

The Role of the Evaluator

• Holly Koteen-Soulé

*There was an old woman lived under a hill
And if she's not gone, she lives there still
Baked apples she sold and cranberry pies
And she's the old woman who never told lies*
—Nursery Rhyme

The Role of the Evaluator

A visitor to an early childhood classroom can bring a great deal of delight to the children, especially if the visitor slips in unobtrusively and is as happy to be there as the children are to have a guest. Imagine, on the other hand, how it might be for the children and their teacher to host a frowning, tight-lipped “know-it-all”! While every fairy tale may have need of such a hard-hearted character and the challenge that it represents, we would not choose such an archetype to be our evaluator.

Experience in Waldorf early childhood settings is not the only necessary qualification for an evaluator. There are specific qualities, capacities, and skills that an individual serving as an evaluator will want to cultivate.

Honesty is paramount, as indicated in the nursery rhyme above, but honesty as a virtue is more encompassing than merely “never telling lies.” Openness, genuineness, sincerity, frankness, fairness, trustworthiness, and acting in an honorable manner are all embedded in the meaning of the word. Much of what an evaluator would aspire to could be found in this expanded definition of honesty, especially when it is coupled with the capacity for tactful communication.

Rudolf Steiner advised the teachers of the first Waldorf School to “have courage for the truth.” He linked having courage for the truth to two other activities that are also relevant to our topic.

*Imbue thyself with the power of imagination,
Have courage for the truth,
Sharpen thy feeling for responsibility of soul.*

An evaluator’s capacity to sense the truth finds its basis in an understanding of essential principles, while avoiding fixed notions of how those principles must be manifested in a particular situation. It is through the creative power of the imagination that the evaluator can recognize and celebrate an individual educator’s artistic expression of common understandings. An evaluator will also be keenly aware of the deep responsibility of serving as a guide for the development of a fellow educator.

If we look again at traditional fairy tales, we can find several common elements that characterize the encounter of the hero and/or heroine with an individual who offers them guidance for their journey. The guide is not usually a companion, but someone whom the seeker meets and whose advice changes the course of the seeker’s journey and allows it to come to fulfillment. Typically the guide is a person, but occasionally might appear in the form of a tree (as in the Grimms’ version of “Cinderella” in which the heroine’s counselor is the hazel tree with the white bird that lives in its branches) and sometimes in the form of an animal (like the cat in certain versions of the Russian fairy tale, “Baba Yaga”). In general, this character has more experience in the world, and so is referred to as “the Old One” in the list that follows.

The common motifs include:

- *The Old One shares somehow in the destiny of the seeker.*
- *The Old One already knows something about the seeker.*
- *The Old One offers a gift or means of protection.*
- *The Old One gives a picture of what lies ahead for the seeker.*
- *The Old One leaves the seeker free.*
- *The Old One teaches the seeker his or her art.*

Motifs often appear in combinations, but the

examples below were chosen to illustrate one or another of the aspects listed. Those familiar with fairy tales will be able to think of other examples as well.

The Old One shares somehow in the destiny of the seeker.

In the German fairy tale “Mother Holle,” the old woman with the big teeth tells the girl not to be afraid, but to stay with her and be the better for it. When the girl wants to return home, Mother Holle says, “As you have served me so truly, I myself will take you up again.” When the golden rain falls on the girl as she passes through the doorway, her words are, “You shall have that because you have been so industrious.”

The Old One already knows something about the seeker.

The heroine of the Scandinavian fairy tale “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” meets three old hags, and each one says, “Maybe it’s you who ought to have had the prince.” The girl gets a gift from each of them, a golden ball, a golden comb and a golden spinning wheel. “Maybe you’ll find a use for it,” each hag says in turn.

The Old One offers a gift or means of protection.

In “The Three Little Men in the Wood” from the Grimms’ collection, while the girl is sweeping the snow from behind the house as the men had asked her to do, the three say to one another, “What shall we give her as she is so good and shared her bread with us?” One gives her beauty, another says that gold coins will fall from her mouth when she speaks, and the third that she will marry a king’s son.

The Granddaughter in the Native American tale “The Arrow Chain,” tells the chief’s son, “My grandmother has been watching you climb up from the earth.” The grandmother welcomes him and says, “You are brave to come up to the sky country, but what do you seek here?” After he tells her, she feeds him and then gives him four gifts: a pine cone, a fish eye, a rose, and a small sharpening stone, all of which he will need to escape with his friend and complete his mission safely.

