
From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Speech and Language is the stated theme of this issue of *Gateways*. And it is. We knew that we would want to feature the keynote lectures presented by Dr. Lakshmi Prasanna and Michael Kokinos from the February 2018 WECAN East Coast conference on *The Development of Speech and the Human Encounter*. The audience expected to learn a lot about speech. And we did. We know that speech and language create a pathway to convey information and share ideas. But the profound emphasis that sounded forth from their presentations was upon how speech provides the opportunity to create connections and to encounter the other human being in “the space that lies between” us. These presenters helped us consider not only how we speak physiologically but also reminded us that our speech needs to be infused with intention and authenticity to truth to activate the power and “spirit of language.”

Dr. Lakshmi and Michael work extensively with young people living with severe, nonverbal forms of autism. Their experience shows how dedicated, sincere, warm interest in these socially isolated young people can open up pathways to encounter one’s human essence soul-to-soul, even if speech is lacking.

These two lecture summaries in our **Focus** section, as the introduction to these articles describes, are unusual. The presentations were not “usual” lectures but very much experiences for the listeners. The message they brought about human encounter through language is important for us to consider. As teachers, we all speak. If we are able to infuse our speaking with imagination and warm, interested intention, then the substance of our speaking can take a quantum leap. The last two issues of *Gateways* have featured comments on reading the signs of the times. Nurturing a healthy social life is of concern in our society at large and even within our own schools. Our conscious intention to fill our speech with true warmth and interest can be an agent for change and healing among human beings in our disquieting times.

Dr. Lakshmi and Michael also shared a third presentation that will be summarized in the Spring issue of *Gateways*. It will be good to have some time to live with these ideas and then round off with their final presentation as a capstone. These presenters have also authored a book, *Autism: Meet Me Who I Am*, reviewed in this issue, as an added resource to exploring these ideas.

In order to have true encounter, we have to have devote true attention to the other human being. Holly Koteen-Soulé has written an article entitled “Attention to Attention” about how we see our attentive faculties being badly weakened

in our technological age with so many distractions. This study is a thorough research article, too long to print in its entirety in one issue. The major part of this essay appears here, describing the situation we are observing with children. The concluding part, which describes more of how we can respond to this concern, will be published in the Spring 2019 issue.

But all is not bleak! We are delighted to share an extract from a research project done by Rie Seo as her concluding project for her early childhood teacher training at Sunbridge Institute. Rie was both fascinated and challenged by how she could bring more imagination and pictorial quality to speaking with her students. What began as kind of a practical question expanded into a deeply thoughtful exploration of language and of speaking imaginatively to the child's will. She describes how her questions and research have begun a journey for her that is far from finished. She guides us through her experience and shares insights into how we can all develop our own pictorial speaking which invites the child to "do" without command or coercion. To my thinking, this is a very important article.

For the Classroom brings us back to language and speaking in our classrooms every day. Stories are prominent ways to share and explore language and speaking. These are very dear to our hearts and practice as Waldorf early childhood educators. Trice Atchison has offered a wonderful description of "Slow Puppetry." She noticed that our societal "Hurry up! Keep it moving!" mentality had crept into puppetry presentations. She chronicles reawakening to the power of quiet, serene, unhurried presentation in puppetry that did not bore but which supported a

*What began as kind
of a practical question
expanded into a deeply
thoughtful exploration
of language and of
speaking imaginatively
to the child's will.*

healthy breathing interlude for the children—and the puppeteers. This article confirms that what we know to be true for children in slowing down the world is perhaps more essential than ever.

Words with really interesting sounds catch children's attention. Rose Maynard of the Calgary Waldorf School shares her version of "The Turnip," employing Russian names for all the characters. The sounds of the names are tantalizing to the ear. The challenge to speak these complicated, multisyllable

names is also almost irresistible to the six-year-olds who are sure they know everything and can say anything. The way she has dramatized this story as a circle time or "acting out" for story time is delightful. Enjoy!

Michael Kokinos featured the Ellersiek hand-gesture game, "Snailyman," in a most impressive story. We wanted to make sure that you all have access to this game for your classrooms. This simple, almost nonsensical rhyme holds archetypal images of inner and outer, going out and then coming back in. What this game—accompanied by the teacher's sincere, committed interest to this child—opened up for a young, nonverbal girl with autism was miraculous. This is shared to remind us that what may just seem simple and sweet can hold archetypal power that we may have fallen asleep to.

And in the "just for fun" category, a short Valentine's Day Circle is shared. This yearly celebration can be challenging to acknowledge in a non-sentimental way. This circle was inspired by a visit on Valentine's Day some years ago to the Green Meadow Waldorf School kindergarten class of Lyn Barton, who is now helping our work from the spiritual world. She announced that this day is "the

birds' wedding day," as we put snippets of colored yarn outside for the birds to collect to weave into their nests. The imagination is short and sweet and gives a picture from the natural world to associate with Valentine's time.

Reading the Signs of the Times in this issue gives us encouragement. The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued a study with current research that affirms the importance of play for children's healthy development. The AAP makes a strong statement that free play is essential for children, not just a nice diversion. Details of the study and how to find the complete report are provided in the article.

Book Reviews begin with attention to the new WECAN translation of Daniel Udo de Haes' *The World of Fairy Tales*. This review is printed courtesy of the UK early childhood journal, *Kindlings*. We thank reviewer Jill Taplin for sharing this rich consideration. My own reading of this book offers some different ways to describing the value and wisdom of traditional fairy tales. There is much skepticism directed toward fairy tales in our times of sexism, genderism, etc. This book may provide us with new language to describe how valuable we find these stories to be for nourishing our children's soul life.

As mentioned above, you will find *Autism: Meet Me Who I Am* also reviewed in this section.

Two other books of interest are briefly reviewed as potentially helpful resources for our work. Sally Goddard Blythe has revised a previous publication, *What Mothers and Babies Really Need*, under the title *Raising Healthy Happy Children*. This book is a deep and thorough study of early childhood development. Its content is rich and dense—not light reading—but well worth the effort.

Faith Collins's book, *Joyful Toddlers and Preschoolers*, rounds out this issue's reviews. Faith describes her success as teacher in Waldorf and

Lifeways programs in figuring out how to live in "yesness" with these little ones. She gives clear picturing of the different consciousness that lives in very young children—which is imaginative, not logical or intellectual. She gives do-able steps to approach problematic situations and lessen conflicts. The presentation is clear and well-documented with mainstream research that will appeal to young parents whose orientation has been so far influenced by mainstream advice.

International News gives us a preview of the International Waldorf Early Childhood conference that will take place at the Goetheanum (Dornach, Switzerland) on April 15-19, 2019. Social relationships and collaboration among the adults who educate our children (us) is the featured theme. As we celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Waldorf education with this conference, emphasis will be directed to building the healthy social life among ourselves. May this impulse flood out into the world at large. Details of the conference can be found at iaswece.org.

Our Spring *Gateways* will continue to focus on **Speech and Language in Early Childhood**. We will also discuss how speech and language in the early years opens the doorway to literacy—obviously for reading in the grades—but also for relationship to the spirit of language for the whole of life. Contributions to expand our conversation are warmly invited.

We are so lucky to have daily inspiration and delight in the children who continue to bring us "the latest news from the spiritual world." Best wishes to all as we enter Waldorf education's second century.

~ Nancy Blanning