
From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Stories fill up countless pages in books. We can find almost any kind of tale we want to read for relaxation, entertainment, and diversion. Look at the *New York Times* bestseller list, filled with thrillers and dangerous detective stories. One wonders if anything listed there will endure beyond its short but glorious run on the “best” list.

We in Waldorf early childhood education are concerned with stories not because they fill up pages but because they can nourish the soul and encourage the spirit. These nourishing stories share images and inspire ideals that guide the striving of humanity. And stories told mouth-to-ear, from human speaker to human listener, warm the space to create relationship. The non-technological sharing of stories is not receiving much attention because spoken stories cost nothing but time. The profit is the creation and support of warm human relationships, which is not quantifiable. But when we tell stories in the classroom, or to our own children at home, we experience that all of this is true.

So this issue of *Gateways* continues the story theme in our lead articles. First, puppeteer and storyteller Suzanne Down shares her original development of the “protection story.” Children are so exposed to the ills and anxieties of the world that they need reassurance and shelter in any way we can provide it. Suzanne has developed the protection story as a kind of balm and protective layering for the listener. As she says, by the end of the story “all is well.” Next we have a serious consideration of fairy tales from Cindy Sudan. Her association with fairy tales over decades of teaching reminds us of the universality of these tales. Janene Ping brings active puppetry to give an imaginative picture to the environmental threats that children may feel swirling around them but not understand. So her story, “The Rainbow,” offers a digestible picture of elemental interaction.

Then our content takes a bit of a turn. Some articles came toward *Gateways* that look deeply at the importance of our work with very young children. Liz Hagerman discusses the importance of having parent/infant and parent/toddler classes in

our school. These gentle, short classes for parent and child offer a valuable introductory experience to Waldorf-style beholding of the child. The songs, movements, and gentle touching games create even deeper bonds between parent and child.

We turn with sadness and gratitude to acknowledge two colleagues who have crossed the threshold in “Transitions.” Kindergarten teacher Patricia Cairns, of Hawaii, Colorado, the west coast, and China has joined the spiritual world. “Farmer Dave” Snow, the farmer, financial manager, and goat-milker at Boulder Waldorf Kindergarten in Colorado also made his passing. They stand as examples of the talent and diversity that we each individually bring to Waldorf early childhood work in our own ways, big and small.

The new feature introduced in the Fall 2017 *Gateways*, “Reading the Signs of the Times,” continues in this issue. That article’s description of the social challenges that we are seeing in our school communities over salary, equity, and value of each person’s contribution to work with the children brought forth additional thoughts. A lecture by Rudolf Steiner is excerpted, which was study material for the WECAN board meeting last fall. Additionally, two readers responded with short contributions on ways we can work toward a healing social life to work respectfully—and artistically—with one another.

Also in this section is an article by Marcia Marquis, a long-time teacher recently retired, reflecting upon her years in the classroom. It is a beautifully written article, describing what the years and the children in her care have taught her about what really matters, about what is important. We think you will find it lovely to read and inspiring. In “Reading the Signs of the Times,” there are positive thoughts and deeds for us to affirm, not only what is troubling. This article provides a wonderful balance.

“In the Classroom” offers a potpourri from all the above topics. Jessica Oswald shares a therapeutic healing story she wrote for some children in her classroom. It is interesting reading both for the story and for her description of the creative process.

There are excerpts from the new WECAN publication, *Singing and Speaking the Child into Life*. Susan Weber, Nancy Macalastar, and Jane Swain of Sophia's Hearth have compiled a resource book of songs, games, and rhymes suitable for children from birth to age three. A few examples are shared in "For the Classroom" to give a sample of the book's content. The selections are perfect as-is for babies and toddlers. But the chosen pieces have some suggestions for adaptation to use with older children in the kindergarten class as well. A movement imagination, "Build a House, Brick by Brick," shared over 20 years ago by eurythmist and friend Steven Moore (now in the spiritual world) is given as a "sheltering imagination" that is easily used in the classroom. Vanessa Kohlhass reminds us, with her article on movement development in very young children, how terribly important it is that children have free opportunities to move through their developmental stages to get to human uprightness.

Book reviews round out this issue. A mainstream work by evolutionary biologist and developmental psychologist Alison Gopnik is reviewed. Her drive to explain everything in terms of genetics and evolution left the reviewer unsatisfied, but her chapters on imitation and play can bring joy to our Waldorf hearts. In these two chapters she is a true friend. Two new WECAN publications are also reviewed. These are *Singing and Speaking the Child into Life* (mentioned above) and *Walking with Our Children: The Parent as Companions and Guide*. This second publication is a collection of WECAN columns published in the magazine *Lilipoh* over the last several years. This is a book also intended for parents, filled with encouragement and gentle advice for the parenting task.

Stories lead us to consider speech and language. February's WECAN East Coast Conference focused on "The Development of Speech and the Human Encounter." Presenters Dr. Lakshmi Prasanna and

Michael Kokinos work with children and young adults who stand in the autism stream. Content from their presentations will be shared in the Fall 2018 issue of *Gateways*, which will focus on speech and language. We invite contributions to do with speech—development of speech in children, use of educators' speech, speech and language that support healthy incarnation for the child, and aspects of speech and its use with young children that we haven't even thought of to ask. Examples of rhymes and verses that invite the children into healthy speaking, listening, and moving will be heartily welcomed as well.

In conclusion, it seems fitting to end with a story from the classroom. As part of Six-Year-Old Games (for rising first graders), each child is asked to tell a story remembered from the kindergarten. One little boy sat pondering. He at first said he could remember nothing, then he stated that his teacher had told a story about a lawyer. The incredulous adult reply was, "I am sure your teacher did not tell a story about a lawyer." The child looked up in wide-eyed indignation and protested, "SHE DID, TOO!"

So the child was invited to tell that story. It took a little while for the listener to realize that the story being told was the Native American story of "Scarface" with the male "lawyer"—a warrior. Goodness only knows what inner pictures this little lad was creating.

This story leads toward next issue's theme of speech and language. Clarity of speech and context are so important for us to attend to. Lovely, sweet misunderstandings such as this bring us laughter and smiles. Through speech and language we can build—or destroy—relationship. We will look at speech as a healing force for social life too. ♦

~ Nancy Blanning
February 2018