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## Preparing the Elementary Age for Adolescence

by

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During the remarks that people were making I began to think through this. I'm going to go somewhere else and it will be an experiment for me - how to relate what I was going to bring to some of the things you have brought. I felt very privileged to have another experience after graduating from 8<sup>th</sup> grade myself and going on sabbatical I had the opportunity to come back to our school as a teacher based in the high school. I actually began to work with metals, copper. I was in the school about 3 weeks when the opportunity came for me to meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher and work with the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class. The first block of metal work was with the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. And it is a very interesting experience having been one of the people who had worked with the first grade teacher to be gone and come back and to see how she had met the class and what had been accomplished in half a year. To know the class and to have worked with them once a week in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and to have known them as first graders and at same time to be working with students in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, some of whom were known in kindergarten and a number of whom I taught in 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> and/or 8<sup>th</sup> grade plus some new students in that class I had never worked with before. So I am bringing a perspective that is coming of many questions that I have. I really don't have any answers. What I am going to bring are questions of research for me particularly in the area in the class just as you are doing practical work in the class around some really serious questions. What have these students come to ask from us as Waldorf teachers? I will begin by reading to you something from a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student. How I look now after a few months—how I look and work with 1<sup>st</sup> graders is not quite the same. I will read from a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student then describe an anecdote from kindergarten and then the very dynamic space in between.

This young man in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade when he was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade he lived in feeling. To draw him into will activity was challenging. To actually work with him moving in a particular direction to the unfolding of a concept was challenging. In 12<sup>th</sup> grade he had a difficult with writing. The students were asked to respond to question about the future. What did he think three challenges in the future might be and what would he do about them?

Unnatural competition occurs when people do not work out of their own capacities and strengths but under the influence of power enhancing substance. This will be seen to a much higher degree in the future. People will begin to enhance themselves via genetic engineering and other technologies, Eventually competition will no longer depend on practice, time and skill but on credit and manipulation. An individuals determination and dedication will be drowned out by politics and commerce. Money will fly in the streets and through hands as though it is something that is really there when in fact it is not. The world will be built on illusion and vanity.

The desire for perfectionism will change what and who we are. People will become engulfed in a mechanical idea of the human being, We will find that people will try to make things so perfect that nothing will vary and everything will be the same. In the midst of our perfection we will create a truly monstrous thing, a thing that if not seen early enough, will creep and plot against us in the shadows of our naivete. We would be forever changed.

The future looks daunting. I, as an individual, can easily be overwhelmed and feel ineffectual. At least I can make the effort and try to find my own solution. The effort itself must be worth something.

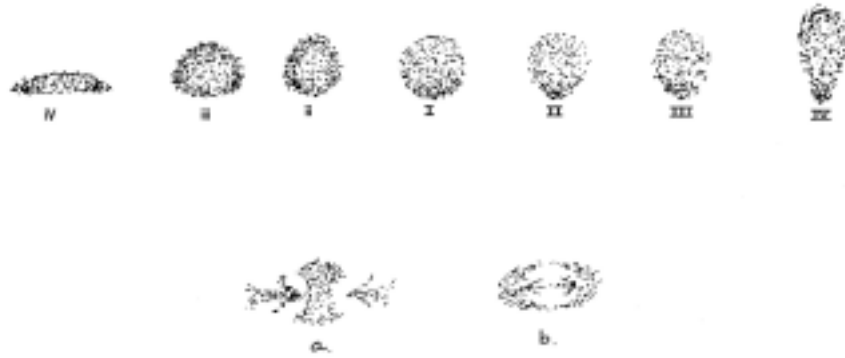
I was asked into a kindergarten to look at a child by age first grade ready. Not only one teacher but also a therapeutic eurythmist visited also. There was a birthday party that day. Now I was going into the end of 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I went to kindergarten and quietly sat on my small chair with knees under my chin and observed the proud parents also sitting with chairs with knees in the air. The child was surrounded by a rainbow bridge. The table was being laid by children in the kindergarten. The mood was quiet although there was a lot of talking it was not rowdy. They were taking their plates and bowls and spoons all made of breakable material. They were taking their napkins made of fabric and they were setting the table and while they were setting the table there was a communication where people knew whose they were doing. If anyone tried to do someone else's job someone would say, that is his job. I watched these people organize themselves with kindergarten teachers quietly moving around—now always quite. At the beginning of the year it was not quite so peaceful and harmonious. After the story the child, who was as bright as a button and would every now and then say, "That is me she is talking about." basking in the glow of having this wonderful event happening in her midst. The children went to sit down. I watched them take bowls of food and offer them to people. As meal progressed I watched as a participant also, when the meal came to an end. A different group of children gathered plates to where soapy water was and the children in a very orderly fashion knowing what to do with three different tubs who was

