
From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Waldorf early childhood education is dedicated to offering experiences of goodness, beauty, and protection to young children. We know that they come from the spiritual realm with innocence and openness to the world. We want the little ones to be able to open up to complexities of this world slowly and not be overwhelmed by its complications.

But we also know that each seemingly new soul comes into earthly life with a biographical past from previous experiences and a pre-birth intention to work through unfinished business. Each resolves to come to new experiences that only living here and now can provide. What a complex world these newest messengers from the spiritual world have come into! And what complex intentions they bring along to unfold.

Increasing numbers of children are coming towards us with aspects that rattle and challenge the ways we have customarily thought about our human experience. It has been traditional to categorize people into groups by race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sex, and so on. While these categorizations may have made sense in former times, we witness the injustice and suppression people have experienced by being frozen and imprisoned within stereotypical thinking. Assumptions are made through these group classifications that do not honor the true being, the true self of the individual standing before us. The individuality is always crying out, “Do not judge me or think you can understand me by what you see. Look and listen beyond and within the externals and know me.”

Transgender and gender-fluid children carry this cry strongly and deeply. We have children coming into our Waldorf classrooms whose physical, biological bodies do not match their feelings. They announce with clarity and conviction that their bodies—and consequently the role expectations assigned at birth—do not fit. It has been assumed that biology dictates gender. But these children are proclaiming that it is not as tidy as that. While there do exist inclinations toward maleness and femaleness, there

is also otherness. The children are calling upon us to stretch our thinking, our accepting, our affirming of this otherness in ways we could never have expected.

This issue of *Gateways* is dedicated to opening up conversation with others and within ourselves about gender and what that means. The relevant articles are best viewed as just the beginning of the conversation. We must be bold in our thinking and our responding to these “signs of the times” for the children’s sake, even as it rattles us.

The four lead articles of this issue are focused upon gender discussion. The first two come from Waldorf teachers about their experiences with embracing transgender children in their schools. To protect the privacy of the children and families, the authors remain anonymous and the schools are not identified. We thank these colleagues for their selfless and generous descriptions of how situations have been met in their school communities. The more we can study and avail ourselves of available resources listed, the better prepared we will be when a complicated issue of difference comes toward us.

We want to stretch our attitudes and concepts to recognize gender-fluidity and step out of any gender assumptions about how a child will or should behave. We don’t want to confine anyone’s identity with a gender stereotype. Yet we would be foolish to deny that there are inclinations and expressions of “boy-ness” and “girl-ness” that are also true. Our daily experience confirms that boys lean toward being physical and active, even rowdy, and girls are generally quieter and more inward, sometimes to the point of secrecy. These are neither deficits nor virtues. They just are. We want to honestly accept what comes along as a biological inclination with understanding and tolerance. To that end, one teacher writes about her experience with a challenging group of very young girls. In “Nine Dancing Princesses,” Susan Bruck of the Chicago Waldorf School, describes a year when the least attractive side of little girls’ exclusivity dominated her class. It is reassuring to read how the teachers did not “fix” this but learned to

accompany the girls through this challenging time.

We also feature a condensed version of Louise deForest's article on "Girls and Boys" from *You're Not the Boss of Me!* Louise's description of the different energies brought by the boys and girls in her classes is classic. It helps to recognize the truth of the archetypal gestures of these different orientations. Each individual goes through male and female incarnations as Rudolf Steiner describes. There must be some important purpose to experience femaleness and maleness for our growth and development. We want to see through to the eternal individuality of each person but not deny nor try to erase the gender differences that enrich our lives.

Other sections of *Gateways* take us to the classroom in different ways. The story of another Waldorf kindergarten pioneer, Marjorie Thatcher, is honored on these pages. Her journey to Waldorf education through New Zealand, Canada, England, and back to Vancouver to teach, is an interesting story. The founding of the West Coast Institute for Waldorf teacher training with Dorothy Olsen is one of the gems of her contributions to our work.

Another burgeoning focus in our early childhood pedagogy is work with children from birth to three. This is still a new frontier in many ways. How we sense our way into the right mood for holding these very little children is an important question. Magdalena Toran, parent-child teacher and WECAN board member, shares her inspiration on this subject.

We are delighted that Freya Jaffke's book, *Play with Us!* has been translated into English and is now available from WECAN. One game, "Bridge of Gold," is shared to give a taste of the many activities in this volume. There are games for indoors, outdoors, parties, and for developing motor skills. The book has some soon-to-become favorites waiting for our classrooms.

"The Three Little Pigs" share their adventures in a circle from Laurie Clark. Fun movements and lively shrewdness from the third little pig that outsmarts the wolf will delight the children at circle time.

Laurie also shares insight into some archetypal wisdom about the fever process that stands behind this well-known tale.

International news comes through a report about Waldorf education in Israel, where the IASWECE delegates gathered for their meeting last fall. Thanks to Louise deForest for keeping us abreast of the work in other countries and cultures. The information shared is impressive by any standard. The accomplishments of our international colleagues in non-western cultures are a tribute to their dedication.

Review of Cynthia Aldinger's new book, *Life Is the Curriculum*, finishes out this issue. The book describes the essentials that LifeWays has identified for children at home and in home-care and small group settings. The book is written in a style that helps the reader experience the reassurance, rejuvenation, and satisfaction that comes to the children when caregivers follow the book's suggestions.

This issue only supplies an introduction to questions of gender diversity. Consideration of transgender issues has barely begun for our times. The articles in this issue only open the door a crack. There is much to learn. If we search the internet for information about transgender identification and gender-fluidity, we see a staggeringly large, new vocabulary emerging to describe different gender experiences. And we used to think that having just two genders was challenging enough! We invite more contributions on the gender question to help expand our understanding of what the children are bringing to us. *Gateways* will continue to share contributions as they come.

Our fall issue will focus on sensory development and health. How well our senses are working—or not—profoundly affects our experience of the world. We invite your research and experiences upon how we can understand and support our children's development in this way.

Wishing you each new energy and enthusiasm with the return of spring. ♦