The Old One gives a picture of what lies ahead for the seeker.

In the Spanish fairy tale “The Three Oranges,” the prince who is seeking a bride not born of an ordinary mother leaves the castle with only three loaves of bread. He gives the first one to an old man who can hardly see or hear. The old man asks him what he is looking for and when the prince tells him of his quest, he describes the road to follow, warns him of the lion ahead and instructs him how to care for the maiden when she is released from the magic orange.

The Old One leaves the seeker free.

Gifts are given without restrictions in the little German fairy tale “Sweet Porridge,” in the Scandinavian fairy tale “The Lad Who Went to the North Wind,” and in similar tales involving a magic pot or a magic cloth. In these stories learning how to care for what one has received is the real gift.

The Old One teaches the seeker his or her art.

In the fairy tale of “The Donkey,” which was discussed in the Introduction, the musician teaches his pupil to play the lute as well as the master himself. This gift becomes the means by which the donkey ultimately becomes fully human.

If we were to apply these motifs to the work of the evaluator, what might be illuminated for us? Are there potential correspondences that could be helpful to the person who takes on the task of offering guidance to fellow educators? Every evaluator is also on a path of development. Perhaps these motifs could serve as inner guideposts for the evaluator in this journey, even as he or she attends to the very necessary and practical details of the evaluation visit.

In addition, we offer below a checklist that outlines the different stages of the evaluation visit and questions to be considered at each stage.

CHECKLIST FOR THE EVALUATOR

Preparation For The Visit

- *Am I inwardly and outwardly prepared for the*

evaluation visit?

- *Do I have copies of all the relevant material?*
- *Do I know what the school expects of me?*
- *Do I know to what group or committee I am responsible?*
- *Do I know how to reach my contact person (phone and email) at the school?*
- *Have I read the teacher’s self-evaluation?*
- *Have I set up a phone conversation or a meeting with the teacher prior to my visit?*
- *Do I have a schedule for my visit?*
- *Am I conscious of the teacher’s questions as well as the questions of the school?*

Initial Meeting with the Teacher

- *How did I help us form a positive working relationship prior to the observation?*
- *Did we review the teacher’s self-evaluation together?*
- *Did I ask the teacher about additional questions?*
- *Did I ask the teacher if there were anything that he or she would like me to observe?*
- *Was I able to listen without jumping to conclusions?*
- *Is my interest in this person genuine?*

The Classroom Observation

- *Was I a supportive presence for the teacher?*
- *Did I arrange with the teacher where to sit and what to do in order to be most unobtrusive?*
- *Did I take in impressions without falling into sympathy or antipathy?*
- *Did I make observations objectively?*
- *Was I able to be inwardly calm?*
- *Was I able to bring myself into the right mood for the children?*

The Post-Observation Conversation

- *Were we able to find together a key to the teacher’s future development?*
- *Were there sufficient time and a private space for an in-depth conversation?*
- *Did I ask the teacher if the day was typical or not?*
- *Did I allow the teacher to speak first?*
- *Did I offer my observations before offering any interpretations?*
- *Did I ask the teacher to explain why certain things were done as they were?*

- *Did I share out of my own experiences?*
- *Did I refrain from overwhelming the teacher with multiple suggestions?*
- *Was I honest in sharing my concerns?*
- *Did we agree on concrete objectives?*

The Written Report

- *Were my communications clear, professional and addressed to the appropriate persons?*
- *Did I ask the teacher to review the report for inaccuracies?*
- *Was there a fair balance of commendations and recommendations in the report?*
- *Were specific goals, timelines and support suggested in the report?*
- *Were options for professional development opportunities noted when appropriate?*
- *Did I respect agreements for confidentiality?*

Even for experienced evaluators, who may already have internalized such a list, the questions above can still serve as useful reminders. For educators who are new to the task of evaluation the checklist can help them become successful guides for others. Working with the fairy tale motifs connected to the archetype of “The Old One” can add an enlivening artistic element to the work for both new and experienced evaluators.

Serving as an evaluator gives us a rare opportunity to lift ourselves out of our personal perspectives to stand for something larger than ourselves. It allows us to behold again, with our colleagues, the ideals to which we all aspire and to rededicate ourselves to our individual paths of development.

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