the one who put them in, who washed, who rinsed, who dried, so well organized. A remarkable world unfolded of order that they were bringing about through their limbs and created by the work of these teachers. There were near misses with certain things observed by the kindergarten teachers with a tremendous calm. The parents going “Ahhh...” looking at the teacher and the kindergarteners using hands and nods of head and so these children moved. A whole universe in that room. I thought, this is what I inherited when I was a class teacher and so did the handwork teacher, the eurythmy teacher, the foreign language teachers inherited this from the kindergarten and I have to say that I looked and thought, and what have I done with that? Where does that live in a different way - where does that live in the younger grades? I had the feeling in the kindergarten (and I do need to move for this) I had the experience in that kindergarten that the children were creating a world that they knew was good and that word that was good they could stand on. I t would hold them up. As Michael said last night in the graveyard of 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade—although it was never quite like that for me though at times very close—so you have this experience of the kindergarten child being guided in goodness and an experience of a student who as a child was still centered in the feeling life needing to be drawn up into the work of clarity of structure and thought and brought down into the will and shaping the space around him. What he was talking about was truth.

The third picture. How many of you actually have a rose ceremony in your school? Many. I will speak about what we do at this ceremony where seniors welcome first graders and then first grade the seniors. In Chicago we felt it was not always as well prepared as it could have been. This year it just seemed everything seemed in the right place. A group of challenging 12<sup>th</sup> graders—a small group got up on the stage and made an arch so that they would be seen. The first graders were there and music began to play. The first grade lined up and what happened next was well prepared. The seniors had a conversation with a high school teacher about what was going to happen. The first grade teacher prepared the first graders. The problem was there were more children than roses. How are we going to solve this?—real picture in me of having this many students in 12<sup>th</sup> and this many in first grade and who gives to who and how many. This created a situation that all the children needed to engage in to come to a solution to how they were going to solve that. It is important to first graders to know they have their share in what is going on. As music played the first group of three came up. What began to happen to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade was seen in the face of the first student who was going to be given a rose. The little child carrying the rose walked across the stage and the 12<sup>th</sup> grader light up with a profound smile. This 12<sup>th</sup> grader who could be highly aggressive with a smile coming from his toes radiated out to the three children. He shook each of their hands. The 1<sup>st</sup> graders said congratulations and handed him the rose. This individual set the town for what happened. One by one the 12<sup>th</sup> graders received roses and what began to happen as the 1<sup>st</sup> graders and 12<sup>th</sup> graders met was like watching a radiant space appear before my eyes on the stage. Something really did happen there, the 12<sup>th</sup> graders know it. They looked identical watching. One of the students told me later, “I saw that little child and I felt that all that was good in myself walked towards me.”

“So youth asked if childhood would help and childhood smiled and promised that it would help.” This is a quote from the collection from comments by Rudolf Steiner on adolescents. Having said that, what is this challenge? What can be awoken in a senior – what is it that is prepared in kindergarten and home? What is it the circle of teachers

meet when those children come to school? How do we work in that sacred space that was created on that stage with 1<sup>st</sup> graders bring innocence and their order in their will towards a 12<sup>th</sup> grader who was reminded of that. How do we work into that space so the 12<sup>th</sup> graders and younger—so that at least 12<sup>th</sup> graders have when this inner space begins to open up for them out of which they will begin to direct their life as adults that the child in them will be there to help. Before I go into these specific points—there is so much that can be touched on—also if we had longer to hear more proposals from colleagues in this audience that would have been better but I will bring you my thoughts from a specific direction.



