

Gateways

Newsletter of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America ♦ Issue 62, Spring 2012

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Gateways is published in October and April by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America
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Spring Valley, NY 10977
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Annual individual membership, which includes subscription, is \$45. Back issues are available for purchase from WECAN, and as free downloads from the Online Waldorf Library at www.waldorflibrary.org.

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Deadlines for Issue 63, Fall 2012:

Articles: August 15

Advertising: September 15

Corrections:

We apologize for omitting some information in Issues 60 and 61: the two-part article “Moving with Soul” by Renate Long-Breipohl was previously published in *Kindling*, the UK journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood. We are grateful for permission to include it in *Gateways*.

In Issue 61, the photo that accompanied the article about The Cottage Garden was not from that program (like the other images in the issue, it came with the report on Waldorf early childhood education in Costa Rica). We regret any confusion this may have caused. A photo from The Cottage Garden is included in this issue on page 5.



From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

When I look at our kindergartens, I wonder sometimes whether the children are losing interest in us adults because we actually are not very interesting. The regular domestic activities—washing our small, cloth napkins; wiping the cubbies clean with a wet, soapy cloth—are good examples of caring for our environment, but small in scope and do not take much real effort of body and strength. Cooking is more engaging. Peeling and chopping vegetables for our weekly soup calls for more skill and intention in cutting with a knife, and stirring our bread dough takes determination when the batter gets stiff and courage is called forth to let hands get sticky with kneading. The delicious loaf at the end confirms that we have really done something. With cooking we can experience process more easily and see the result of our efforts. But still these alone do not seem to quell a restlessness the children display. If this question about the children's interest in us has any validity, what can we do to extend a stronger invitation the children to come, out of their own will, toward what we do?

Freya Jaffke's practical, sensible approach to the kindergarten has always been a personal inspiration for my teaching. So taking my cue from her, when we teachers had this question in our classroom we moved from the periphery of the room during play time into the center with our work. And real work we did. Using big saws we cut sections of fence posts into pieces that became block stilts. We drilled holes through the blocks with a big brace and bit to thread lengths of rope through. We looped and tied the rope at waist height to become the "handles" by which we would pull each block and our foot up so we could take a step. The sawing created splinters that had to be sanded away before we could use our new stilts. All the children were interested, but the six-year-old boys especially came clambering forward. The children could not get enough of this.

This experience began a pedagogical journey of research and investigation regarding real, practical work in the kindergarten. We sensed that this kind of activity is what the children's restlessness is hungering for. If the kindergarten is an extension of "hearth and home," how can we bring more and more of real-life-based activities

to them in ways that suit the possibilities of our school environments? In a rural, farm setting, the opportunities are much wider. In urban schools, we may have to be very inventive in how we can bring aspects of practical human work to the children's experience.

That is one side of the question. A parallel question has to do with the incomplete physical and sensory development we see in rising numbers of children. Increasingly we see children who are nervous, sensitive, excitable, timid, and easily distressed and distracted. Others are insecure in body movement and posture, clumsy, and under-sensitive both physically and socially. Either extreme can be disruptive to the rhythmic calm we strive to create in the classroom. It used to be that we might have one or two such children in a kindergarten group. Now it can be one-third to one-half of the class who display such tendencies, in degrees from subtle to extreme. What has changed?

We all know that modern life becomes more and more technologically assisted. The electronic age makes many things so "instant" that we cannot perceive the process through which something was achieved. Pictures, music, information, and factual explanations are instantly and virtually at our fingertips. Even in our Waldorf communities, we know that children are exposed to technology in seeing their parents at the computer and possibly playing video games on the cell phone in a moment of weakness when mom or dad needs a few quiet minutes of concentration. Modern labor- and time-saving conveniences make archetypal human work unnecessary. We don't need to work in the old ways, so we do so less and less. The rich range of movements available to children has become more and more narrowed. But all of the movements of human work that we are rejecting hold a profound secret.

It used to be that life itself with daily, practical work and play guided children into healthy sensory and physical development. We can look at books on sensory integration and occupational therapy manuals and see lists of the movements that lead to healthy integration of all of these systems—getting oriented in spatial directions of right and left, front and back, above

and below; coordinating the two sides of the body in smooth movement; bringing eye and hand together as supportive partners; crossing the midlines of the body; and so on. And when we look at practical life activities, practice for each of these movements is wisely imbedded in the activity itself, with no human mind having cleverly planned it. Archetypal, healthy movements live in human work activities on their own. Children naturally found more comfortable entry into their bodies without anyone noticing that it was happening—until it began to stop with the encroachment of modern life into the lives of younger and younger children.

The effort that real work requires—the push and pull on limbs and muscles; adjusting balance and posture; lifting, carrying, spatially arranging; coordinating of limbs to dig with a shovel; experiencing sequence in process—educates, integrates, and harmonizes body, sensory systems, and mind. We see that children are *fascinated* and lured toward technology, but they are *not satisfied* by it. And so they are restless and looking for something they do not know how to identify until they experience it.

When we see children with interrupted and incomplete development, we can send them off for occupational therapy, which may sometimes be a proper, even essential, recommendation in some situations. But as a foundational backdrop to anything else that might be called for therapeutically, Rudolf Steiner gives us guidance for our classrooms and for children in general. Everything that is brought in Waldorf education should come from real life. And that leads us right into the practical life activities that are the foundation of the kindergarten “curriculum.” The wisdom and developmental support imbedded in the movements and sequence of practical human work and the increasing need our children have for authentic, real, human activity to help grow healthy bodies stream together as logical and compatible partners.

Out of these thoughts was born this issue of *Gateways*, featuring practical work in the kindergarten. Many colleagues responded to the request for ponderings about and examples of how they bring this into their own classrooms. Thanks to Annie Gross from Canada and to Steve Spitalny, *Gateways* editor emeritus, for their thoughts and examples of how the child is assisted into incarnation through imitation guided by the model of real human work. Su Rubinoff, Lyn Barton, and Anke Scheinfeld have described examples of work from their kindergartens—from the wilds of woods and farm to the sensory wilds of Manhattan. Some of our gentlemen teachers—Tim Bennett, Lincoln Kinnicutt,

and Joe Robertson—have also given glimpses into their settings.

Ideas for also enriching our classrooms with artistry and story come from Laurie Clark, who shares a May Day circle with fun, archetypal movements that guide children toward physical and sensory integration.

We owe special thanks to Louise deForest, WECAN board member and council member, along with Susan Howard, of the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE). Louise conceived, collected, and edited the new WECAN publication, *For the Children of the World*, a collection of stories and recipes from IASWECE Council countries. Proceeds from the sale of this book will go to support Waldorf teacher training on the international level. A story and recipe from this collection await your delight and cooking adventurousness. Also reminding us of our international colleagues and their work is a report from Russia. Thank you to Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes for this contribution.

Finally, we are also privileged to include a book review of Freya Jaffke’s recently translated book, *Celebrating Festivals with Children*. Reprinted from the British publications *New View* and *Kindling*, this review from Jill Taplin describes Freya Jaffke’s insight into the essential qualities of the Christian-derived festivals we mark in our kindergartens. Suggestions of how to celebrate these, remaining authentic to the archetypal gesture and mood of each festival in deeply simple ways, are offered.

You will find a new look in this issue, which we hope you will find more attractive and easier to read. By request, we have also added a list of the main contents to the back cover. In the fall we will be transitioning to a color cover, as the cost of color printing is no longer prohibitive with today’s technology. We hope for each issue to bear a different cover, featuring many different artists, and thus reflect the richness and diversity of the talents that fill our canvases and our classrooms. We invite submissions of cover art as well as written contributions of all kinds. Next fall’s issue will focus on the theme of the International Early Childhood Conference in Dornach, “the journey of the I into life.”

This was an exciting and satisfying issue to call into being. We hope you find inspiration, both practically and pedagogically, for work with the children. In ways both literal and metaphorical, the adult guide for the child is the “master craftsperson” and the child the “apprentice.” This becomes even more evident and obvious when we transform our early childhood settings into kitchens and workshops to experience authentic activities of human life through practical work. ♦

FOCUS: Practical Work in the Kindergarten

“A Kitchen, Not a Parlor”

— Annie Gross

Many years ago in England, the summer before I began teaching my first kindergarten class, I had the good fortune to attend a seminar in Wynstones given by Margret Meyerkort. Although at the time I didn't understand the full breadth and depth of all that she offered, her words resonated within me and I knew instinctively that I was on my intended path. Her enduring comment, “The kindergarten is above all a kitchen and not a parlor,” informed my study and practices over the subsequent years. It implied rhythmical activity, purposeful work, and warmth.

As I grew into my work I grappled with these principles and found that the more we, as adults, worked at our daily life-sustaining and nurturing needs, the more the children would play. Almost on a daily basis our large kitchen table was moved more fully into the room, always in full view of the entering children. One of us would be working, and more often than not, if our daily work was purposeful and earnest, some of the children would engage in their own work—which is play. All children were welcome to join us at our work; there was always room for more. We never asked if they wished to join us. It was a legitimate and perhaps an unconscious inner choice for each child to make for him- or herself. We hoped that our activity would inspire play or the golden words, “Can I help?”

In the time since I first met Margret Meyerkort, the world has changed drastically. The experience of many children today is of adults engaged in passive activity, mainly through technology, or extreme activity, as in sporting pursuits. The former requires little movement even though important and creative work can be taking place. The static body with sliding hand, wiggling thumbs and pointing or touching fingers gives no hint of the tremendous capabilities of the human being. Sports, on the other hand, certainly can demonstrate the amazing feats of athletes, and one can easily understand how captivating this can be for children who don't often see adults using their bodies otherwise with such vigor.

*Gardening at The Cottage Garden in Amherst, Massachusetts.
Photo courtesy of Celia Riahi*

When my own children were growing up it seemed that our biggest challenge was the neighboring televisions. Today, with the proliferation of hand-held devices, it is hard for children to avoid screens in any shape or form! Unless they are in a rural environment, not many have the opportunity to experience human beings engaged in the human activity of life arts. It would appear that never before in the history of human development have the sheaths that protect the young human being been so thin. However, we know today's children have chosen to incarnate at this time. They have said yes to these times, and as they have come most recently from the spiritual world, they have much to teach us. We are beholden to them, to listen to what they are bringing and to create environments that welcome them and guide them towards their destiny.

Over the last few years, at each of our Pacific Northwest Regional meetings, we have asked of each participant “What are the questions and burning issues that you carry regarding your work in Waldorf education?” Boys, imitation, play, and continuity of care were among the leading topics asking for attention. A frequently-voiced concern was that many children were experiencing fragmented and breathless days, and that play was becoming less imaginative and less creative. A picture emerged of boys, in particular, often finding themselves



beside the teacher and being given handwork or fine motor skill activity in order to redirect their “energy.” Perhaps now is the time to be courageous and review our practices. Perhaps we can tip the balance in favor of a simpler format with fewer transitions, and provide a fuller vista of meaningful activities to soak up and drink in. Maybe it is time to consider moving back into the kitchen?

