

The Kindergarten Apron

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Photographs by Euclides Santiago

As a Waldorf kindergarten teacher, I have considered the question of what to wear in the classroom from a number of different angles. Reflecting on one's appearance from the child's perspective does keep the question simple — anything eye-catching or out of the ordinary in our appearance draws their attention to us, and they comment appreciatively or frankly on what they see. Their attention then is on us and our "stuff," rather than their play or their friends. However, I have found that in practice, wearing clothing that hides one's anatomy and offers a flowing, softened form can hinder certain types of movement. Haven't many of us gotten tangled in our skirts crawling around the circle?

In addition, while many people in many professions wear work clothes that are not reflections of their own personal style, we in the Waldorf kindergarten are particularly concerned with working from a place of truth. Careful editing must be done when we strive to leave our personalities at the door. Leaving too much of ourselves outside of the classroom can result in an empty falseness not conducive to the kind of organic, inspired energy that we hope fills each classroom.

Most objectionable to me has been the impression that the Waldorf kindergarten teacher should look a certain way, and exude a certain Victorian primness. Here I find that the apron is an aspect of our kindergarten persona that serves us well. It not only functions to protect our clothing, but also can offer a way to soften and standardize our daily appearance. Those of us who may need to come to school some days in jeans or prints can still uphold a level of uniformity for the children, and not feel stifled by our "dress code." Wearing an apron may help us in our striving to bring our higher self into the classroom.

After experiencing a year of wearing no apron (which felt particularly unsatisfactory and bare) and a year of wearing a "uniform" apron along with many of my colleagues (which felt at times too

homogeneous), I have compiled my own thoughts and questions that I hope can serve to encourage teachers to bring consciousness to their use of an apron in the classroom. There is no definitive answer or golden rule about the kindergarten apron, and there is no official apron. Each teacher has to address the basic questions themselves: Will I wear an apron? Why? What kind? And where will it come from?

In this article I will make the assumption that the underlying aims of any Waldorf kindergarten classroom are recognized as consistent. These include, though are not limited to, qualities described beautifully in 1998 by Nancy Foster in a course at Sunbridge College:

- *To support or bring about dream consciousness*
- *To nourish the senses*
- *To help the child develop a healthy will*
- *To bring archetypal life activities to the child, rather than to "entertain"*
- *To provide a healthy rhythm and form*
- *To provide an environment of beauty and order, worthy of imitation*

Given these assumptions, this article will hopefully offer the teacher guidelines for considering:

- *the role of the apron in the classroom*
- *the child's experience of the appearance of the teacher*
- *resources for different types of aprons*

Why wear an apron at all?

A simple and true answer is to protect one's clothing — after all, we work in kindergarten, and certainly create all the messes of work. Many teachers also feel that our appearance should be considered as carefully as one would consider anything else to which the child's senses are exposed in the classroom, such as the color of the walls and curtains, or the type of lighting that we use. All of these elements in the classroom support the

“dream consciousness” of the child. An apron can be thought of as a facet of an environment of gentle stimulus.

I have also found that the simple act of putting on my apron is a step in my morning routine that helps me prepare myself for teaching. In donning the mantle of the kindergarten teacher, I am physically enacting the meditation,

*Dear God,
Make it so
That as far as my personal ambitions are concerned,
I may completely extinguish myself,
And Christ make true in me
The words of Saint Paul:
“Not I, but Christ in me,”
That the holy spirit may dwell in the teacher.
This is the true threefoldness.*

In this light, the apron can sometimes remind us to leave our egos, our personal dramas, and our afternoon list of errands at the door of our classroom. By freeing us from these burdens, our creative impulses are more accessible, our openness to inspiration more palpable, and our ability to see the children more vivid.

Some teachers also feel that an apron helps create a buffer between the great physical needs of the children and the teacher’s own etheric/physical bodies. I have certainly found that even the softest apron has a fortifying effect, creating a gentle armor, the layers of which support me as a pillar in the classroom.

What is the child’s experience of the teacher with an apron, or without?

Children who see their teacher caring for the tools of their trade experience a gesture of respect towards the work that fills the day – whether it be ironing an apron, hanging it up carefully at the end of the day, cleaning the gardening tools, or returning the thimble carefully to the sewing box. Through caring gestures, the teacher brings an example of purposefulness that offers a healing antidote to the fast pace of our lives that often overlooks process.

A teacher with an apron that is worn every day also offers to the child a comforting consistency. I have found that if the children in my class, who are used to seeing me wear the same two or three

aprons, catch sight of me now without one, they will invariably comment. It is surprisingly unsettling to them. Sometimes they ask me if I changed my clothes. I see in this how an apron lets them sleep a little longer: they are less conscious of my personal appearance. By offering consistency in my own appearance, I am not imposing my own subjectivity upon them. Nancy Foster, in her article on teachers’ clothing, even considers how the teacher’s astrality (expressed in his or her clothing) affects the etheric body of the child. This, to my mind, could be a question held by each teacher, depending on his or her own individuality, and also on the nature of the class.