The above represents a picture of where I want to begin—a picture which starts with the sphere—with what is round—with what is a cosmos in itself. If you can don't just following these forms with your eyes but as if you were moving them in eurythmy movements—take them into yourself to really follow what happen when you go from I to II. Go from what is round to what to lift up—and then continue moving up further and further and further and further. The danger is that if you continue in this direction you will be off the ground. If you follow the other direction you begin to get a movement that starts to go down—first slightly but then increasingly until the form is almost flat. If you take these two forms “a” and “b” you can look at the form here—one you can see from the center is pushing out like “b” and the other one you can see is being pushed in, “a”—a hollowing —these are just two pictures—do you recognize any first grade child? Can you see children who are living rather heavily? Children who are living in themselves too lightly, children who are in balance. One of the things I would ask you to keep in mind, is this movement to go from what is complete and to know that from that completeness you have to move out. There is going to be growth and development – it is not going to stay round as a cosmos—work towards as an adult—cannot stay in that space but how do you come out? How do you awaken? How do you work with forces of the body when the 2<sup>nd</sup> teeth are pushed out and some of the forces that are free work with as forces of memory and learning. How do we work with forces that are rich and full burgeoning so that between first grade and twelfth grade there are healthy movements in the direction of balance between 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade a feeling-thinking begins to arise and find a home, and where you have consciousness you begin to have hollows. But you don't if you have collapse which is an extreme of hollowing. The extreme of hollowing is collapse— extreme of burgeoning could be dissipation. Those forces that live in us as teacher and I do think when students come to us in first grade these children—see how are we working in these realms. They are looking to see what are we doing as individual

teachers, as faculty, where are we working with forces of growth and where with forces of consciousness. What kind of balance is asked for in what situation and in what age? So, if we keep that in mind as we talk—some delightful students who are so friendly and remember all birthdays—they will remind you—don't want to use names as normally might use—think of them as living here perhaps—if you think of a student who has great difficulty engaging the interest hard to get them moving that question how to do energize students so that they can move from this place iv to ii or another. That is going from weight to something a little lighter. Once I begin to move it is hard to stop. Don't take these forms literally—apply the idea of gravity—what moves up and down within it. When working in grades one through five it is in part how are we play with weight and lightness with the student. Who needs what kind of activity guided from handwork or class? Who needs to go, to come down or go out—really look at ways in which we can help the child find their balance point in whatever activity. In order to find the balance point you never stand still. Balance is in movement and balance is something that we can begin to work with more consciously in the grade school using the rich inheritance from the kindergarten. Because visual pictures have a strong effect on us I will erase these. These are just markings