In many of Rudolf Steiner’s writings, we are reminded again and again that in the first seven years of life the environment is one of the human being’s most influential educators. Young children are in an empathetic relationship with their environment, irrespective of its content or qualities. Through their senses they flow out into the environment and soak up whatever their senses find. That environment impresses itself upon the young child’s physical body. If children can take up developmentally-appropriate surroundings that are created in a warm, rhythmical and experiential manner, their innate capacity to imitate will be sustained and cultivated. This vital capacity of imitation, so easily sabotaged and diminished by early intellectualization, lays a foundation for freedom in adulthood.

In *The Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science* Rudolf Steiner writes:

If people have knowledge of life, it is only out of life itself that they can take up their tasks. They will not draw up programs arbitrarily, for they will know that the only fundamental laws of life that can prevail in the future are those that prevail already in the present. The spiritual investigator will therefore of necessity respect what exists. No matter how great the need they may find for improvement, they will not fail to see the embryo of the future within what already exists. At the same time they know that in everything “becoming” there must be growth and evolution. Thus they will perceive the seeds of transformation and of growth in the present. What they read becomes in a certain sense the program itself, for it bears within it the essence of development. For this very reason a spiritual-scientific insight into the being of humankind must provide the most fruitful and the most practical means for the solution of the urgent questions of modern life.

Anthroposophic principles provide a framework for us to work with. As we consider these principles we are able to ask ourselves whether our activities are true to these principles. Anthroposophy has given us “the pedagogical law.” It states that the higher member of the fourfold human being supports the development

of the member immediately below. Within the first seven years etheric forces impress themselves upon the growing and transforming physical body, like a seal on molten wax, creating a lasting impression. The activity of the etheric body impresses itself upon the physical body, allowing for the transformation of the still-unborn etheric body.

As caregivers of young children working with the pedagogical law, our primary focus is on creating an etheric atmosphere that supports and nurtures the physical bodies of our young charges. The child’s physical body is forming and transforming through etheric influences, both from his own incarnating etheric body and from etheric forms surrounding him. Before the change of teeth, children are developing a bodily intelligence that will stay with them for their entire lives. In the body, the individuality of each child is slowly finding its earthly home.

The first seven years of life are phenomenally formative for the whole of life. Beginning at birth the child is still under the guidance of the spiritual world, acquiring movement, speech, and thinking. Those caring for the youngest children create environments that support the healthy awakening of the foundational senses. We know that much of the activity that surrounds the children is devoted almost exclusively to their care. Feeding, clothing, and cleaning in a warm and loving fashion conducted within patient, rhythmical, orderly, and consistent forms, allows for the acquisition of healthy habits to develop. The little ones might not notice our activity, per se, but our consciousness that determines our gestures, pace, mood, and intentions fills their surroundings. Our warm interest in the children and in each other provides sculptural forces for these young bodies.

It is fortunate for all concerned when little children are in the care of consistent caregivers who are given the time to attend to their needs and who allow them the freedom to move out of their own intention without adult interference. When I asked Carol Cole of the Sophia Project what she considered to be an ideal adult to two-year-old ratio, she replied “one for each hip.” As we know, the care for these tiny ones leaves little time for anything but the simplest of songs and stories. The care given to them is a large part of their day. Their play material is simple. As we go about our work, they fill and empty baskets, they put and place, they wrap and unwrap and so on, mirroring the gestures and activity of their carers. This is pre-social play and pure imitation.

As the children enter the middle phase of childhood,

the capacity for fantasy and play really takes hold. The extent to which these two capacities have developed and continue to develop depends largely upon two aspects—the individuality of the child, and the environment in which he is finding his new earthly home. Out of our adult activity within the child's environment, the capacity for play and fantasy helps a child build his body. At this stage, habits created in the previous phase become evident. I recently came upon the term “accidental parenting.” It describes how our unconscious habits nestle themselves securely into our children, only for us to realize at a later date that that which we do unconsciously, comfortably and habitually is also part of the environment that our children soak up. Teachers’ “accidental parenting” may be more subtle, but I have no doubt that there were areas that I was blind to. My only hope is that they were happy and positive “accidents”!

As the children mature and enter a more social stage, play can become sustained in a fluid manner. However, they need a constant context for play. Fine motor activity such as handwork or complex crafts certainly suits some children, but often requires explanations or instructions. Not all of the household tasks that our day requires call for vigorous bodily engagement, but those repeatedly-conducted tasks that do, and show what humans are capable of in service of others, not only inspire healthy movement and play, but also lay a strong social foundation. The children soak up our activity of purposeful work and in return manifest it in their play, which is the child's work.

In the final stage of childhood, children continue to be inspired by purposeful work in their midst. As their capabilities develop they are able to work and play alongside their caregivers. The diversity of tasks that they are exposed to, still in an experiential and non-instructional manner, allows for their bodies to develop in increasingly differentiated ways.

In answer to colleagues who would ask me each year if older children were ready for first grade, my picture of readiness was always that they could move with confidence, play imaginatively and creatively, sit at their place for meals and story time, look after their own needs, be helpful to their fellows and, above all, know that the world is good. I can't pretend that it was always the case, but I do know that our adult work amongst the children, if it was not too complex, always brought about a sense of well-being, which in turn allowed for the children to be themselves.

At every turn we are called upon to establish surroundings that are worthy of imitation. So what con-

stitutes being worthy of imitation, and how does that relate to the purposeful life arts? One way to consider this question is to look at the fourfold nature of the human being and how these aspects might support healthy development in the children.

On the physical plane, our movements and gestures, as we engage in the many activities that are needed to provide for our children and ourselves, bring an opportunity for us to use our bodies with purpose and, if appropriate, with vigor. Cooking: bread baking, making soup. Laundry: washing, rinsing, wringing, hanging, folding, ironing, storing. Cleaning: sweeping, wiping, washing, scrubbing, dusting, washing windows. Gardening. Cleaning and polishing shoes. The list is endless. The archetypal movements required by these activities need the engagement of our whole physical body. Our coordination, balance, and dexterity will inform and inspire the children in their own movement. Each child will absorb and integrate visual experiences according to his or her own individuality.

On the etheric level, all of the preceding physical attributes brought at a comfortable pace within rhythmic and repetitive cycles allow for the young child to develop trust in her environment. It can be challenging to give consideration to the rhythms and structure of each child's whole day, but it is important to remember that our time with them is just part of their day, and we are one person amongst many whom they encounter. It requires tremendous good will, flexibility and tolerance to de-compartmentalize the day and provide continuity of care with as few transitions as possible while at the same time keeping what is essential for their well-being. The order in which we do things with a beginning, middle, and end—assembling, producing, and cleaning up, for example—is an important aspect of practical work. The more that these processes can be done in the presence of the children, the better, even though it may mean that something else has to give. Ambitious overscheduling of our time with children has its costs, and less is truly more. Unpredictability is stressful and can lead to social challenges and a lack of confidence.

On an astral level, work brought about with equanimity and joy sets a tone of warmth and tolerance. Whether we are sloppy or perfectionists, whether we view our co-workers or neighbors with a critical or judgmental eye or not, whether we under- or over-value our own abilities, affects the mood that surrounds the children. Whether our likes or dislikes determine our activities is worth considering. As with all aspects of our work with young children, it is helpful if ideas and intentions precede our deeds.

On an ego level, work performed in a lawful, considered, timely, and intentional manner can support a calm, confident, and stress-free experience. A daily practice of reviewing our day will give us the opportunity to ask of ourselves, “How did the environment that I have created impress itself upon the children today? How did this environment inspire the children to play?”

Working with these questions and with these principles is an individual matter. As with the children the manifestation of our inner selves is in accordance with our own individuality. But with our adult four-fold maturity, unlike the children we have the opportunity to strive for a deeper understanding of human development. The children have courageously said yes to these times. With the wealth of wisdom available to us within anthroposophy and from colleagues in compatible streams, we surely can find the courage to review our practices either to affirm our present environments and practices, or to transform them. Above all, in working with children and using core aspects of anthroposophy, the recognition that our intention and striving to understand and transform ourselves is at the heart of the matter. This inner work can deepen our capacities to understand the children and our colleagues. As each of

us takes up these principles, out of earnest contemplation, we are able to create forms and rhythms that reflect our own authentic and individual intentions while at the same time representing human development in the light of anthroposophy.

I encourage colleagues to share their research and questions regarding practical life arts with other colleagues, both within our Waldorf movement and those working in differing disciplines. It can be both wonderful and daunting to visit one another’s classes to observe and share practices, for older colleagues to consider a different approach, and for newer colleagues to break through long-established traditions within our schools, but always worthwhile. Our deepened interest in each other’s work warms the environment that we create with social impulses that massage their way deeply into the core being of these dear children. ♦

Reference

Steiner, Rudolf. *The Education of the Child and Early Lectures on Education*. Anthroposophic Press, 1996.

Annie Gross, a Waldorf kindergarten teacher for many years in both the UK and Canada, and WECAN board member from 2001 to 2011, continues to do consulting and mentoring work with Waldorf schools.



Sanding wood blocks. Photo courtesy of Su Rubinoff

Practical Activities with the Young Child

— Stephen Spitalny

This article was adapted from Steve's book, Connecting with Young Children.

The task of the kindergarten teacher is to adjust the work taken from daily life so that it becomes suitable for the children's play activities. The whole point. . . is to give young children the opportunity to imitate life in a simple and wholesome way. —Rudolf Steiner, April 1923

Imitation is the natural learning mode for the young child. Rudolf Steiner described it as a sort of bodily religion arising from a sense of joy and wonder with all experiences and sensations. The young child, so recently arrived into a physical body from the spiritual world, loves all he meets in the world. The adult, whether caregiver, kindergarten teacher, or parent, has therefore a huge responsibility since the child is molding himself out of his experiences, out of what and who is imitated. Therefore it is incumbent on the adults to create an environment of objects, people and activities that we would be happy to have taken up in imitation by the child. An environment that nurtures the child includes crucial elements that create form and order in the developing child: rhythm in daily life activities, safe and healthy boundaries, and adults' consistency in maintaining the boundaries and rhythm.

Young children naturally are most active in the doing, the willing realm of soul life. They are drawn to adults' work activity, especially when the adult is truly engaged in meaningful working. I experience that when a chair breaks, or we are making lunch—meaningful work that needs to be done—then the older children in kindergarten are attracted to participating and helping, while the younger ones exactly imitate the activities in their play. Young children are drawn to the activities of real workers and craftspeople like the blacksmith, the carpenter, spinner, plumber, and so on. The experiencing of these activities is a body-building experience for the child, as well as an example of focused adult will for the child's will forces. A

young child who experiences, and even does, various different types of real work is given a blessing of many images to incorporate into his or her development. As Joop van Dam writes in "Understanding Imitation Through a Deeper Look at Human Development," "[his] body becomes an instrument with all kinds of tones and colors. This is a body the individuality can enter and live in for a lifetime."

When the adult fully engages in her own work, the will of the adult is engaged and it is a sort of invitation to the imitative will of the young child. There are certain qualities of this "real" work for the adult to develop. It is meaningful if you do the work whether or not the children participate. If you are simply doing something so that the children will join in, and then when they don't you put away materials and tools, then clearly it not something important that needs to be done. It is also an important quality to model that you are planted in one location while focused on the work, rather than a little work, a little roaming the room, a little more work and a little more roaming. This calls for being prepared when you set to the work—all needed tools and materials are at hand, as well as tools and materials for the children who choose to imitate your activity.