An apron can also influence the posture, attitude, and warmth of the teacher, influencing the manner in which he or she moves in the circle, sits at the table, walks, stands, and interacts with other adults. This is an interesting experiment that each teacher can try, as an exercise in self-observation.

In addition, as kindergarten teachers, we are concerned with bringing the child archetypal images of the human being. Wearing an apron can also contribute to this effort, depending on the cut and color and shape.

Although I usually wear the same apron all week, and sometimes for weeks at a time, I do have another one clean and ironed waiting in the wings in case the one I am wearing doesn’t make it through the week. My experience has been that the children hardly notice the change, even though the aprons are different in style and color. I have also found that rotating in a third style satisfies only my need to vary my wardrobe. The children will inevitably comment on the change, essentially confirming that the shift had an awakening effect.

Resources for different aprons and considerations of styles:

When thinking about what type of apron to wear in the classroom, the kindergarten teacher may wish to bear in mind the following questions:

- *Does the fit, color, and drape affect my decision to wear an apron?*
- *Is there too much fabric?*
- *Is there too little fabric (not enough coverage)?*
- *Do I want a different apron for different activities?*

Or one for all day?

The following aprons offer an example of styles that I have worn in the classroom. All but one are easy to make, and the fourth can be purchased. All have advantages and disadvantages, which I will examine briefly.

APRON 1, figures 1 and 2

Attributed to Margret Meyerkort

I wore this pinafore-style apron every day for a few years. Almost all of the early childhood teachers in my school wore this, and were easily identified as a part of that group by parents and children. I found it comfortable, and loved the amount of coverage front and back, and the roomy pockets. I tended to wear longer, flowing skirts with this apron,

because the fullness of the pinafore accentuates the separateness of the legs when worn with skirts that are shorter than the apron. I also tended to wear the same outfit under this apron, because it covered so much of my clothing that consideration of my personal outfit was mostly functional. This apron has a definite sheath or mantle quality to it – the very act of donning it in the morning could be transformational.

It is fairly easy to make, although the pattern must be tailored individually to customize the shoulder width, skirt length, and pocket placement. This apron should be made from a lighter fabric to give it a soft drape, and therefore requires careful laundering, ironing, and hanging. The amount of fabric in this apron can offer children a wonderful place to nestle or hide; however, crawling and other circle maneuvers can be difficult.



Figure 1



Figure 2

APRON 2, figures 3 and 4

Simplicity pattern # 5201

This pattern for this comfortable pinafore-style apron can be found in pattern books or ordered online at <http://simplicity.com>. The pattern includes two different lengths and three different sizes, which run big. It is easy to make and has wonderful pleated pockets. As can be seen in figure 4, the back wraps completely around, providing

excellent coverage. Children love to hide inside the folds of this apron. The form it presents is archetypal and whole, with no waist to bisect or straps to crisscross. There is a lot of fabric, at least in the longer version, and the apron can be hot and somewhat bulky. A lighter weight cotton or linen mixed with a bit of rayon will give this apron the durability it needs, as well as a bit of drape. Again, sometimes I found it tricky to crawl in this apron.



Figure 3



Figure 4

APRON 3, figures 5 and 6

I found this apron in an antique market, and easily traced its pattern on a large piece of craft paper. There are no seams and no fastenings. The straps could be made from wide grosgrain ribbon, making it even easier to sew. I made a few of these – one from an old white linen sheet with a simple

embroidered edge, and one from a wonderful 100% cotton reversible fabric that gave me two aprons (with no pockets) in one. This apron is extremely comfortable. The straps do not tug on the back of your neck, as do many halter styles, and it is lightweight and easy to launder and iron. Movement is not a problem in this apron.



Figure 5



Figure 6

The shoulder straps are not adjustable (figure 6) and therefore must be custom measured. They criss-cross in back, which is a bold form, and for this reason you might choose a color for this apron that does not contrast greatly with the clothes you intend to wear underneath. Although this apron does not cover your back, it does provide a whole image from the front, with no bisecting waist.

APRON 4, figures 7 and 8

Styal Mill, England

I wore this pinafore-style apron very frequently. It is comfortable, practical, and comes in three different sizes, which tend to run big. It is easily dyed, and extremely durable. It stands up very well

to washing and needs only light ironing. Although there is a waist, the overall image is one of softness and wholeness. There are no straps tugging at your neck (figure 8), and very good coverage in the back. This apron offers the coverage of Apron 1 and 2, combined with the lightness and ease of Apron 3.

This apron comes from Styal Mill, England, a beautiful National Trust Site and working water-powered textile mill from the eighteenth century. The apron is made, worn, and sold at Styal Mill, and proceeds from the sale of the aprons go to the Mill. In the United States, a weaver and clothing designer named Candiss Cole sells the aprons. They may be purchased directly from her by emailing her at candiss@candisscole.com.

The first three aprons listed here can be easily



Figure 7



Figure 8

made. Although “figuring out” our own aprons may be an important process in itself, I am happy to offer assistance with ideas, measurements, yardage, or patterns. Please email me at annie.tjm@gmail.com.

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