

## From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

This issue of *Gateways* continues with the theme from last spring, **Continuity of Development**. When we reflect on our own biographies, we experience that we cannot explain or describe who we are without appreciating our experiences and development from the past. And we don't like to be defined by how we stand in the present moment because we have plans and ideas we want to move toward and manifest for our future. Our adult pace has slowed down from childhood, but we are given generous opportunities to develop and grow both through our own initiative and always by life itself. So it is perplexing when we see descriptions of child development that seem to imply discrete stages instead of a flow of growth through change and destabilization, insecurity with mild chaos, revelation of emerging transformation, consolidation and ripening, and hopefully a resting pause—then on to the next impulse in this rhythm. The outside world tends to give fixed definitions of what is “normal and typical,” categorizing the child into different developmental “bits” that do not acknowledge this continually unfolding, ebbing, flowing, sometimes eddying movement toward becoming an individual human being.

We began our picturing of the emerging, evolving child last issue with an overview by Claus-Peter Röh, which he shared as preparation for the *Transitions in Childhood* international conference which will be held at the Goetheanum the week before Easter 2015 (see page 34 for details). Re-reading this article as an introduction to what you will find in this issue is highly recommended. Other articles from the spring issue described the very young child living between two worlds—the realm of spiritual archetypes and the new physical world and its realities—and the tender, precarious, transitional moment of the three-year-old. The strengthening and consolidating of the four- and five-year-olds characterized the next pulse for the child. A final article considered what to do with the complicated six-year-olds who are staging a new birth of their etheric forces. The continuing pathway from birth to school entry was well prepared by these contributions.

It is gratifying that *Gateways* has been provided with such an abundance of insightful, thoughtful articles that one issue could not do justice to them. Jane Swain, of Sophia's Hearth, shares her expertise as birth-to-three educator and Spacial Dynamics spokesperson in the first article, “Development of the Three Planes of Space.” We saved this article for this issue so it could be printed in its entirety. Jane gives a broader context to the developmental continuum by describing how the human being from birth to age twenty-one finds his or her relationship to the three different planes of space. How we relate to each plane influences our willing, feeling, and thinking capacities for the first twenty-one years of life. We trust that you will find Jane's observations fascinating and enlightening. It is an article that can be shared with full faculties, including the high school teachers, which is what I plan to do in my own school.

Stephen Spitalny, longtime kindergarten teacher and former *Gateways* editor, returns to these pages with “Three Archetypal Styles of Walking.” Steve offers this information as a new window to child observation that he has found valuable. Interestingly, without naming any planes of space, you will see some familiar terms described in Steve's article.

With the *Transitions in Childhood* conference coming towards us, there is much attention on school readiness. There are questions of how we recognize readiness. How do we truly understand what Rudolf Steiner describes as “birth of the etheric?” This can seem elusive to grasp and identify, but it is fundamentally and even critically important that this “birth” be accomplished with each child before starting grade school. How, in the face of mounting societal and governmental pressures that children begin academic schooling at younger ages, can we confidently advocate for the right grade school starting time for each individual child?

Articles by Dr. Claudia McKeen and Ruth Ker address these issues. Both authors are members of the international IASWECE Older Child working group. This is one of the groups helping to plan the *Transitions in Childhood* conference, along with those focusing on

the nodal transitional points from birth to age three, the pivotal nine-year change, and the transition towards adolescence at twelve.

As an anthroposophic physician and school doctor, Dr. McKeen's research correlates growth completion of the skeleton to changes of consciousness and new thinking capacities for the child, giving us a physical picture of the etheric birth. Dr. McKeen's article is reprinted from the new WECAN publication *School Readiness Today* (which includes additional illustrations, such as x-ray images of the example mentioned above). This article can help us understand the etheric birth in a new, concrete way.

Ruth Ker has done much research within the educational field on behalf of all of us. Her article, "Standing for the Children in Our Care," cites significant mainstream research that supports letting children be fully ready to begin grade school learning and not rushing them ahead. Studies confirm that younger is not better. Both short-term and longitudinal studies over decades reveal that older children are more successful in school, have better health, and live longer. Ruth points to the specific studies which we can share with officials and questioning parents. We also thank Ruth for compiling and editing the new WECAN publication *From Kindergarten into the Grades*. This is another sourcebook looking toward the conference, and contains many of Rudolf Steiner's indications about the birth of the etheric.

The other weighty article in this issue comes from my own desk. This article has been growing in me with an increasing sense of urgency over the last year and more. It is useful and important that we learn from mainstream sources about the burgeoning descriptions of challenges and difficulties young children are experiencing in our modern world. Three-letter syndrome classifications and "spectrum" vocabulary are tossed around almost casually in conversation. We need to know what these mean, and to explore what the mainstream picturing can offer to our anthroposophical understanding of the human being. But just as we adults resent being defined or categorized by how we are in a single biographical moment, it is offensive to the child who "is just getting started" and cannot protect or defend himself. "The Child is not a Check List. . ." speaks to this concern.

A book review of *Benjamin Breaking Barriers* is included to give us a vivid and personal picture of one family's journey through their son living with autism. The author/mother is a musician and acquainted with Waldorf education. At a conference on the topic of Autism held at Camphill Beaver Run last March, this

book sold out. Here we may find ideas we can adapt to help many of our children develop in a healthy way as we live in an increasingly isolating, autistically-inclined world.

International news features Waldorf early childhood work in Vietnam. Louise deForest's description of three programs there makes poignant reading for those of us who have memories of the Vietnam conflict. The dedication of the Vietnamese teachers and those who come to help train them gives hope of some healing to the war-torn past. One of WECAN's aims is to carry a consciousness of our international colleagues and programs. Financial donations to any international program can be sent to WECAN and ear-marked to support international work through IASWECE.

And now for the fun. "Farmer Grieder" joins us from the pages of *Tell Me A Story*, as a wild duck gives his peaceful farm some challenges but the end brings a satisfying resolution. We are also able to share with you a lovely cobbler circle composed and compiled by Christina Assirati of the Chicago Waldorf School, with simple but interesting movements that give this familiar theme some new twists of delight. Our cover illustration and selected poems come from Betty Jones, to give us some new artistry. Betty's recently republished *A Child's Seasonal Treasury* is also reviewed in this issue. We hope you will find delight, inspiration, and some fun with her collection. Betty's art work is beautiful, her watercolors a treasury by themselves. This book may also be a good reference for new families wanting to bring Waldorf elements into their home.

What is up next for *Gateways*? We will embrace the theme of last February's Early Childhood Educators conference, **Nurturing the Sense of Life**. This theme will be carried through the 2015 and 2016 conferences as well, so we are able to gather much material from the individual presenters for our thinking consideration. What we especially invite from you are descriptions of how you experience the life sense supported by the activities in your early childhood classes? Through rhythm? Practical work? Artistic activities? Creative play? Longer contributions or small vignettes are all welcomed. Please share your magic moments when something lights up and enlivens your classroom—inside or out. *Gateways* also invites your questions and challenges to supporting the life sense in busy major cities with little opportunity for outdoor play and renewal in nature.

We have so many different experiences and different successes. There are many different right answers. Please share them. ♦