There is so much to do to care for a kindergarten home: washing, cooking, sewing, ironing, planting, weeding, pruning, repairing chairs, tables, dolls and other toys, making toys for the kindergarten, and more—not as activities that are done to give the children projects, but work related to the care and improvement of our kindergarten home.

All learning involves an engagement of the will. Learning requires effort. With young children, the will is directly connected to sensory activity, without the mediation of thinking or understanding—this is the process of imitation. It is a special art to engage the child's interest and attention, an art that adults must

learn. When the adult takes up the tasks that need to be done with joy and with enthusiasm, with his or her own engaged will, then the child's attention is more likely to be present in the task as well. Tasks attended to with care and love engage the child's interest much more than tasks done in a disinterested or even resentful way.

One's inner attitude to the work at hand is so important. Do domestic activities conjure thoughts and feelings of drudgery, of chores? If the adult is begrudgingly doing the task, the attitude that the task is unpleasant is passed on to the child. Also, if the adult's heart is not in it, the adult's will is not truly engaged. So the children experience an adult who doesn't want to do a task, but is doing it, with just a part of herself involved. Even the name "chore" has a connotation of something one doesn't want to, but has to do. So consider the language used. "Task" or "job" seem to have a nicer ring to them.

~ *Human beings can make things, and the children can even make things. We are continuing the work of the creator beings in ways that are easily experienced.*

We are working with the reality of educating the will of the young child. It is will education to make a toy while the child is watching. Will education is making a wooden crate for kindergarten while the children are watching, and perhaps some are even helping. The child learns that first of all, it can be done. Human beings can make things, and the children can even make things. We are continuing the work of the creator beings in ways that are easily experienced. "Oh, we make stuff if we need it."

And the adult taking raw materials and making something from them is an example for the child's imagination. This type of activity stimulates the child's imagination into creative mobility. The imagination resonates with the activity of making when encountering it. This resonance works deeply into the child's soul and physical body. It stimulates the formative forces working in the brain and works deeply into the developing breathing and circulatory systems. The activities of making nourish and energize the young child's will forces.

When an adult makes a toy in front of the child, a doll or wooden animal for example, the child's will

is stimulated by the creating power of the will of the adult. Making is will activity, and is a dwindling art. We all can be makers! Through making we immerse the young child in our engaged will.

One role of the adult is to welcome the child into the community of human working by doing work as example and with the young children. The adult's work is the tasks that need attention; the children's work is their play. In kindergarten, one day I was ironing and folding the napkins and placemats. "Steve, will you be a dog with us?" "I'll be a dog, but I'll be a dog right here doing the ironing." "Okay." The adult can be present, near the child's play, and engaged in adult activities. This example of working can be a stimulus for the child's play. The adult may of course initiate play, but needs to be aware of his or her role and the effect on the children, and know when to leave the children to play on their own terms. Children should not depend on adults to participate in their games, nor on adult attitudes. Free play will come from the children's own imagination, inspired by adults' working, songs, and stories, as well as everyday events.

If the adults are engaged in calm, purposeful activity, the children are likely to imitate it in their play, or even want to participate in the activity. Mending, sewing, washing, sweeping, and repairing toys, are among the activities for the teacher to be involved in while the children explore the room, play, draw, and so on. When conversation is kept to a minimum—both with adults and with the children—the children can be more deeply engaged with their play. The atmosphere created by adults engaged in such purposeful activity creates a protective and nurturing environment for the child in which he can either help with the chores, or explore the world through play.

Janet Kellman once spoke about the myth of quality time. What is "quality time?" Many adults think "special" time going to "special" places is more valuable than other activities; it has more connecting going on. Quality time really is measured by how truly present one is with the children, while one is supporting their developmental needs, the needs of the developing soul, etheric body, and will of the young child. Connecting with the children while immersing them in life activities, activities that nurture and sustain life, is a powerful support for the child's etheric and will development.

If one of our wooden chairs in kindergarten breaks, we fix it. We mend what needs repair, from chairs to dolls to children's pants and aprons. Whatever needs fixing, I always attempt to fix it myself before I call

in a “paid expert.” Perhaps if I don’t have the tools or skills, I ask a parent to help, and have it done when the children are present.

When something breaks, usually the children first try to fix it themselves. There always are one or two repair specialists who actually have the skills for many types of repairs. If those children can’t do the repair, they bring it to me. We have created a culture of fixing and mending. One aspect of that is to acknowledge the situation right away, saying “We will mend this,” even if it will be a while, or even another day, before repairs can begin. I always make sure to get to the repair project when the children are present, and not let it slide and end up forgotten.

Steiner said that it is important to bring life activities into the kindergarten, to surround the young children with real life. These life activities, life-giving and life-sustaining activities such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, and “housework,” are nurturing the developing etheric body, the life body, of the child which will not, in a sense, be born until age six or seven. Life activities support the development of the life senses, the foundation for truly social life.

The whole point of a preschool or kindergarten is to give young children the opportunity to imitate life in a simple and wholesome way. This task of adjusting life as one carries it out in the presence of the child in a meaningful, purposeful way, according to the needs of each child, is in accordance with the child’s natural and inborn need for activity and is an enormously significant educational task.

What are real life activities? They are real *and* they are life-based, need-based activities. At home or in the kindergarten, there are always domestic chores to be done: washing placemats and napkins; hanging them to dry; ironing, preparing and cooking meals, cleaning up after meals, weeding, pruning, raking leaves, and on and on. Both indoors and outdoors, there is plenty of work necessary for the maintenance of home and garden life. When we engage our adult will forces on this meaningful work, both the developing will and the developing etheric body of the children are strengthened. The children benefit from being surrounded by loving adults engaged in meaningful work such as housekeeping activities. The taking up of household tasks gives the children a sense of calm purpose and meaningful work. These activities help to create a sheath of warmth and protection around the children in our presence. And when the adult is meaningfully and joyfully engaged in work, the children play more peacefully, creatively and cooperatively. It is

the magic example of the adult’s engaged will for the child.

Adults engaged in the domestic arts (cooking, cleaning, building) provide real work examples that stream into the play of children and are very much in need because of the children’s widespread lack of experiences of housework done in the home. Kindergarten has to take on some aspects of what the home once stood for; the home is no longer the heart center of the family, but has become a resting place in between errands, activities and appointments, to which parents and children are often on their way. Waldorf early childhood centers more and more have become a replacement for certain aspects of the traditional home. They provide a place where there is enough time for housework to be lovingly taken up and accomplished with participation from children. Providing a home-like environment for children gives them the opportunity to do things out of their own initiative. And the children need time, enough time. We need to create the feeling of “There is no rush. There is time to play.”

Domestic activities, housework, taking care of the surroundings: all of these take us out of the personal and into the social realm. Caring for one’s surroundings is a social gesture. We work together and for each other! The basis of our community life is the home, and social responsibility starts there.

Linda Thomas, whose cleaning company cares for the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland says:

There exists a great difference between cleaning and caring. When we clean, we remove dirt, and the result of cleaning sometimes does not even last five minutes. At the Goetheanum, you have barely cleaned the hallway, and already someone walks over it, leaving footprints everywhere. The same goes for parents with young children. For this very reason, many people consider cleaning a frustrating and unrewarding activity, a troublesome necessity.

Yet, we should try to do this task with our full awareness, with all our love. Once we learn to consciously penetrate each little corner with our fingertips, then cleaning takes on a nurturing aspect and becomes caring. What is so wonderful about it is that the result of caring lasts considerably longer than the result of removing dirt! When we have taken special care of a room, the little bit of fresh dirt that is brought in is barely disturbing—one can live with it. The glow is totally different from areas where layers of dirt and grime have built up. Lately, a new cleaning culture, which we should really try to prevent, is

trying to establish itself. There is supposedly a spray for everything—you spray and you wipe away—not much water is needed! One does indeed remove a small quantity of dirt, but instead of caring for a surface, you leave a chemical layer behind, containing quantities of dissolved dirt.

While caring for a room, we do not only come into contact with the physical world. The whole atmosphere changes, the room is filled with light. Children react especially strongly to this transformation, and they also seem to perceive the change directly. (See Linda Thomas, “Chaos in Everyday Life.”)

How can we redeem housework, the image of housework as drudgery, so we provide a positive example for the children? We can find joy in the work and express it in our movement and our gestures. We can bring order and planning to our work and finish it. Some projects take more than one time to complete, but persistence over time is important for the child to observe. All of these, though, are self-discipline on the part of the adult, and hard work at first.

We can cultivate an attitude of looking for work that needs doing. That is a real gift to the children. Rather than, “What should I do with the children today?” we

can say, “What needs to be done, and how do I do it?”

Taking care of our body and our surroundings are most important. For me, craft projects are not as high a priority, though a craft project as a part of the preparation for a festival becomes a meaningful element in the life of home or kindergarten—for example, the making of a card for a birthday, or gifts for Mother’s Day. But a project “to give the children something to do” is not so meaningful. Crafts and projects with the children can support creativity and motor skill development, but they don’t exercise the will unless they come from the child’s initiative. If the adult has a sewing project that needs doing—perhaps a cloth has torn—then of course you will have extra materials available as the children will also want to sew. And you can help them along as needed. Five- and six-year-olds will sometimes want to make something to bring into their imaginative play, perhaps a doll or puppet. But then it comes out of the child engaging herself, out of her own initiative, and based on imitation—the will is exercised and strengthened.

Domestic activities anchor the child in the world, both the physical world, and the social world in which we live. Our housework provides a healthy example for imitation. We are helping to make the children truly capable, and helping them toward their future with strong will forces.

It happens from time to time that a child is out of sorts and is not able to play constructively, either by herself, or in the social setting. A magical cure for that child is helping out with some real work that needs doing. Folding the laundry or cutting the vegetables is an opportunity for the child to get grounded into the work, and the obstacle to relaxed and peaceful play they may have been experiencing dissolves. A few minutes later one hears, “I want to go play now.” The adult can feel that the child is really ready to play. Her fantasy or imagination has woken up again from a small dosage of meaningful work. ♦

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Rolling dough for pretzels. Photo courtesy of Joli Kiss, Hungary

Kindergarten on the Farm and in the Garden

— Lyn Barton

Recently I came across the word *biophilia*. Meaning “a love of life and the living world; the affinity of human beings for other life forms,” it is a beautiful wish for good fairies to bestow upon children, and for early childhood teachers to help those wishes come true. Green Meadow Waldorf School’s “farm kindergarten,” located at the Fellowship Community (an intergenerational community centered around the care of the elderly), and surrounded by forest, field, stream, pond and farm, is nestled in an idyllic place for inviting the incarnating human being into earthly life through cultivating rich, reality-based experiences of the seasons, and nurturing a love of nature.

