
From the Editor

~ Nancy Blanning

The world we knew last February, when the last major gatherings of Waldorf early childhood educators at the East Coast and Pacific Northwest WECAN conferences took place, has exploded. COVID-19. School closures. Remote instruction even for early childhood. Sheltering in place. Quarantine. Masks. Distancing. Separation and isolation. What is going on? Is this for real? When will things get back to normal? What “normal”?

The COVID-19 crisis is also ripping off the mask that tries to hide the systemic racism that is embedded in US society. George Floyd’s martyred death has shocked the world into wakefulness and outrage. Institutionalized discrimination and marginalization cannot be denied. We are individually experiencing separation, isolation, and disconnection from others. Facing the reality of racism and other biases makes evident that groups of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have been deliberately separated, isolated, and disconnected since the first white Europeans touched this continent’s soil.

In the midst of all of this, we share thoughts, questions, puzzlements, frustrations, and practical and economic challenges. We may also admit that we are scared. We do not want to succumb to this fear, but we would be dishonest to deny that we have our stomach-sinking moments of uncertainty. How do we undo racism? How do we make connection?

But there is no use in lamenting the situation. This is what we have, so what are we going to with it? Is there a connecting thread to give us orientation? These challenges seem to cluster together around questions of **BUILDING RELATIONSHIP** on many levels.

- ◆ Relationship with our classes of children and families through times of school closures, distance learning, and screen use
- ◆ Relationships which affirm our classrooms as anti-bias sanctuaries where everyone has an honored place, where there is appreciation of and rejoicing in the differences we bring to community
- ◆ Relationship to ourselves, found through a path of uncovering our hidden biases and shadowy places

In the articles that fill this issue, this thread of relationship—with individuals, communities, and self—weaves through. There are important, powerful words and thoughts waiting to inform, inspire, confront, and challenge us. This is a very full issue, so descriptions introducing the articles in each section are brief. We do not want to delay your getting into the heart of what this issue has to share.

Two Black colleagues, Lynn Turner and Leslie Woolverton, share their professional and personal experiences as people of color. Be prepared. These are powerful. If you read nothing else in this issue, read these.

Two white colleagues, Magdalena Toran and Dawn Warfield, share their discovery of things within ourselves that can prevent, even distort, the possibility of building relationship with people we find different than ourselves.

Jeffrey Kane, university professor and former Waldorf class teacher, reflects on wrong assumptions he had that hampered him in developing the right relationship with a Black child in his class.

Laurie Clark next speaks to us with inspiration to help us wrap our warm attention around the children we so deeply care about. What do the children really need to feel embraced and held in these uncertain times? “Hope: A Tonic for the Future” offers answers.

For Carol St. John gardening and trekking in nature opened a door to relationship with her children, the natural world, and with herself. After-care teacher and avid gardener, she was astonished by what unfolded from the children during their school year. We trust that you will be, too, when you read this piece.

The Spring 2019 International Early Childhood conference at the Goetheanum encouraged Waldorf teachers to look out into the world to other educational approaches and streams to develop connection and relationship. Building bridges with others who care deeply for children’s welfare—but in different ways—is an important step for our movement to take. The next article introduces to the work of Dr. Gordon Neufeld, a Canadian psychologist, whose understanding of attachment and relationship resonates with Waldorf

education. Gail Neilsen, herself a counselor and therapist, describes Dr. Neufeld's steps of "connecting" to create relationship with a child. This is a very practical article with advice that can help us and the children orient back into relationship so we can take a new step forward together.

Back to COVID, we know the possibility exists that we may face death in our school communities. The shock, trauma, and grief that comes with someone's passing can be paralyzing. Allison Reznik describes her school community's experience when a young child crossed the threshold without any warning. Hearing about their process gives reassurance that we can journey such a difficult time in relationship with one another.

Margret Meyerkort, one of the magnificent pioneers for Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education in the UK, passed the threshold last March at the age of 94. Margret made many trips to the North America to provide teacher training. She was unquestionably one of the "greats."

Memories of and a tribute to her are shared by Janet Kellman. Some details from her biography accompany Janet's reflections. Here is food for encouragement and inspiration. Margret was adamant about grasping and working with the essentials and always developing relationship with what was coming. Included also with this tribute is Margret's birthday story from 1983, a little bit of her legacy.

For the Classroom has stories. Mindy Wecker and Leslie Woolverton share some delightful tales with us, reaching out with possible pictures of diversity. How they blend with our theme of Relationship you will discover as you read.

There are also a couple Mother Goose rhyme imaginations that have been adapted for our no-touching, maintaining-distance times. We hope these can be useful at circle time.

International News takes us to Hong Kong in these COVID times. Louise deForest describes the stresses affecting this exotic and bustling metropolis that is dealing both with COVID and with unrest and anxiety as the Chinese government clamps down upon the people's freedom.

Last of all come two book reviews. First is the NAEYC publication, *Anti-bias Education for Children and Ourselves*. This is a guide and practical handbook for self-education, self-reflection, and developing respectful, healthy relationships with and among children and ourselves and with parents. This book is highly recommended.

And lastly, the WECAN bookstore is now carrying the updated and expanded edition of *The Dignity of the Young Child*, a Birth-to-Three volume. This book is all about relationship. It is a beautiful and very practical read that will be of benefit to everyone, not just those working in Birth-to-Three settings.

Uncertainties abound. We have lists of official things that we must do, and things that we cannot do. We at *Gateways* hope that something in this issue will ignite your feelings of courage to see what we **can do**. There is *always* something that we *can* do. If we are momentarily stumped, we can practice touching the children with our gaze in such a way that they feel the smile under our masks. That will count for a lot.

May your work be blessed. We have spiritual companions who want to assist us. They just need our voices, our hearts, and our limbs to do the work. ♦