The One and Only Way

Cynthia Aldinger

In our eagerness and devotion to provide young children and their families the very best we have to offer, we find great enthusiasm when we experience or hear of new approaches that are meaningful and creative.

Many of us remember the very first time we heard of the work of Nökken in Denmark. Soon, many of us decided we should be having outdoor kindergartens or, at the very least, spending most of our time outdoors. Sometimes I have heard people say, "I am doing the Helle Heckman model."

With the deepening of our interest in the birth to three stage of child development, we have discovered the work of Emmi Pikler, and its related work of Magda Gerber and the Resources for Infant Educarers. We are encouraged by their insights into the movement of the young child and the importance of non-interference, among other aspects of this work. Now we are hearing the expression, "I want to do a RIE/Waldorf model."

There have also been lively discussions on the Waldorf early childhood Internet chat group about parent–child programs and the multitude of ways people are taking up this work.

More recently, the LifeWays work, with an emphasis on the domestic activities of the healthy household and the nurturing relationship of the adults to the children, has come onto the scene. Again, we hear the expression, "I am doing a LifeWays model." In fact, going around the country teaching about LifeWays, I have used that expression myself.

It is wonderful and somehow assuring to have a guiding star to follow. It is also an indication of our willingness to let go of the old and make room for new ideals, even when some of them are actually old ideals with new thinking behind them. I feel it is wonderful that we have such open–mindedness and flexibility.

As with any new enthusiasm, we want to take care not to think that our new discoveries represent a singular way to approach the care and development of young children and their families. Otherwise, we can find ourselves in the position of thinking that a colleague who is working out of a different approach from ours is wrong, and we are right.

Additionally, we want to be careful not to narrowly define any of the above "models" by only one or a few of its practices or principles. Nökken is more than an outdoor kindergarten. RIE is more than freedom of movement of the young child. LifeWays is more than the domestic and nurturing arts.

The fact is, there is overlap of various principles and practices in all of the above approaches. For example, Nökken also emphasizes freedom of movement. RIE also recognizes the importance of the adult-child relationship, particularly when it comes to bodily care of the child. LifeWays also believes the child needs long stretches of time outside and freedom of movement.

It is important to acknowledge another ever-changing "model" –that of the Waldorf kindergarten. Many of us are searching for ways to enliven our work and meet the needs of the contemporary child. Some have found inspiration through the *Extra Lesson* work, with the sensory integration approach, or other learning support approaches. Others are inspired by some of the approaches mentioned above.

The term, "the traditional Waldorf kindergarten," is no longer appropriate, if it ever was in the first place. Rudolf Steiner argued against Waldorf education becoming a body of tradition and challenged us to re-found it every day.

The main source of overlap for most of us is our common interest in the works of Rudolf Steiner, through whom we find access to profound and mighty spiritual archetypes and ideals that guide our work and manifest practically in so many individually distinct ways. These sources, rather than "traditions" and specific practices, give life to our movement.Without such a foundation, our work runs the risk of becoming simply another "application."

It is challenging not to speak in narrow definitions. I find myself doing it often–mostly for the sake of simplicity when I am trying to explain

LifeWays, RIE, Nökken, or Reggio Emilia or Montessori or Waldorf!! Without taking each of the requisite trainings or immersing myself in each approach, it is totally understandable that I tend to speak about the part that I am most enthusiastic about at the time. Most of us do that. Perhaps what we need to do is to speak out of our own enthusiasm, acknowledging at the same time that each approach has much more to it than the piece we can represent. We can also choose to learn more, through reading, observing at places that carry those names, taking courses and trainings and finding what resonates within each of us.

At the end of the day, there truly is a "one and only way" to care for young children and their families. It is the way in which you, as an individual, can be your most creative and honest self, based on practices, inner and outer, which encompass a deep understanding of the developing child, and in which you are filled with love for your work.

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The Dragon's Gate

A traditional Chinese story adapted by Stephen Spitalny.

In this story, the image of the dragon represents something that is valued, something that is the object of striving. The story itself presents a picture of courage, wisdom and perseverance being the means of self-development. This version is adapted from Tales from a Taiwan Kitchen.

In the heart of a deep forest far from any towns and villages is a high waterfall called the Dragon's Gate where the waters plunge more swiftly than an arrow shot by a bow. Many carp gather at the bottom hoping to ascend the huge waterfall for those that make it to the top and through the Dragon's Gate will turn into a dragon. Many have tried and few, if any, have ever succeeded.

Day and night, the dragons guard the Gate, swishing their tails and splashing in the water to make waves, snorting out clouds to make rain and roaring thunder. Not only dragons, but many dangers await those who attempt to climb the waterfall. Some are swept away by the swift waters, some are caught by eagles, hawks, owls and ospreys. Others are caught by fishermen. Such is the difficulty of a carp becoming a dragon.

Once upon a time, there was a carp who lived in a small pond hidden in a deep forest far from any predators. There was always enough to eat. The little carp thought his pond was the whole world. At one end of his pond was bubbling, foaming water that led into a rushing stream. He never went by the bubbling waters. Occasionally, he saw other carp disappear into the foam, but he never went close. He was curious and afraid. As he grew, so did his curiosity. He swam near the spot and watched. He asked other carp what lay beyond the pond, "What is the world outside our pond like?" Most told him not to wonder about what lay beyond. He longed to know.