In the autumn, our main outdoor activity is harvesting on the farm. Our small-but-mighty crew helps the Fellowship farmers bring in crops to store in the root cellar, put up for winter, and sell at their shop, *The Hand and Hoe*. The farmers often generously gift us vegetables for celebrating the harvest at our snack time. Our favorite crops for harvesting are large, child-friendly potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, and shiny peppers. The children enter the fields not knowing the task at hand, allowing the discovery to unfold with delight in the moment. Some children stay engaged with gusto in the treasure-hunt of harvest, while others have their interest captivated and carried away by earthworms, weed-flowers, and other ways to enter into the outdoor environment through their own inner activity.

Kindergarteners are welcome as harvesters on the farm, but are not yet big enough to participate in growing and tending. So the Fellowship was kind enough to entrust us with our own garden, an invaluable plot of earth for experiencing the cycle of life, which is an endless source of wonder and joy. With our treasure trove of seeds, we start some plants in the greenhouse, and others in the ground. As much as possible, we take our plants from seed-to-seed, replanting seeds we have gathered ourselves. Our popcorn has been planted, harvested, dried, wiggled off the cob, eaten for snack, and a few ears set aside for planting right off the cob when the ground warms in

the spring. Going through the year from seed-to-seed offers an empowering experience of the cycle of life. Collecting and replanting a variety of seeds, we mainly choose those that will be ready in the autumn when the children return to school.

A few of our projects from our seed-to-seed plants include calendula, shiso, louffa, birdhouse gourds, a variety of beans, and broom corn. Gathering radiant orange calendula blossoms, we make enough calendula hand cream (see the recipe by JoAnne Dennee in *Gateways*, Issue 35) to send a pot home with each child, and to use all year in the classroom each day after hand-washing. The delightful iron-rich red shiso leaves are made into a pink lemonade-like drink, wrapped around riceballs, and dried to add to rice. Additionally, we used the leaves to dye raw silk a glorious lavender with the children, and sewed them into “sweet dreams pillows” stuffed with wool from our sheep and herbs from our garden. The impressive louffa gourds are stripped of their dark green skin, revealing sponges that we use for washing our classroom dishes, and everyone takes one home for bath time. Birdhouse gourds* have been made into bowls and treasure boxes by rising first graders. As well, we experience the age-old tradition of gourds made into vessels for carrying water, which we use in the garden to water the plants. We have made cake-testers from our graceful broom corn, wrapping the children’s finger-knitting around the tops to form a decorative binding and loop for easy use at home.

The children have gathered the seeds from all of these plants in the autumn, delighting in feeling them with their hands, enjoying their beautiful colors and forms, and participating in storing them with care until they are re-planted in the spring. We have even packaged them for sale at the annual Fellowship Community Christmas Sale.

Some vegetables are grown for enjoying at snack time. A well-loved garden gnome appears in the garden when there is good news such as ripe garden peas for nibbling. Our annual birthday snack has been

inspired by our harvest, including cornmeal muffins from grinding our own dent corn kernels into cornmeal, pumpkin pies, and pizza with garden toppings. Assorted herbs are either enjoyed fresh from our garden or dried in bunches, stripped, and used for snack-time tea all year round. After stripping off the leaves, the bare stems are bundled and sent home for kindling with children who have fireplaces or wood-burning stoves.

We never go to our farm or garden without a fleet of child-sized red wheelbarrows and sturdy shovels, giving us opportunities to nourish the senses of balance and self-movement, as we do chores such as mulching our garden paths, spreading a winter blanket of compost over each of the garden beds, and taking weeds to feed the chickens. There is a treasured spot in the garden just for digging, which has offered hours of enjoyment for creative free play, excavating boulders, and discovering clay for making pots.

In an effort to connect all of our projects with the farm, garden, and woods, we have made such things as wooden cutting boards (inspired by a WECAN Conference class with Su Rubinoff) for chopping garden vegetables or our own mangels to feed the sheep. We are in the middle of preparing to dye our new snack napkins with plants from the field and garden, such as onion skin and red cosmos flower petals.

In addition to cultivating plants, we gather wild edible gifts from nature. Every year we keep a close watch on a local chestnut tree, hoping to savor that delightful taste of autumn. This year we had a bumper crop of black walnuts.* After spending a few days pounding the nuts out of the husks, we made a large cauldron of brown dye, fastened marbles and gems into a white tablecloth with rubber bands, and carried it ceremoniously to the dye pot. We saved all of the nuts, cured, cracked them and enjoyed baking and eating black walnut cookies.

In the winter and spring, we work with the wool from our sheep. While spinning with a drop spindle is a favorite task for the teacher during outside playtime, last year each child had the opportunity to spin a bracelet out of our sheep's wool, by rolling a primitive stick spindle on their legs. Afterwards, we gathered mugwort, nettle (in an effort to befriend a plant that we otherwise try to avoid), and goldenrod for dyeing their creations. As a group project, we wove a small sheepswool rug, with natural and black-walnut-dyed wool on a peg loom, which the children joyously felted with their feet in warm soap bubbles.

At the end of winter, our local "grandfather nature,"

Mr. Ed Bieber, helps us tap four maple trees. If the sun rays are warm enough on tapping day, we all catch "a taste of spring" dripping from the sap spout. Pulling a wagon from tree to tree, our class gathers the sap over the course of a few weeks. With a lot of work behind the scenes, the sap is boiled into syrup for our own pancakes and our annual treat of maple candy made on snow.

In addition to the plant life of the farm, the chickens, sheep, and calves, as well as the wild turkeys, ducks, hawks, turtles, earthworms, garden insects, the occasional fox-spotting, and our own rabbit are a special part of our lives. Gathering eggs, catching and holding chickens, brushing calves, and caring for the sheep and our rabbit are part of life in the kindergarten.

Around Valentine's Day, we celebrate the wedding day of the birds by taking bits of yarn gathered from fingerknitting projects through the year and hanging them in the garden for the birds to have something soft for building their nests, and bringing them something good to eat, like valentine-shaped birdseed cakes.

Some of our favorite days are spent in the woods, building, making woodland dolls, and creating bark boats to sail in the pond. In autumn, we each find a favorite stick, peel it with a vegetable peeler, rasp and sand it, and polish it with a homemade beeswax-olive oil blend, to carry our lanterns at Martinmas. We make our lanterns with the help of our older neighbors at the Fellowship Community. Several times a year we go to their main house to make festival crafts together.

Creating an environment which allows mother nature to work with the higher nature of the child offers opportunities to strengthen the will and the lower senses, as seeds are planted for a life-long love of the earth, the kingdoms of nature, the seasons, and the cycle of life. The future of the earth will benefit from those who have been given this gift in their early childhood. ♦

* Please note that working with both black walnuts and gourds requires safety precautions.

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From Our Gentlemen Colleagues

— Lincoln Kinnicutt, Tim Bennett, Joe Robertson

In anticipation of this issue, a request was sent out to some male kindergarten colleagues to describe activities they are bringing into their classes. Below are some “bits and pieces” that have come in response. They give a surprising and delightful glimpse into the range of what the “gents” are doing.

Lincoln Kinnicutt **Kindergarten teacher** **Potomac Crescent Waldorf School,** **Alexandria, VA**

We had been doing Nancy Foster’s woodcutter circle, which I modified so the woodcutter was using a two-person saw. This change was made in part because in the past when we had gestured using an axe, the children (boys) would quickly start chopping each other. We also have a large bow saw, which we use for cutting wood outside, and I wanted to use that familiar image. In circle the children would pair up and hold hands, sitting down with their feet together, and go back and forth “cutting.” When we started cutting wood outside, I realized that the sawhorse I had made was too small. So instead of standing to cut, we would have to sit just like in the circle, using the bow saw as a two-person saw.

After that circle we did a gnome circle with images such as hacking rocks. A parent gave me a box of geodes which we were able to hack open when we were outside, just like in the circle.

Neither of these things is particularly practical (we do use the wood at the school bonfire), as in “useful,” but they did end up being real activities which were mirrored in gesture in our circles.

Tim Bennett **Kindergarten teacher** **Seattle Waldorf School, Seattle, WA**

Tim’s class spends a large portion of each morning as an “outdoor kindergarten.” There is a large park nearby that the class journeys to each day where they have free unstructured movement and the kinds of climbing and scrambling activities most kindergartens can

only dream about. Yet the “practical work” that has arisen from these outings is a surprise.

Some years ago Tim had seen a hand-sewn winter cap made out of triangular shapes cut from old thrift-store wool sweaters that had been felted in the washer and dryer. The pieces were sewn together with blanket stitch, using brightly colored knitting yarn. On their way to the park this winter, they commonly saw homeless people. So their practical work has been to sew caps for their hatless, homeless neighbors.

Joe Robertson **Parent/Child class teacher** **Rudolf Steiner School, New York City**

Joe guides classes of 12 to 14 children, 25 months to 43 months old, who attend with one or both parents (or grandparents or a caregiver. . . and sometimes the whole lot). The classes are 90 minutes in length with free play, a short circle, hand washing, snack, and a short puppet story. Most of the activities listed below occur during the free play time, which is about the first 45 minutes.

We iron silks and napkins for the upstairs kindergarten, fold napkins, wash and polish apples, cut apple into slices, knead dough for our rolls. We bake rolls also for one of our nursery rooms. We clean the table and floor when finished. We wash our hands, sand all our well-loved wooden toys, sweep, and put away our things. This year we sawed and sanded nature blocks. This is all so simple and ordinary.

It is an amazing journey to dedicate oneself to teaching young children. “Teach” seems to be such an ill-fitting verb. We do not sit them down to learn letters and numbers; we do not review colors and shapes by name until the children

can identify and repeat them back to us—all routines that are quite common in most American pre-schools today. In Waldorf early childhood programs the most important lesson we have to offer is who we are as worthy human beings and that the work we do is nourishing to the children in our care. In early childhood and in the majority of my work with parent-child classes, the main lesson is always what I bring of myself each day. Each year that I am in the classes it becomes more and more apparent that what the children need are jobs that fold seamlessly into the morning we are living. It is the simple rule in the form of a question: *Is what we are doing needed?*

We make oatmeal and bake rolls because we need to eat. We iron because our silks and clothes are wrinkled. We sand the boat because it has splintered, rough patches. We cut apples because often we get a bit hungry before our group snack. We sweep the floors when we have dirtied our floor with flour or wood dust. I get out the screwdriver and repair the cabinet door if it falls loose. When the chairs need washing, we will wash them.

There was one job this year that I am not certain met my criterion of really being needed. The two- and barely three-year-olds gathered to watch me saw small limbs and then sand the cut rounds to make a little basket of play wood. Though the children did need something bigger,

both in gesture and effort to take in for themselves, we did not need any more wood pieces. We had plenty. But at the suggestion and encouragement of a colleague, I chose to go ahead and use the wood table and see how it went.

I sang a little inchworm song to find just the spot to cut. My concentration heightened without much effort once I held the large and very sharp saw at the ready. But I joyfully made a clear action on purpose and sawed away. I realized as I observed the children flock over and live into this job, the nature of the two- and early-three-year-old is still so timeless; each moment has the purpose we give it with our inner life and connection, even if it is a bit out of context to our defined morning.

