 2015

Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

A friendly, warm new resource has come to us in the form of Cynthia Aldinger's new book, *Life Is the Curriculum*. In the late 1990s, Cynthia began considering the needs of very young children in care away from their families while parents worked. Already a trained and experienced Waldorf kindergarten teacher, she could see that institutional settings with large groups of same-aged children did not serve the children's needs. Warmth, personal attention, and the richness of the home environment with simple, practical rhythms and routines of daily living and growing were lacking. All the advantages (and sometimes challenging opportunities) of living with siblings of differing ages were thwarted by the same-age groupings. And the large-size groups were overwhelming and overstimulating for little children.

A new paradigm for providing home-based care arose out of pondering how to create a gentle and unhurried environment that would invite the children into healthy, secure incarnation. Rudolf Steiner's insights into child development provide the foundation for this approach known as LifeWays. Children are cared for in small groups, from babies up to six-year-olds, in a home-like setting. The wisdom, richness, and insights of this relationship-based care fill the pages of *Life Is the Curriculum*.

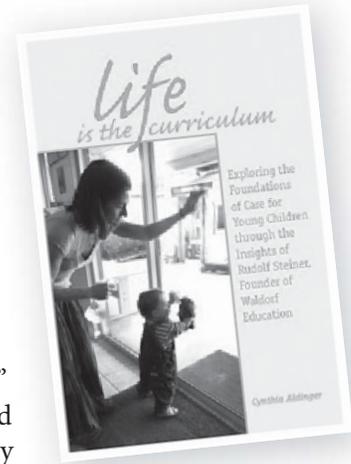
The book is divided into considering four "curricula"—Life, the Child, the Adult, and the Environment. The introduction observes that "pressing down" the forms and schedules of the kindergarten does not serve the needs of the very young child in the home or home-care setting. Parents and care providers "need to know how to set up a meaningful home life." The chapter "Life as Curriculum" then considers the practical and domestic arts that surround the children in the home setting, giving them experience of process and orderly care for the environment. Seeing adults do their work with intention

and interest gives the child reassurance that life is good and purposeful. People's work and care for one another contribute to the common welfare. Steady, quiet rhythms reassure the child that there is time to explore, grow, and be.

"Child as Curriculum" reminds us that each child already comes into earthly life with a spiritual biography and pre-birth intention for this incarnation, and that children pass through lawful stages of development. Watching the child with true interest and respect allows the adults to learn much. Knowledge of child development is essential so we can know what to offer and what to fairly expect from the children as they move through these different passages. Here the children and their unfolding instruct the care givers.

"Adult as Curriculum" emphasizes the importance of consciously embraced self-development. Children imitate not only what they see. They are more substantially formed by the authenticity of deed, feeling, and thought of the caring adult. Rudolf Steiner is quoted: "In helping the child as he learns to walk, we must be pervaded by love; in helping the child to gain the power of speech, we must be absolutely truthful; and since the child is one great sense organ and in his inner physical functions also copies the spiritual, our own thinking must be clear if right thinking is to develop in the child from the forces of speech." This chapter's section on "Relationship-based Care" is important reading for all of us involved with children in any setting.

The chapter "Environment" reminds us how subtly and deeply the children's surroundings affect them. This is beautifully summarized: "The bodily-religious devotion the young child experiences toward her surroundings is of the same nature as the oneness she experienced prior to incarnation, while cradled in the non-material spiritual world. One can



see in the infant's long gaze, in the toddler's caress, and in the two-year-old's lively dialogue over and through all surrounding sounds and noises, that the choices we make regarding the sights, sounds, touches, tastes, smells, and thoughts, feelings and things that the child encounters will, in some way, merge into the child's being."

These thoughts are not new to Waldorf educators. Preschool and kindergarten classrooms are centered upon these essentials as we plan our rhythms, activities, and interactions with the children. What is so nice about *Life Is the Curriculum* is that it gives a review of these fundamentals through quiet, accessible

consideration. The book is written with no rush or hurry about what anyone should do, no haranguing to make a point. Rather the book helps the reader to step out of the flurry of activity to sort out what really matters in the flow of the day, the week, and the seasons. This small volume is a fine resource to recommend to parents with its clear descriptions and real-life examples. It also gives a useful and satisfying framework to help teachers review these "curricula" in our classrooms.

When I finished reading the last page of *Life Is the Curriculum*, I felt refreshed and satisfied. I think this will be the experience for many more readers as well. ♦
