

From the Editor

Stephen Spitalny

More and more it becomes clear that it is all about the will!

The challenges we face as early childhood educators are, by and large, the result of the diminishing will capacities of young children. One of the causes is the proliferation of technological gadgets that are promoted as necessary for modern life, and specifically those marketed for children. Consumer culture has conspired to create products that deliver to young children exactly what is most detrimental for their development, while advertising wizards spin same products in such a way that parents line up in droves to make sure their child is not left out. The gadgets take children away from their life of will activity.

Similarly, the so-called “food” given to so many children is lacking in nutritional value and life energy. Food is the substance the digestive system, the metabolic system, has to work with. This is the sphere of the will in the physical body. Another factor is the way young children are related to by most adults, especially in the realm of verbal communication. Adults offer explanations, instructions, and questions, questions, and more questions to the young child. This prematurely awakens the child in his thinking, and diverts him away from the developmental relating through the will. We see children who don’t imitate, who haven’t achieved mastery of their own bodies, and who don’t (or can’t) seem to do anything.

The engaged will of the adult is the antidote for this situation. The adult’s will must be active both in activity and in thinking. By utilizing our will in thinking we can create situations that wake up the child’s will forces that have been put to sleep or damaged. And we must become makers and creators, engaging ourselves in will activities for the sake of the children—making gardens, toys, dolls, food, and so on. The will forces of the adult must exaggerate themselves, must “over-engage,” as example for the children to begin to imitate—imitating both the activities, and the adult’s engagement of will forces.

Adversarial forces are attacking the human being at its most tender and formative stages, preventing the positive unfolding of new gifts from the spiritual world

of which the children are the bearers. Our responsibility, as soon as we become aware of the situation, is to stand up for the protection of childhood. In the lectures given to the teachers prior to the opening of the first Waldorf school in 1919 (published as *Study of Man*), Rudolf Steiner spoke over and over about the education of the will. This is THE essential pedagogical activity, even more so today, especially for the young child.

In this issue of *Gateways*, Cynthia Aldinger’s article “Getting Over Easy” takes a look at both sides of this situation—the will of the adult, and the situation of the child. In her article she says, “One colleague, to whom I have looked for guidance over the years, was concerned that the idea of children learning by imitation was falling by the wayside. She was aware of a number of adults who were beginning to verbally assign tasks to the children, rather than trusting that they would eventually become involved via imitation. Her concern resonated in me, and I shared that I often did a specific task myself for weeks before really expecting the children to participate.” For me, this is a frightening picture that makes me want to redouble my efforts to work out of imitation as a pathway of strengthening the will of the young child. I am interested in what new ways colleagues have found to work in the realm of will education for the young child so we can share those ideas in these pages in future issues.

This issue is filled with so much that can support our work and broaden our perspectives, and it is here because colleagues have taken the time to write down their ideas and questions and send them to this editor, and take a chance that others are interested. That is how we create *Gateways* together—it is a venue for sharing ideas and activities, and for bringing up questions that all serve the work we do with young children in North America, and throughout the world. Thanks again to all who have submitted articles and stories, songs and activities for this issue, and for all the past and future issues of *Gateways*. We depend on you!

Dr. Karnow included a verse referring to “a knighthood of our time” in his lectures synopsis in this issue. We can recognize ourselves as members of this knighthood that serves the future in these dark times, and align ourselves with this force for the good in all our striving.