The quality of physical work children witness adults doing in the world and home has diminished rapidly in our technological age. It is the loveliest gift for the children when we have given great thought and heart to what we do for them and around them, to assure that what we choose to do in our rooms will nourish them in lasting ways. It is my experience that nothing can matter more to the children, ourselves and the other adults in the room than the way we take our time. A peaceful, steady pace and the permission to finish our job un-rushed nourish a soul deeply with a beauty and strength that is without words. ♦



Carrying wood from the forest. Photo courtesy of Su Rubinoff

Working with Wood

— Su Rubinoff

The Carpenter pounds with one hammer, one hammer, one hammer

The Carpenter pounds with one hammer and then she pounds with two.

The Carpenter pounds with two hammers, two hammers, two hammers

The Carpenter pounds with two hammers and then she pounds with three. . . —A traditional circle activity

Woodworking connects one with nature, and it is a magical process to use one's hands and imagination to create something from what appears to be just a piece of wood. It is very exciting and empowering for adults as well as children. I feel it is important to share what we love, and I love wood: the beauty and function of trees, finding pieces of wood, feeling wood, seeing the different patterns and grains, repairing wooden toys, and more.

As early childhood educators, we are so good at doing practical work inside in order for the children to inwardly and outwardly imitate. But sometimes when we are outside, it is a little more difficult. Thus, I always have something in my pocket that needs sanding. In the beginning of the school year, there is always something to refurbish, such as the wooden plates, cups, play clips, and more. Since children learn from imitation, many often want to sand, as well, so they share in the work and develop a strong desire to transform something.

We are very fortunate to have our school on twenty-eight acres with a brook and untouched forest. Yet even if you live in a city, there are places you can explore to find wood treasures. Often while we are walking or playing in the forest, we will find nice pieces of wood that we bring back to our classroom to use in play. This year we have been searching for long branches of wood to make our compost bins with. These bins are four feet wide by four feet long and five feet high and they are made of layered branches (like a log cabin house). We use our saw as I sing a song, "back and forth, back and forth, saw our wood today,"

and then slowly build our bins. This is a wonderful purposeful activity. We also saw different-sized pieces, sand and then polish them, and use them for play, stories, in "the store," and so on.

Every Chanukah, we find a small log or branch in the forest and with our hand drill we drill nine holes for the special Chanukah candles that we will light as we sing our blessing. I love when the thread of light begins at Martinmas and then weaves its way through Advent and then Chanukah. For gifts for the parents at this time of year, we always make something out of wood, whether it is a cutting board, a key holder rack, coat rack, or a candle holder. Our oldest children, The Elderberries, will have the privilege of sawing the edges of their wood while the Dewberries are often waiting for the sawdust to use in the "kitchen" or will gather the cut triangle wood pieces.

My colleague's class cut down a trunk of cedar and then sawed it into two-inch slices. Her husband then cut out the heart, the fragrant internal part of the wood, into a heart shape. She attached a big piece of sandpaper to a stump with tacks and the children sanded the hearts for Valentine's Day.

It is important to remember that it is not necessarily the end product that we are focusing on but the process, from beginning to end. The excited anticipation the children had of being able to switch from a rough sandpaper to a finer grade was incredible. There is something so powerful in seeing a branch turn into a menorah or a cutting board be created from a mere board. The children are always so proud of what they have accomplished because they know that it took many days of hard work.

Without needing to say too much, it is also important to use real tools correctly and safely.

Not only do the children develop a respect and appreciation for working with wood and items made out of wood, but this activity is very therapeutic. It combines sensory experiences with developing eye-hand coordination, dexterity and fine motor skills, and it is a beginning in their "will" development.

*For those who will to work
 With those who guide the future of mankind,
 Bring forth spirit potentials within yourselves
 And so achieve the power to awaken
 Dormant faculties in others.
 Cultivate the seed kernels,
 Foster the forces of development,
 Recognize that which is of the future.*
 —Rudolf Steiner

Toolbox Essentials

- Hammer (under 12 oz. in weight), crosscut saw (12-14 inches long), coping saw, square, measuring tape, screwdriver with different bits, rasp, glue, screws and nails, clamps, hand drill and bits
- Sandpaper: sandpaper is graded as medium, or numbers 60, 80, and 100. Fine sandpaper numbers are 150, 180, and very fine 220, 240, and 280. Medium is usually used for the first sanding, fine for smoother results and very fine for smoothing finishes between coats.
- Work apron
- First aid kit with peroxide, band aids, gauze, ointment (calendula and antibiotic)
- Wood: the two basic categories of wood used most often in woodworking projects are hardwood and softwood. Hardwood is more durable and less prone to dents and scratches; it is also more expensive. It will finish to a better advantage, but is harder for chil-

dren to saw. Soft woods, like pine, bass, birch, cedar, fir, spruce are more prone to dents and scratches but easier for children to use.

Finishes:

- Mineral oil: a light coating of mineral oil, rubbed into well-sanded wood, provides an easy-to-apply and relatively durable finish. Apply several coats of oil wiping away the excess. A warm room or warm oil will help penetration. This does need to be reapplied frequently.
- Beeswax: Put the finish on the wood with a paint brush or cloth. Allow the finish to remain on the wood for 30 minutes. Use a clean, soft cloth to wipe any remaining finish from the wood. Buff using the cloth and following the grain. This will help the finish soak deep into the wood. Reapply as many coats as desired, waiting at least 24 hours between coats. A simple beeswax formula is five parts mineral oil to four parts beeswax, adjusting the mixture for a harder or softer cream. Just melt the two together.

Remember to start simply until you feel confident. Your joy will be imitated both internally and externally by the children in your care. ♦

Su Rubinoff is an early childhood teacher and faculty chair at Meadowbrook Waldorf School in West Kingston, Rhode Island.



Photo courtesy of Su Rubinoff

A Rolling Pin's Journey Home

— Anke Scheinfeld

The daily joy of purposeful work in our early childhood classrooms is revealed in the eager bright eyes of our children as they enthusiastically engage in “real work.” It is most satisfying for child and teacher to work together, keeping rooms neat and clean, repairing broken toys and classroom items, preparing shared meals, setting and cleaning tables. We create our own world, our own “gardens” and “kingdoms.” Together we take responsibility and feel deep satisfaction and pride for work well done.

How can we make our work together ever more enriching, so that it envelops and nourishes our children beyond the classroom? This question becomes even more paramount in an urban environment where life for all can easily become disconnected. I would like to share a simple woodwork project that naturally flourished, weaving its way lovingly from the classroom into the home, enriching both.

During an exchange of ideas on the subject of “real work” in the classroom, a colleague suggested making rolling pins from poplar dowels. Woodwork is a treasured activity in our mixed-age kindergarten. We enjoy using our strength and skill to saw thick branches gathered from Central Park. We next each sand a segment of wood until it is so smooth that delicate year rings are magically revealed. Creating something out of wood that could be used in the kitchen was an exciting prospect.

Work began in autumn. We obtained several five-foot-long and 1.5-inch-thick poplar dowels. Their arrival in class was met with much curiosity. We sawed them into ten-inch segments. As we usually work with wood gathered in the park, the long, evenly-shaped poplar dowels evinced a very different mood. The older boys were soon sharing knowledge of the major construction projects they pass daily in their Manhattan neighborhoods. The fledgling architects and engineers began in earnest to build tall apartment buildings using play stands, planks, large blocks, chairs and tables.

We then began the will-shaping, physically chal-

lenging work of sanding the dowels. The children were familiar with the process from prior woodwork. As we used first rough and then fine sandpaper, the pieces gradually became smooth. Sanding the ends of the dowels was especially satisfying. Working with vigor, the children held the dowel in one hand, keeping the sanding paper in place on the table with the other. Then we worked with fine sandpaper, rounding edges and smoothing the long sides of the rolling pin. These tasks required a summoning of strength, will and perseverance. The children would often approach the

— *It is most satisfying for child and teacher to work together. . . We create our own world, our own “gardens” and “kingdoms.”*

teacher while rubbing their piece of wood against a rosy cheek, inquiring “Is it smooth enough?” The answer of “Just a little more” was met with further effort to make it smooth all around.

During the entire process the children were unaware of the purpose of their evolving creation. This engaged their imaginations as many answers bubbled to the surface: a block, tree, trunk, sword. . . As Advent had arrived, it was time to bake our ritual cookies. On this special day we rolled the cookie dough not only using the big old rolling pin but also our new little ones. A moment of joyous revelation: We had made our very own rolling pins!

How could this wonderful moment be best shared with our parents and imprinted in the loving memories of our children? How could the rolling pins journey home and find their place in the kitchens and daily lives of our families? Could they avoid the toy cradle and gathering dust?

The theme of practical work in the kindergarten and at home is so important for the development of the young child and a healthy home environment. One of our central responsibilities is to help parents experi-

ence and understand the significance of what we do in our early childhood classrooms. Our success rests on the fulfillment of this responsibility. With this in mind I decided to devote an upcoming parent evening to our newly forged rolling pins. We began our parent evening by baking together in the same way we bake with our children in the morning. Measuring ingredients, kneading and then rolling dough with their child's own rolling pin, cutting out cookies of different shapes, and finally baking them created a warm, home-like atmosphere. Wonderful conversations arose, often centering on childhood memories recalled by a room filled with the sweet smell of home baked treats. During the following study and discussion these initial threads were taken up and woven into an enriched tapestry.

When the children took their rolling pin and a little metal star cookie cutter home the next day, they took

with them the joy of our work in the kindergarten and the happy anticipation of using their very own rolling pin at home. The parents were well prepared, and many homes were filled with the delightful smell of cookies baking in the oven and the nurturing warmth arising from families lovingly engaging in practical work on a cold winter afternoon. ♦

Dr. Anke Scheinfeld *has been an early childhood educator at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City for the last eight years, where she teaches in the mixed-age kindergarten. Prior to teaching, Anke worked as a physician and researcher in Germany and in the USA. She received her Masters in Early Childhood Waldorf Education from Sunbridge College. Anke's main interest is in working to align the healing impulse of Waldorf education with preventive medicine to best serve students and the school community.*



Teatime in a Russian kindergarten. Photo courtesy of Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes (see report on page 27).

Potato Pogatcha Recipe

— Joli Kiss

Here is a traditional Hungarian recipe to use with your rolling pins. It comes from the new WECAN publication For the Children of the World: Stories and Recipes from the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education, and was submitted by Joli Kiss, the IASWECE Council representative for Hungary. Proceeds from the sale of this book benefit IASWECE's work on behalf of children around the world.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups (2 lb/1000 g) all-purpose (wheat) flour
- 2 cups (1 lb/500 g) wholegrain rye flour
- 2/3 oz (20 g) yeast
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 4–6 cups (32–48 fl oz/1–1.5 l) lukewarm milk or water
- 2–3 tsp sea salt
- 2–3 potatoes, peeled, diced, cooked, mashed and cooled
- 1/2 lb (200 g) unsalted butter, warmed, melted and cooled
- 2/3 cup (5 oz/155 g) shredded cheese, cheddar type

To Make:

Pour 1 cup (2.5 dl) of the milk or water and honey into a bowl, and stir to dissolve the honey.

Sprinkle the yeast over the top of the liquid, and add 2 Tbsp wheat flour.

Stir until smooth, cover with dishcloth and let stand in a warm place until the yeast bubbles and forms a creamy layer, about 15–20 minutes.

Grease the baking sheets, melt butter, shred cheese.

