
From the Editor

~ Nancy Blanning

Considering Festivals—Creating Gateways through the Thorny Hedge

A “gateway” is a passageway from one space to another. In the stories we tell, there are doors, thresholds, passageways into the unknown and unfamiliar. Sometimes a treasure or solution to a critical problem lies on the other side of the gateway. To pass through this portal, effort is required. A doorway does not open magically and often requires courage and sometimes sacrifice to pass through. In the Grimms’ story of “The Seven Ravens,” the little sister journeys undauntedly to rescue her seven brothers who have been cursed into the form of ravens. She has to open the door of the glass mountain but has lost the drumstick gifted to her as a key that would open the passageway to entering. She sacrifices a little finger from her hand, which becomes the key to unlocking the entrance. Through this dedication to her task, her resolve, her brothers are returned to their human form.

The story of “Briar Rose” offers another picture. A longed-for royal child has been born. In celebration, a grand feast is held. There are thirteen wise women in the kingdom, but only twelve are invited to give their blessings to the child. Nonetheless, the thirteenth wise woman appears uninvited at the feast and curses the child, saying that in her fifteenth year, she will prick her finger on a spindle and fall down dead. But the curse is mitigated by the gift of the twelfth remaining guest who has not yet spoken. The piercing of her finger on the spindle will not result in death but a sleep of one hundred years. The story continues to describe how the royal parents try in every way to protect their child, but on her fifteenth birthday she sets out to explore all the rooms and passageways of the castle. She happens upon a tower she has never seen before, climbs the staircase, opens a door with a rusty key, encounters an old woman spinning, and pricks her finger. The destiny that was foretold manifests as she—and all the people of the castle with her—fall into a deep sleep.

And so it is for one hundred years. Then a young, brave warrior, who has heard legends of the beauty that lies within the castle, resolves to penetrate through

the thorny hedge that surrounds the palace, even at the risk of “dying a pitiable death” from getting stuck in the thorns. “I am not afraid. I will go and see the beautiful Briar Rose.” The time is ripe for the prophecy to be fulfilled and the beauty within the castle is found, awakened, and escorted back into the world, refreshed and renewed by the long night of sleep.

Taking on the questions of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) is our current thorny challenge. We are coming to the end of our first 100 years in the Waldorf early childhood movement,* and are being called to enter into the new world of our next century. This *Gateways* issue focuses on **Festivals** from the perspective of IDEA. We love festivals. They help us mark our seasonal, social, and spiritual passage through the cycle of each year. Our festival celebrations are an opportunity to build community on all of these levels—communion with the natural world, with each other, and with the spiritual world that surrounds and wishes to guide us.

Yet our festivals can also be painfully exclusive. Colleagues of the global majority with different colors of skin, ethnicities, religions, traditions, and heritages tell us of their pain and disappointment that Waldorf early childhood education, as they have thus far experienced it, has left them standing as outsiders. What the education offers is beautiful in what it is, but is not enough to support them and their children in affirming the rightness and value of their own personhood. How can we proceed to enlarge the existing space where everyone’s belonging is affirmed? This is our urgent question.

“Briar Rose” seems an apt picturing of what we are grappling with right now. Many of our assumptions about education, identity development, affirmation of the individual selves of the children, and pedagogical practice are being challenged. “Friction” is an element that keynote speaker Meggan Gill identified at the February 2022 WECAN North American conference. We live with this friction when something cherished is questioned or challenged.

Our sensitive skins are stabbed and rubbed. We are surrounded by contradictory points of view and advice about including IDEA in our work. And what is so bewildering, frustrating, piercing, distressing—and exciting—is that every view holds its element of truth. One person’s “rose” is another person’s “thorn.” If we stand rigidly rooted to single points of view, a thick hedge can grow thicker around our Waldorf castle. While we want to protect the goodness and beauty that lives within its wall, we want many pathways through the hedge to invite all visitors to come enjoy its wonders.

Friction is not bad. The rubbing of two points of view against each other creates warmth. Warmth can flare into destructive fire, yet it can also soften what has become stiff. WECAN wishes to help find gateways to Both/And. Getting there requires work. Different questions and viewpoints need to be expressed, discussed, and pondered socially and esoterically to find something that is not either/or, but a new inspiration that warmly recognizes everyone whose space in the circle of community remains unfilled.

Gateways is the name of this journal. Notice that it is plural. There is no single gateway suggested in the name, but more than one, perhaps many. The articles awaiting your consideration speak for themselves in suggesting different “gateways” into our educational future. Some defend, some call for change. Some

viewpoints are moderate, some extreme, depending on individual points of view. Readers are likely to feel a thorn prick or two as the series of articles is read. Yet what holds these expressions together is that each author cares deeply about Waldorf education. Each wants to see its beauty, goodness and truth manifested for the next 100 years—renewed, refreshed and awakened to greet the new morning of our world.

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Surely when the Briar Rose castle awakened, there was a great banquet to celebrate. The tables were set splendidly and there were chairs waiting for everyone in the whole village. So may it be for our communities, too. May we find many pathways through the hedge. And remember: in the story, the thorns turned into large, beautiful flowers. ♦

Note

*While there was an early attempt to open a kindergarten class at the Stuttgart school, the kindergarten was not officially supported and recognized as an integral part of the school until 1926.