One day, as he was watching the foaming bubbles, his grandfather swam up to him and said, "Exciting sight, isn't it? What lies beyond the pond is also exciting and interesting." "What is beyond this pond," said the young carp. Grandfather carp smiled and said, "There is a stream outside this rushing water. In this stream are many small waterfalls. If you swim upstream and climb these small waterfalls, you will come to a waterfall called the Dragon's Gate. The waters of the Dragon's Gate plunge a hundred feet with tremendous force. At the bottom of the falls you will find a great many brothers and sisters–all the carp who are hoping to climb the Dragon's Gate. If a carp ever succeeds in climbing the falls, that fish will turn into a dragon. However, not one carp out of a hundred, a thousand or ten thousand will climb the falls. Most fail, swept away by the rushing current, or caught by birds of prey or foxes and bears and fishermen. All of these and more are the dangers that await one on this journey. But one who meets their fear and overcomes these challenges shall turn into a dragon."

The young carp listened closely to his grandfather. When grandfather was done speaking, he

smiled warmly at the young carp and slowly swam away. The young carp then swam straight into the foaming waters, never to return to his protected pond again. He swam upstream through the many small waterfalls, avoiding the banks where hungry foxes and bears awaited. He swam in the shadows and under leaves and branches where he would not be seen by birds of prey. He rested when he needed, but went a great pace. At length he reached the pool at the bottom of the Dragon's Gate. He looked up at the mighty waterfall. He saw hawks and other birds soaring overhead, waiting to snatch any foolhardy fish. He watched other carp as they attempted the falls, only to be swept away by the rushing water and dashed upon the rocks, or get caught by the talons of the hungry birds. He thought about what to do. He felt his own fears rise up, but he managed to still himself, and, little by little, he made a plan.

He leaped to a small ledge near the bottom of the falls and began to make his way from ledge to ledge, always keeping close to the rocks and rushing water, out of reach of the soaring birds. After a long time, he reached the top where a large dragon awaited him. "Go away," said the dragon. "You are a little fish. You should be scared of me. What makes you think you can be a dragon?"

The little carp answered, "I am afraid, but still I am here. I dedicated myself to this effort of becoming a dragon, and I am persistent. I can wait. There is plenty of time." The dragon laughed heartily and kept one eye on the carp. No fish would get through the gate while he was guarding it. "I thought dragons could fly," said the little carp. "Why don't you?" "I can fly," said the dragon. "I can fly better than birds." "I don't believe you," said the carp.

The dragon began to grow angry, and the carp swam into a deep pool beneath the dragon's feet. When the carp surfaced, he said, "I don't believe you can fly. I never saw you. Maybe you are not a real dragon at all." The dragon bellowed, "I'll show you little fish." And the dragon leaped into the air and flapped his huge wings.

The little carp quickly darted through the now unguarded dragon's gate and waited. Soon the dragon returned. "So you can fly after all," said the carp. He began to feel himself growing and his fish scales changing into dragon's scales. The dragon gave a thundering bellow, but soon stopped, and a smile came over his face. "I wanted you to be a dragon all the time. You have the courage and dedication and cleverness to be a dragon. So I have let you pass because you are truly worthy."

The little carp who had now turned into a dragon that was still increasing in size, looked at the large dragon and smiled. It rained that day, and when the sun came out, a double rainbow glowed over the land.

In Memoriam: Klara Hatterman

Susan Howard

Klara Hatterman, one of the early Waldorf kindergarten teachers, passed away on September 1 in Hannover, Germany, at the age of 94, fully conscious and surrounded by her loved ones. Born with her twin sister in May 1909, she became interested in Waldorf early childhood education at a young age. She assisted Elizabeth Grunelius, the first Waldorf kindergarten teacher, and worked in a Waldorf kindergarten until it was closed by the Nazis. Undaunted, she continued to work with little children privately in a home kindergarten until the outbreak of World War II. After the war, in the rubble and ruins of Hannover, she began a little kindergarten group, which grew into a large Waldorf school with nearly one thousand pupils, and a Kindergarten Seminar (training center) where she was active for many years.

Klara Hatterman was instrumental in the development of the international Waldorf kindergarten movement. In 1955, she and her colleagues began meeting together as a small circle–these meetings grew into the annual Whitsun Conference, attended each year by over seven hundred Waldorf early childhood educators from around the globe. Together with Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen, Klara Hatterman and other Waldorf kindergarten teachers

concerned for the young child founded the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association in 1969 to foster the development of new kindergartens and training centers and, perhaps most importantly, to "struggle for the rights of children for a human education. . . and intervene on an international scale against educational practices and theories which seriously threaten the healthy development of the young child through one-sided cognitive pedagogy." (von Kügelgen) Today the Waldorf early childhood movement is active around the globe.

Klara Hatterman also collaborated with Wilma Ellersiek, a professor who had begun to develop rhythmic, musical hand gesture games for the young child. Through her encouragement and support, the "Ellersiek games" were developed and then carried out into the world through conferences, workshops and working groups founded by Klara Hatterman. Today these games are translated into various languages, including English, and are played all around the world.

Four years ago, at Klara Hatterman's 90th birthday, Joan Almon and I had the opportunity to visit with her. She shared with us her concern that Waldorf early childhood education was becoming too much of an outer method. She said it was in danger of losing its connection with the inner spiritual sources–sources available to every individual who has the privilege of working with young children who themselves are still so close to the spiritual world. It is time for a re-dedication of the work, she suggested, out of these spiritual wellsprings.

Klara Hatterman was profoundly inwardly involved with Waldorf early childhood education until her death and will continue to serve as an inspiration for the many whose lives were touched by her devotion to the spiritual foundations and joyful practice of this work.

Susan Howard is the Chair and Coordinator of WECAN and has served on the board of the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association since 1998.