Place the rye flour in a large bowl. Sift the white flour on top and mix the flours with your hands. Create a well in the center, and pour in the yeast mixture.

Add the mashed potato, salt and almost 4 cups (1 liter) of milk or water. Mix together and knead with your hands.

When the mixture begins form a dough, add the melted but not too warm butter. Add milk or water if necessary and knead for 5–6 minutes to form a smooth and springy dough.

Form the dough into a ball, and throw it onto a well-floured surface three times. Knead for 2–3 minutes, then separate into little balls.

Sift flour on the tables or desks in front of the children. Each of them gets a dough ball. They knead the dough well, then with little rolling pins they can roll out each

ball until it is about 1 inch (2.5 cm) thick.

Using a knife the children can score the dough horizontally, then vertically to make a grid of 1/4–1/5 inch squares. Flour the edge of 2- to 4-inch round cutters or glasses and have the children cut out rounds from the dough. Spread the shredded cheese on top of the rounds.

Place the pogatchas on the greased baking sheets, leaving about 1 inch (2.5 cm) between them. Bake the pogatchas in a 400°F (200°C) preheated oven for 20–25 minutes or until they turn light golden brown. ♦



Photo courtesy of Joli Kiss

The Little Seed

— Ananda Eluf

This delightful spring story is also excerpted from For the Children of the World (see previous page). It was submitted by Silvia Jensen, the IASWECE Council representative for Brazil, and translated by Louise deForest. The illustration is by Gudrid Malmsten from Sweden.

There was once a little seed that fell from a boy's hand. The little seed looked upon the earth and saw so many beautiful things that she began to feel sad that she was only a very little seed. She longed to be like the cherries hanging above her or a sweet and juicy orange and not just a little seed.

She looked up at the sky and saw a flock of birds flying and playing in the sky, turning somersaults in the air, and she imagined how good it would be to be a bird, to have wings, to FLY!

But she was only a very small seed.

She looked to one side and saw a lovely rose. "How full of life it is! I would like to be like that—so bright!"

But she was just a very small seed. She was tired of being such a small seed, so small that no one even saw her.

She looked to the other side and saw a blue butterfly. It had such light, airy wings with such beautiful designs, and she thought, "I would also like to be a butterfly, or at least to have such special wings. . . then everyone would see me!" But it would be strange for a little seed to have wings. . .

And she became sad, and sadder and sadder—so sad that she began to sink down and down.

And she sank into the earth. She felt good down in the warm earth.

It rained.

And it was sunny.

And suddenly a little green shoot came up out of the earth.

More rain.

And more sun.

And the shoot began to grow! She felt very happy to know that a little seed could change into a lovely little plant!

More rain. And more sun.

She continued to grow and to grow, until one day she looked at herself and saw that she was now a beautiful tree covered with delicious cherries.

All the birds flew to her and settled in her branches to sing and to make their nests. The most beautiful butterflies came and danced around her leaves.

The animals of the fields and woods came to sleep in her cool shade, but she was happiest when the boys and girls climbed her branches to gather cherries and took them home to eat.

A little boy climbed the tree. He picked a cherry and he ate it. And a little seed fell from his hand. . .



The Merry Month of May

— Laurie Clark

Bracelets that look like miniature maypoles can be made with the children before doing this circle. A round form can be made from paper twists, pipe cleaners or other material that fits over the child's hand. Streamers of various bright colors of crepe paper can be cut into thin strips and tied onto the bracelet. This is a fun way for the children to practice tying. This decorative bracelet can be worn during the May Day dances to make them festive. This circle gives the opportunity to whistle, something the children love to practice. A small felted robin bird can also join this circle.

On May Day we dance
On May Day we sing
For this is the day
We welcome the spring

Turn round

*Crouch down
Jump up to standing position
Clap on the word "spring"*

Song

D G G G A B A B

It is the merry month of May

B D' D' B B A B A

Oh happy, happy is this day

D G G G A B A B

So let us skip and skip and play (*Repeat*)

B D' D' B B A

then clap our hands and shout, hurray!

Form a circle and walk around

Continue walking round

Skip or use other movements such as, tiptoe, run, hop

Clap, jump and shout (can substitute whisper) hurray!

Follow indicated movements while speaking:

Little Kings and Queens of May

Listen to me on this very fine day

Our tiny friends like to celebrate too

I will tell you what we shall do

On our magic flute we shall play

Have our little friends come from far away

A little more on our magic flute we will play

Now we will put our magic flutes away

And see who comes to join us on this May Day

Hands form a ring on head like a crown

Hand near ear

*Pretend "flute" comes out of pocket and whistle as
fingers go up and down "flute"*

Repeat flute playing

Here come Mister and Mrs. Grasshopper

They jump as high as they can!

They love coming to May Day Land!

(Repeat)

Jump up one time from a crouching position

The roly poly bugs are shy
and roll up into a ball
They listen to the flute
but will do nothing else at all!
(Repeat)

Tuck knees to chest and raise head up to knees

Mr. and Mrs. Beetle come
with their baby beetles to May Day
They crawl and crawl along
as mother beetle does say,
“Come along, baby beetles, come this way.”
(Repeat)

Crawling

The ladybugs all come together
and polish each other’s backs,
They are all dotted and red.
“We want to look our best on May Day,”
they all said.
(Repeat)

*Sitting in a circle, children gently rub
each other’s backs in a “polishing” motion*

All of our little friends have come
to listen to the band
Marching, marching in a parade
through the land
Marching, marching here we go
Marching along, listen to our song.

*Rhythm instruments can be passed out to the
children and they can be in a “parade,”
marching around the room or through
the hallway.*

Now our little maypoles we will pass around
We will pass them round without a sound.

*Teacher takes the maypole bracelets out of a basket
that has been covered with a spring colored silk.
They can be passed round the circle from child to
child until everyone has one and is ready to play the
maypole game.*

Now the May Day Circles fly round and round
Above our heads then near the ground
Above our head, then near the ground
the May colors fly round and round
Now we spin them round and round
Above our head then near the ground
Now we give them a shake, shake, shake
A whooshing sound they do make
Now they glide from side to side
From side to side they do glide
Then, rainbow snakes, on the ground we’ll make
Slithering, slithering, so many snakes!
Now they go round and round us, there they go
Not too fast and not too slow
In front and in back of us they go
Not too fast and not too slow
Now throw the maypole gently in the air
But not too high, then catch them

*Follow the movements that are indicated
Each of the movements can be repeated*

See the rainbow colors fly!
Now up and down they fly,
like a bird with colored wings
Then into the basket they return—
what else will this May Day bring?

But who is this coming along?
It is robin redbreast singing his spring song.
He flies around and lands in our hands
We will make a nest
So Robin can take a rest
Listen to dear Robin sing
May Day songs to welcome the spring!

Now robin flies away
but we will lie down to rest
After celebrating May Day,
it has been the very best.

A felted robin or other little bird is gently passed along the circle from child to child as they put both their hands together like a little nest. Whistling bird songs can be made as the bird is passed round.

The children lie down and rest

Teacher can sing a lullaby, or play the lyre or the glockenspiel while the children rest.

An Explanation of the Movement Activities in *The Merry Month of May*

This circle adventure includes potential for many different developmental movement possibilities.

Proprioception or the sense of self-movement is experienced through the body's position. The contracting and stretching of muscles and the compression of the joints gives signals to the brain to obtain the correct muscle tension for certain tasks and positions the body correctly. For example, if a ball is being thrown and is about to hit the head, then the signal is sent to immediately duck down to avoid the collision.

Body geography is another expression of the sense of self-movement. Going from a crouched position to jumping up to one's feet while clapping hands at the same time gives an opportunity to strengthen this sense. This is experienced in the first poem of the circle, "On May Day we dance." Other movements in the circle that strengthen this sense include skipping, tiptoe, hopping, jumping, and so on.

Vestibular movement or the sense of balance has its organ in the semicircular canals in the inner ear. Sally Goddard Blythe clearly describes this sense in her book, *The Genius of Natural Childhood*: "Each of the senses comprises specialized receptors sensitive to a specific range of movement frequencies (speed of motion). The balance mechanism for example re-

sponds particularly to slow, turning (rotation) or tilting movements and to movement that follows a linear direction (up and down or forward and back). The balance mechanism is most sensitive when movement starts, stops or when there is a variation in speed or direction." Balancing on one foot by hopping and using independent sides of movement by skipping both strengthen this system. Opportunities to stimulate this sense include moving in a circle together, turning

~ *Movement has a starting and an ending point, as do many things in life*

around individually (as in the first poem), and jumping up one time from a crouching position with Mr. and Mrs. Grasshopper.

This one-time movement, done just as the words "jump as high as they can!" are being spoken, also helps the children to practice impulse control. Movement has a starting and an ending point, as do many things in life, and this is a good way to experience that fact. The child experiences gaining impulse control through beginning and ending a gross motor movement. Later in life, this will become an inward ability to take an impression in from the outside world and bring it to balance in one's soul life. Coming to rest at the end of the circle brings practice of the stillness that will develop and later come to maturity.

The sense of touch is experienced through holding hands with one another, clapping hands, crawling with knees and palms touching the floor, and holding the soft felted bird while gently passing it on to the next child. The Ladybug poem gives the opportunity for the children to touch one another in a soothing and acceptable way. So often, it seems, we are telling the children to be gentle with touching (or not to hit, pinch or push). “Polishing” one another on the back allows the children to touch each other with a pleasant sensation that releases oxytocin, a hormone that brings a sense of calm and well-being. It is worthwhile to find a place in each circle where this acceptable touch is encouraged and experienced. More information about this can be found in the book *The Oxytocin Factor* by Kerstin Uvnas Moberg.

Immature movement patterns or infantile reflexes integrate the nervous system and are mostly matured in the first year of life. Often, they are not fully integrated for various reasons and exercises can be done to fully integrate them. Doing the movements of the roly-poly bugs and crawling with Mr. and Mrs. Beetle help to integrate and strengthen these reflexes. More information about these reflexes can be found in books by A. Jean Ayers and Sally Goddard Blythe.

The May Day Bracelet game provides the experience of directionality by naming the direction (round and round, side to side, up and down, in front and in back) while moving the streaming ribbons of the bracelet. We are speaking, moving and naming the three planes of space with a delightful imagination. Karl König describes the importance of experiencing the three planes of space in his book *Being Human*, where he speaks of the polarities that integrate and orient the human being in these three dimensions. “For someone who studies the human being, front and back separate the two worlds we call day and night. Up and down are two totally different worlds that we can call lightness and heaviness or buoyancy and gravity. These things are of the greatest importance.” Side-to-side motion, the harmonious movement of right and left, gives the opportunity of crossing the vertical midline. Dominance of one side or the other eventually (hopefully) occurs and gives the human being the ultimate experience of oneself as an individuality.

Potent imaginations that guide the movements are vital to engage the young child in the appropriate developmental approach. Through these imaginations and movements, the children are given the opportunity to feel and experience themselves “at home” in their bodies. When the child is able to establish a strong

physical foundation and orientation in space, it opens the way for integrating into the world with others in a healthy and balanced way later in life. Hopefully, this circle adventure and others like it will bring the children in our care a sense of well-being and a warm welcome into life. ♦

References

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- König, Karl. *Being Human*. Anthroposophic Press, 1989.

