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## From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

Everyone loves stories, no matter our ages, no matter our situations. Children clamor for stories—“Read me a story.” Or better yet, “Tell me a story.”

Children are deluged with tales, read or told from storybooks and interpreted into other media. Many are intellectually instructive. Some are amusing, some ironic, many exaggerated and stereotyped. Others are moralizing. Each may have its time and place, depending on the age and situation of the child. Yet there are fundamental questions to apply to all stories. Is the content of this story true? Do the characters, the images and deeds portrayed in this story nourish human development in soul and spirit? Does the story offer enduring pictures of goodness, beauty, and truth that the child can grow with? When we apply these criteria, we narrow our field of story choices and call upon ourselves as educators to be deeply discerning about what stories we offer and how we bring them.

In our confusing times when young children are exposed to so many superficial, materialistic, and morally ambivalent images and messages, the quality of story becomes even more important. The right stories can heal. They can comfort and reassure. Stories can make us laugh at the comical foibles and naïveté that illustrate simple hearts with pure intentions. Stories instruct us in courageousness and selflessness, where problems are solved and prizes won by honesty, commitment, and dedication to the good.

With all of this in mind, this issue of *Gateways* is dedicated to stories and storytelling. Susan Perrow, Australian author of *Therapeutic Storytelling* and *Healing Stories for Difficult Behaviors*, was the keynote speaker for the February 2017 East Coast WECAN conference. She travels the world offering workshops for teachers and therapists to enable them to write their own healing stories. The theme and wisdom of her presentation inspired us to revisit story in *Gateways*. This issue features the first part of her presentation, addressing Imagination. She discusses what this means conceptually and in very practical terms for teachers. Susan humbly and generously shares the experiences and insights that have graced her own path as storyteller. She invites us take our own steps

to open our own Imagination on the story journey.

Other contributors focus upon more specific powers of story and storytelling. Nancy Mellon—author, therapist, and story expert from the West Coast and friend of Waldorf education—speaks to how true stories, particularly fairy tales, can be an antidote to the effects of children’s exploding exposure to screens. She encourages us to boldly understand the darker images in the fairy tale as forces in human life and society that must be overcome. She sees dramatizing or “acting out” a tale at story time as powerful medicine for the children of our time.

Laurie Clark, long-time lead kindergarten teacher, has always loved fairy tales and has studied them deeply. She discusses the power of the truthful images these tales portray when we tell them from our own thoughtful understanding. She describes how acting out a story after it has been heard a few times engages the children’s will and captures their attention. Many teachers report that it is increasingly difficult for children to simply listen to a story. Acting out the story may also be a healing avenue to reawaken the capacity for listening.

Early childhood educator Debora Petschek focuses on the story of Cinderella. She shares research she did in finding versions of the Cinderella theme across centuries and in many, many different cultures and geographies. The similarities of the stories confirm the universality of these story images across time and in diverse religious and ethnic settings.

**Pioneers** honors two dear teaching colleagues who passed the threshold this year. Annie Gross, former teacher at the Toronto Waldorf School and beloved WECAN board member, passed the threshold last February. Annie held a deep and dedicated concern for the healthy social life in our collegial and school communities. This is a topic you will encounter further along in this issue. Kundry Willwerth, early childhood teacher best known to us all for bringing the Ellersiek hand gesture games to North America, also passed onto the spiritual world in early June. Reminiscences of Kundry’s interesting and varied life are inspiring. Our early childhood work on this continent has been enriched by both

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Annie's and Kundry's contributions. We are deeply grateful for all that they brought to our work.

You will find a new section next—**Reading the Signs of the Times**. Rudolf Steiner urged us all to pay attention to the trends, the themes, and the distresses of our times. Recently there have been incidents of social and professional discord in our school communities. We all have challenges and practical matters to handle. But the foundation of our existence as an educational and social impulse depends upon how we honor and appreciate each other's contributions to our work. We must address how to work respectfully and collaboratively for the good of the whole. Please read this section and join in this conversation of how we can support a healthy and healing social life.

**For the Classroom** lightens up our reading pleasure, sharing two movement imaginations from WECAN's recently published translation of *Let's Dance and Sing!* by Freya Jaffke. The labor of harvest and the work of tradespeople remind us of how important it is for growing children to imagine and enact human activity—not technological activity. There are playful, very fun moments in these imaginations, too.

Stories presented as puppet plays are always special moments for the children. And ease in setting up and presenting the puppet play provides joy to the teacher as well. Rachel Ladasky, nursery teacher with dedication to puppetry, shares design and instructions for a puppetry table, created with her carpenter father. The table is simple, practical, easily portable, and beautiful.

**Book reviews** feature *Let's Dance and Sing!* by Freya Jaffke, mentioned above, and *Baby Bare*, a new book by movement therapist Stephanie Johnson. The Jaffke book is a treasure of authentically translated

games that we received in snippets over the years from “across the pond.” In this new translation, we finally have the full imaginations available. Frau Jaffke also gives practical, wise advice from her many years of guiding circle in her classroom. Ms. Johnson, Waldorf parent and author of *Baby Bare*, makes it her mission to bring the importance of self-directed movement for infants and toddlers to new parents. Self-directed movement builds up the critical neurological foundation the human being needs to have a satisfying life. *Baby Bare* is very accessible, makes a compelling case for why infants and toddlers should not be rushed ahead in their development, and helps us to understand how movement and brain development are intimately intertwined. This book is highly recommended for all early childhood educators, no matter the ages of children in our care.

This issue concludes with **International News**. The IASWECE council met in South Africa last spring. Louise deForest shares her impressions and Stephanie Allon speaks on behalf of the council itself.

We hope that the fall issue of *Gateways* will enliven and expand your interest in and understanding of story. The children need us to potentize every possibility we have to bring them healing, encouraging, nourishing imaginations. We received more articles regarding fairy tales and storytelling than we could include in this issue, and look forward to sharing the remaining contributions in Issue 74 next spring. We can take Susan Perrow's call to awaken our forces of imagination in many ways. The next big question we want to address is how to bring warmth and healing to the social life in our school communities.

With warmest wishes for this school year,  
~ Nancy Blanning