Laurie Clark has been a Waldorf kindergarten teacher for over 25 years and currently works at the Denver Waldorf School. She is also a conference presenter, a teacher trainer, and a mentor. She has coauthored a book of original “movement journeys” with Nancy Blanning entitled *Movement Journeys and Circle Adventures* (available from WECAN).



A scene from Russia. Photo courtesy of Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes

Three Russian Kindergartens

— Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes

The kindergartens our small group of four from ISIS Cultural Outreach International visited in central Russia this past summer started around 1989, when glasnost had opened Russia's doors to the world in the midst of the chaos ensuing from perestroika.

At our first stop in Irkutsk in Siberia, near Lake Baikal and the border of Russia and Mongolia, German and Scandinavian Waldorf educators came and worked first with mothers of children with special needs and then with those wanting a Waldorf school. The kindergarten is in an old section of town with great charm but also many challenges, including drafty buildings, and until recently a dependence on a well on the street from which water had to be hauled to the kindergarten on a sled, even in bitter winter weather. The Anchorage Waldorf School will continue to help raise money to winterize another set of windows to hold the heat from the large, centrally located masonry stove in the nap room with its bunks for the children who stay all day.

When our group visited, a room full of earnest women of varied ages gathered around the kindergarten's low tea table to discuss issues and needs and to enjoy the beautifully prepared, nourishing snacks. We felt very much at home in the carefully crafted spaces of their kindergarten. We heard much that was positive for the future: parents have been helping to beautifully renovate an upper story so that the kindergarten program can expand. But then we learned that they will only be renting the new space, not buying it, as hoped, along with an expanded wild play area. They had raised the money to buy, but by the time the "proper paperwork" was presented to the government, the opportunity to buy had passed. This story of forever seeming to file the "wrong paperwork" was repeated over and over at the different centers. We were impressed how this evolving group of women managed to keep going.

Our second stop was in Yekaterinburg, the third largest city in Russia. There we saw photos of the lovely Waldorf festivals that had been celebrated in

the past at a school no longer in existence. The photos brought back memories of festivals we'd each participated in back home. That school and others did not survive the challenge of the Russian Orthodox church taking over the buildings, and outright opposition to the development of Waldorf schools. We heard a fierce, lone woman tell us about how she continues a small, unlicensed kindergarten in her small apartment, carrying the thread forward, longing for a place in the country where the children could play in nature, a situation not easily found in such a large city.

Kirov was the third stop of our ISIS journey. This time, Nina, a short, robust woman last visited by ISIS about ten years ago, directs a State "Waldorf" kindergarten, bearing the numbered sign of the many State kindergartens on its exterior. Inside, 67 children spend their long days in three beautiful classrooms. Nina, an anthroposophist, describes that the essence of a Waldorf kindergarten is in "how" things are done and how the children are kept active.

A harvest festival had just been celebrated before our visit, and vegetables were still laid out on beautifully draped tables. Elsewhere pink dominated; the filmy, transparent materials used might be synthetic, but the effect was still there. On the shelves were row on row of handmade animals, perhaps dating back to visits by Monica Gold and the early impulse of ISIS to bring toys and dolls made with love, building peace heart to heart.

The eurythmist among us adapted her offering to better meet those unfamiliar with the art, and the kindergarten provided knit balls for the development of a social exercise. The design of the balls was familiar, but the balls were made of synthetic material and of harsher colors, and stuffed with plastic. It is hard for even a kindergarten that is not struggling to find natural materials to replace toys.

We were immersed in warmth by the teachers at this kindergarten and at the struggling Waldorf school. We may have been somewhat repelled by the institutional kitchen and an approach to nutrition dat-

ing back decades, but the singing and line dancing that arose spontaneously to involve us all after our anthroposophic workshops provided a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Unlike in Irkutsk where a diverse group of individuals each seemed deeply involved in decision making, here it was Nina whose strong will forms the school, who trains the teachers and helpers, and probably faces off any challenges from authorities on what she regards as essential.

We felt the contrast between her kindergarten, where the teachers were paid, and the situation of the Waldorf school teachers in Kirov, who spent their tuition money to make their building habitable after it had been turned over to them in a trashed condition, minus doors, radiators, and toilets. Those teachers spent their summer making it beautiful, only to be told they had filed the “wrong paperwork” and could not hold classes there until this was fixed. Thus, they must pay rent for both their own building and for use of space at the State school until the problem is rectified. Gathered around the kindergarten tea table, we could feel the weary, but brave unity of purpose, in a group that has faced repeated challenges.

Later, still in Kirov, we visited a private Waldorf kindergarten with twelve children, where the lead teacher had left the State “Waldorf” kindergarten on friendly terms five years ago, and converted an apartment in an old, disreputable-looking building into a place of peace and beauty. I was glad that we had gone to the State kindergarten first because the contrasts would have made what was missing at the State school stick out. Here was the quiet enclosure, the safe place for early childhood to slowly unfold. This was not part of an institution. Here, the aesthetic thoughtfulness in each element of our shared meal was experienced.

Around glasnost Russia had many visitors, who brought funds and training to start Waldorf-based initiatives. Now there is the tendency to think that the great need has ceased. At least in Kirov, which comparatively speaking is close to western Europe, just thirteen hours by train from Moscow, there still seems to be a need for experienced Waldorf kindergarten teachers to model the quiet, subtle background fundamentals that underlie festivals and puppet plays, as well as a love of natural materials, and use of fresh produce. The further challenge is that natural materials and fresh produce are difficult to obtain and, where available, they are not cheap given the low incomes of most Russians. ♦

Future Travel and Support

If you or your kindergarten are interested in becoming a sister kindergarten with one in central Russia or would like to hear more about ISIS travel plans to return to Russia in July 2013, contact Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes by e-mail at maryplumbmentjes@yahoo.com.

Support is also needed for the Moscow kindergarten training center and to help Russian kindergarten teachers attend a conference next fall—a train ticket to Moscow can cost a month’s wages. You can read about the training course on the IASWECE website under Country Projects at www.iaswece.org/country_projects/around_the_world/former_soviet_union.aspx.

If you are interested, you can send a check made payable to WECAN marked “Russia” to WECAN, 285 Hungry Hollow Road, Spring Valley, New York 10977. For further information, contact Susan Howard at s.howard@iaswece.org.



Photo courtesy of Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes

Celebrating Festivals with Children

by Freya Jaffke (Floris Books, 2011)

In the foreword to this book Freya Jaffke writes of our attitudes to festivals: “Originally established in contexts of ritual worship, where they were considered to be profoundly significant, they have increasingly become mere tradition and routine.” I would go further than this and say that they have become, in many situations, little more than opportunities for making money and encouraging pleasure-seeking as a relief from the humdrum every-day world. But here, Freya Jaffke presents a lively picture of how the Christian cycle of festivals in the northern hemisphere can be reinvigorated and brought to consciousness in a rich and meaningful way. In four short chapters, at the start of each seasonal section, entitled “creating the mood,” she brings out in a marvelous way the essence, distilled from her anthroposophical knowledge, of the time of year and the festivals celebrated within it. An example from one paragraph reads,

The Christmas festival represents the fulfilment of a process that unfolds very quietly through many months. From the full light and warmth of high summer, the soul withdraws increasingly into itself as the light gradually diminishes. The moment of equilibrium between light and dark in autumn is like a threshold over which we pass; and at the darkest time of the year an inner light can be kindled.

Already, I find there is a great depth of meaning that can be drawn out of this passage, or even out of just the first sentence.

In these “creating the mood” chapters, there is material enough to encourage thoughtful study for those interested in the cycle of the year, but Freya Jaffke’s gift is as a kindergarten teacher with a special knowledge of child development focusing on the first seven years. This is an immensely practical book that shows us what we might make of these worn-out festivals when celebrating them with young children. Her genius is in bringing together clear pictures of the inner work of the adult with the practical details of life with young children. This is not another book about seasonal crafts and traditions that might be fun to do, but more about—for example—how cleaning and tidying create the Advent mood, how children can enjoy and find deeply meaningful the simplest of activities, such as polishing apples or planting a few seeds, and what you are really saying

to a child if you use sticky tape to wrap parcels.

There are some wonderful poems and verses for adults to contemplate, but I would like to have seen some colored photos. The photos in previous books from this author published by Floris have been an important part of the effectiveness of those books and festival celebrations certainly would have lent themselves to lovely photos.

An early short chapter on the nature table, that simple way of bringing a little of the outdoors in with a seasonal display in the house, shows how to bring the seasons and the festivals together in a home or a kindergarten, and immediately brings the opportunity to emphasize how imitation is the key to young children’s learning. Caring for the nature table together is a significant activity for adults and children. There is plenty in this book for parents about celebrating festivals at home, as well as the general comments on just what is appropriate for children under seven that appear throughout the book. We are reminded that there is so much that can better be left until the children are older, both in the experiences that we offer and in the way we communicate with them.

Time and again Freya Jaffke reminds us that it is our actions that speak to the children and that our outer actions are imbued by our inner work. We are “providing an important foundation for their mature relationship with these festivals, when they can consider their underlying meaning” (p. 89). Writing of the Easter festival she gives us the following:

The mighty transformational event that occurred, uniquely, 2,000 years ago at Golgotha, on behalf of humanity, is not easily assessable to us today. We have to make conscious efforts if we are to absorb the mystery of the resurrected God. . . . We can try to take these great events into our soul and deepen them year on year, which will strengthen the relationship to our work with children during Easter and also for all other Christian festivals. For young children who connect with everything through their senses, it’s important that we succeed in imbuing our actions and gestures with what lives in our thoughts and feelings, leading children to an experience, rather than just an explanation, of natural processes. This creates a sound foundation which can later help them to consciously grasp the greatest mysteries and interconnections.

She goes on to give a full description of planting seeds

with young children and how children at different stages of development will respond to the activity. It is the simple symbol, the seed, the decorated egg or the Whitsun dove, that show how nature (the season) and culture (the festival) are brought together through our activity. It is the way in which the adult treats such symbols that really speaks to the child and the activity usually needs few words to accompany it.

I found it enlightening to read her descriptions, in connection with Advent secrets, of the child's journey in developing consciousness from wondering to guessing. This is a very helpful section reflecting her knowledge and understanding of the changing needs of the young child. At the end of the book there is a lovely section on birthdays, including the "heavenly birthday" when we leave this earth and are born again for our life between death and re-birth. Parents and teachers will find her simple explanations of the child's developing understanding of death very helpful. She points out how certainty of the pre-birth picture, which we can build on at every birthday celebration, will lead to a secure certainty, in the child's eyes, of the after-death picture, justifying loss and transforming mourning. And, of course, she reminds us how simple a meaningful birthday celebration for a young child can be. She writes about the support that children find when we offer them "true images" and when these images are met with again each year:

In a quite natural way we can help young children who have recently left the heavenly realms and are awakening more each day within the sensory world, to preserve their connection with the spiritual world. We can tell them about their origins and journey to the earth, thus strengthening what already lives in them. When we clothe these stories in true images, they can echo children's pre-birth experiences, and give them a sense of security here on earth.

This is an extremely useful handbook for kindergarten teachers, giving full descriptions and explanations of all the festivals that she celebrated with her kindergarten children and their parents. I only wish that I had read many things here, such as what she has to say about when to add the Child to the crib scene at Christmas, while I was still working in a kindergarten. In her long experience of working with young children, she has worked out in detail what makes for a successful celebration of a kindergarten festival and, although from time to time she does say that there are different ways of doing things that may suit different circumstances (particularly in the case of the still-

evolving festival of Michaelmas) she is not afraid to tell us exactly what to do. This approach has the blessing of clarity but also the danger that some parents and teachers might find it too dogmatic or, alternatively, might just do it and stop thinking for themselves about how to develop a festival.

This is a wonderful book in the sphere that it addresses. Apart from the sections on Halloween and Thanksgiving (introduced for an American audience, I imagine) all the festivals are part of the Christian cycle and in the seasonal context of central Europe. Indeed, they are often based on the central European traditions, and readers in Britain, for example, may not find a connection to the ways of celebrating "St Nicholas" or "Carnival" in the ways described in the book; and some British readers may miss any reference to the quintessentially English May festival (while finding interesting connections to the "altered consciousness" brought about by midsummer dances mentioned in this book).

Although newly published in English, this book was first published in German in the mid-1990s. I found it interesting to compare it with the recent WECAN publication (2010), *The Seasonal Festivals in Early Childhood: Seeking the universally human*, edited by Nancy Foster. This is a compilation of articles reflecting the struggle to resolve difficult issues between anthroposophy's picture of the Christ impulse as a unique turning point for the whole of mankind, with the needs of early childhood settings catering for families from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, and in regions with other seasonal experiences.

In *Celebrating the Festivals with Children*, on the other hand, the emphasis is only on Christian festivals. For example, the Easter hare is discussed as a symbol of self-sacrifice, but the connections to Buddha hare legends are not made. It is possible that this focus could lead some to reject this book and all its valuable insights into child development. However, I hope that it will be widely read with an awareness and understanding of its limitations because it has so much to offer both parents and those working with young children. ♦

—Jill Tina Taplin

This review was originally printed in New View magazine and Kindling, the UK Journal for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education. We are grateful to both for permission to include it in this issue.

Calendar of Events

Events listed are sponsored by WECAN, our member schools and training centers, and our affiliated organizations, AWSNA and IASWECE. A limited number of other events of wide interest may be included at WECAN's discretion (mainly major conferences). For up-to-date listings and further details, visit www.waldorfearlychildhood.org to view our web calendar. To submit an event, contact publications@waldorfearlychildhood.org.

Non-member organizations and individuals are welcome to submit advertisements of interest to Waldorf early childhood educators. Advertisers are not necessarily endorsed by or affiliated with WECAN.

Personal and Professional Development Courses and Workshops

May 5–6, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Creative Discipline—Reframing Discipline Using Sensory Strategies.** Professional Development Workshop with Jane Swain. Cost \$95, \$50 deposit required to hold space. Contact Bonnie Chamberlin, 603 357-3755, bonnie@sophiashearth.org

May 19–20, Rudolf Steiner College, Fair Oaks, CA: **Bedtimes: Battle or Bliss.** Workshop with Lauren Hickman (Family Ways Parenting Series). Contact Lauren Hickman at earlychildhood@steinercollege.edu or 916-961-8727 ext.117. Website: www.steinercollege.edu

June 15–17, Rudolf Steiner College, Fair Oaks, CA: **The Art of Teaching Preschool** with Lauren Hickman, Karen Viani, and Rosario Villasana. Contact Lauren Hickman at earlychildhood@steinercollege.edu or 916-961-8727 ext.117. Website: www.steinercollege.edu

June 17–23, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Essentials of Waldorf Education.** Weeklong course with Regine Shemroske. Contact Kathleen Morse at 845.425.0055 x18 or summer@sunbridge.edu. Information and registration at www.sunbridge.edu.

June 17–23, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Introduction to Working with Children from Birth to Age Three.** Weeklong course with Susan Weber and Jane Swain of Sophia's Hearth Family Center. Contact Kathleen Morse at 845.425.0055 x18 or summer@sunbridge.edu. Information and registration at www.sunbridge.edu.

June 24–29, Rudolf Steiner College, Fair Oaks, CA: **The Art of Teaching Kindergarten** with Karen Viani. Contact Lauren Hickman at earlychildhood@steinercollege.edu or 916-961-8727 ext.117. Website: www.steinercollege.edu

June 24–30, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Cultivating the Healing Will: Therapeutic Early Childhood Education.** Weeklong course with Nancy

Blanning and Laurie Clark. Contact Kathleen Morse at 845.425.0055 x18 or summer@sunbridge.edu. Information and registration at www.sunbridge.edu.

June 25–29, Bay Area Center for Waldorf Teacher Training, San Rafael, CA: **Rhythms of the Home.** Summer Enrichment Course with Marianne Alsop and Christine Margetic. Contact: 415.479.4400 or info@bacwtt.org

June 25–30, Waldorf School of San Diego: **Strengthening Life Forces through Storytelling and Puppetry.** WISC Summer Course with Holly Koteen-Soulé. Contact 877-394-1444 or visit waldorfteaching.org

July 1–7, Center for Anthroposophy, NH: **Healing Gestures: Renewing Forces for the Early Childhood Teacher, Health-giving Opportunities for the Young Child.** Renewal Course with Laurie Clark and Rena Osmer, Eurythmy with Cezary Ciaglo. For more information: www.centerforanthroposophy.org/admissions/application

July 1–7, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Introduction to Waldorf Early Childhood Education.** Weeklong course with Connie Manson, Lisa Miccio and Patricia Rubano. Contact Kathleen Morse at 845.425.0055 x18 or summer@sunbridge.edu. Information and registration at www.sunbridge.edu.

July 2–6, Sound Circle Center, Seattle, WA: **Therapeutic and Artistic Movement in Early Childhood Education** with Nancy Blanning, Holly Koteen-Soule, Michael D'Aleo, Johanna Steegmans, and Christof Wiechert. Contact: (206) 925-9199 or information@soundcircle.org

July 2–14, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Advanced Studies in Child Development.** Two-week course with Susan Weber, Jane Swain, Nancy Macalaster, Kim Snyder-Vine and Eleanor Winship. Contact Bonnie Chamberlin, 603-357-3755, bonnie@sophiashearth.org, or www.sophiashearth.org for more information.

July 2–7, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Supporting Integration of the Primitive Reflexes in**

... Calendar of Events Continued

Children Birth to Six: Practices and Interventions

with Jane Swain and Kim Snyder-Vine. Contact Bonnie Chamberlin, 603-357-3755, bonnie@sophiashearth.org, or www.sophiashearth.org for more information.

July 8–21, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **The Child and Family in the First Three Years.** Opening session of 13-Month Program. Contact Bonnie Chamberlin, 603-357-3755, bonnie@sophiashearth.org, or www.sophiashearth.org for more information.

July 9–13, Sound Circle Center, Seattle, WA: **Festival Archetypes in Early Childhood: Enlivening the Cycle of the Year** with Holly Koteen-Soule, Johanna Steegmans, Janet Lia and Carol Ann Bärtges. Contact: (206) 925-9199 or information@soundcircle.org

July 9–14, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Child Development I** with Susan Weber, Jane Swain, Kim Snyder-Vine and Eleanor Winship. Contact Bonnie Chamberlin, 603-357-3755, bonnie@sophiashearth.org, or www.sophiashearth.org for more information.

July 9–14, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Building Family and Community Relationships** with Nancy Macalaster, Kim Snyder-Vine and Eleanor Winship. Contact Bonnie Chamberlin, 603-357-3755, bonnie@sophiashearth.org, or www.sophiashearth.org for more information.

July 16–21, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, Keene, NH: **Child Development II** with Susan Weber, Jane Swain, and Nancy Macalaster. Contact Bonnie Chamberlin, 603-357-3755, bonnie@sophiashearth.org, or www.sophiashearth.org for more information.

July 16–21, West Coast Institute, BC, Canada: **Making Music Together.** A Renewal Course for experienced early childhood educators, with Louise deForest and Annette Lampson. Information: 250-748-7791 or info@westcoastinstitute.org.

July 16–21, Highland Hall Waldorf School, CA: **The Courage to Transform Ourselves: the Calling from a New Generation** with Rena Osmer. More info at waldorfteaching.org, 877-394-1444

July 23–27, Highland Hall Waldorf School, Los Angeles, CA: **Threefold Social Ideals & Spirituality in Waldorf Education.** WISC Summer Course with Patrice Maynard. More info at waldorfteaching.org, 877-394-1444

June 30–August 1, Rudolf Steiner College, Fair Oaks, CA: **The Art of Teaching Birth to Three Year Olds** with Lauren Hickman and Simone Demarzi. Contact Lauren Hickman at earlychildhood@steinercollege.edu or 916-961-8727 ext.117. Website: www.steinercollege.edu

Conferences

April 20–22, Calgary Waldorf School, Canada: **Sensing Our Natural World: The Root to Learning.** Conference with Michael D'Aleo. Information: gateways@calgarywaldorf.org or www.calgarywaldorf.org/gateways.html

April 20–22, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Handwork Research Conference.** Keynote Speaker: Dr. Gerald Karnow. Contact information@fibercraftstudio.org or 845-425-2891.

June 23–30, Sacramento Waldorf School, CA: **Answering the Call of the Future.** 2012 AWSNA Summer Conference. www.regonline.com/Register/Checkin.aspx?EventID=1065536

July 2–6, Waldorf School of San Diego, CA: **Our Precious Voice—Healing, Rejuvenating and Protecting the Forces of Singing.** AWME Music Conference with Christiaan Boele. For information see the WISC website, waldorfteaching.org.

July 22–28, Hawthorne Valley, NY: **Creative Collaboration In Puppetry Arts Conference** with Jennifer Aguirre, Janene Ping and Katie Schwerin-White. Information: 518-672-7542 or jping@hawthornevalley.school.org.

August 2–6, Threefold Educational Center, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Forging a Path: Child Development as a Shared Foundation for the Working of Physicians, Teachers, and Therapists.** AAMTA Conference in cooperation with PAAM and the Otto Specht School. Presenters include Dr. Bruno Callagaro and Dr. Gerald Karnow. Contact : 845-352-5020x18 or events@threefold.org or visit: threefold.org/forgingapath

Part-time Training Cycles

June 18–July 7, Sunbridge Institute, Chestnut Ridge, NY: **Sunbridge Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher Education Program begins.** Opening session of 25-month, part-time low-residency program recognized by WECAN and AWSNA. Contact Kathleen Morse at 845.425.0055 x18 or summer@sunbridge.edu. Information and registration at www.sunbridge.edu.

June 24–July 14, Rudolf Steiner Centre Toronto, Canada: **Waldorf Early Childhood Part-Time Teacher Education Program begins.** Opening session of a two-year WECAN-recognized program. Contact Jan Patterson, 905.764.7570, info@rsct.ca, www.rsct.ca for more information.

Other Events

April 19–23, Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota: **AWSNA Service Weekend.** Contact: Anamyn Turowski, aturowski@awsna.org or (518) 672-7878.