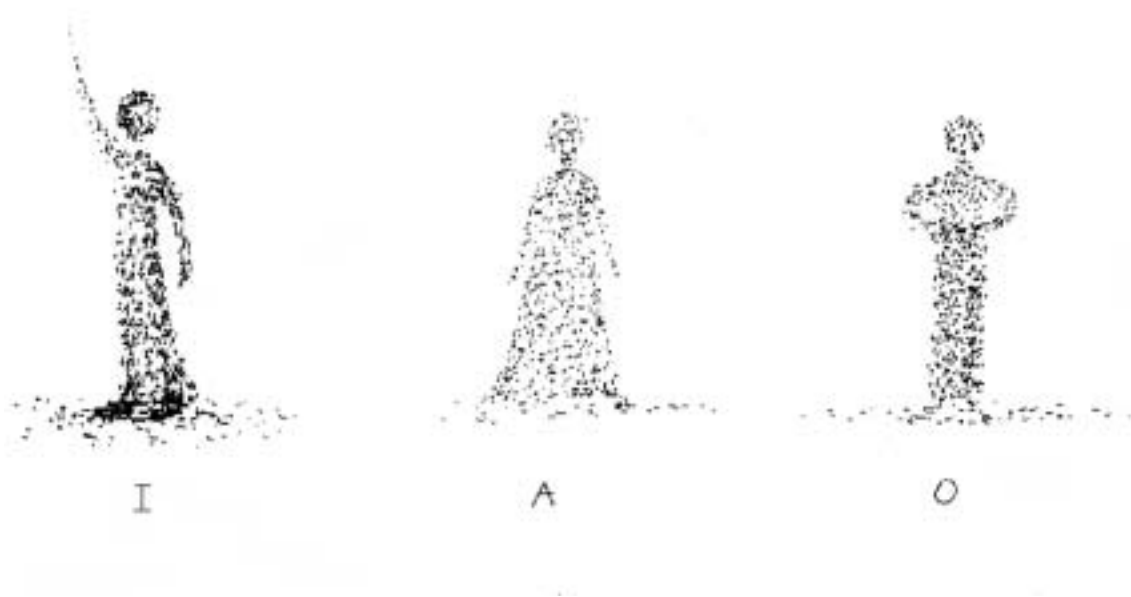
I have seen in these children great difficulty penetrating into their hands and difficulty penetrating into their feet—also some teachers have described children who tend to drag their feet or slop along, and toe walkers and heel walkers. Someone said earlier that children seen very tired while at the same time not seeming very present—so that is what they bring to us. They bring a shuffling way of walking or they bring to us as a gift the fact that they have not reached all the way to their fingertips or feet. They provide us with the opportunity of becoming much more conscious about what kind of activity we can engage them in order that they be more connected with their physical body. Our task is to work with education in such a way the students in grades one through five begin to really experience wholeness. Yes, this happens in age 9 and 10. Yes they begin to work towards rightful alienation with a more gentler term of separation, yes they need to separate on their path to a certain quality of freedom that they will need to struggle and work for and which is our task to help them – yes they need to do that but that is more with the 9 year change experience. As a class teacher it can be quite dramatic if you have mostly children and parents not prepared for what comes toward them. Seems quite dramatic - the faint inkling that the children have of their ego. At that time some children begin to look you in the face and tell a lie and the adult does not always know when are they telling the truth. Can be seen as negative but it is a picture of separation from the world around you – have they been connected to that world. Joan mentioned imagination, one of my colleagues quotes Coleridge about the Shaping Spirit of Imagination. Rudolf Steiner gave us a verse that begins “Imbue thyself with the power of imagination” and sometimes it seems to me that we may be forgetting how powerful imagination is. When we speak about the nervous world in which our children live, when we are beset by fears and worry about reading, about testing, we are part of that nervous world our task as teachers is not to bring this worry to them in classroom. There I think from my own experience to stand-alone is a very difficult thing. We are given meditations so that we can begin to work with the angels of the children placed in our care. We are given meditations that allow us the opportunity of trying to develop a community of individual adults who are striving to unfold a common aim. If we rely on trying to work with these meditations and on shaping a different kind of

community which I do think we are committed to. If we are truly doing that, that also means that there are certain capacities that Rudolf Steiner told us we would begin, however primitively, we would begin to develop capacities that we can test out and trust. I think any teacher receiving children into the first grade needs to experience themselves as one among a circle of teachers who each have different perceptions, different subjects offer different activity, different kinds of learning. The child study—when we are able to work with that as a community of teachers—is a way of being able too see who these children are with their strengths and I think it seems to me that it is very difficult to work with a child study at different times. With the stresses we have around schools, the finances, it can be very difficult to look at what is the heart of our work. Keep in balance when a group of children experience being seen by the faculty as these little children were seen by the 12<sup>th</sup> graders. That quality of perception frees something up in us. When we are able to see together trying to put aside perfection of what should or ought to be done but looking at what every student and class or individual needs. When we work to address the challenges and strengths to help the child shape and transform over time – those children begin to experience something set in motion that is the substance with which we work. When Rudolf Steiner spoke to us about the word of the younger grades as preparation for adolescence the task from first grade on which is one of the many ways is to prepare the children with a musical experience working with these sculptural forces that have formed them in different ways in grade school with a quality of musicality. What does that mean for a child who is not in their feet? What do I do for a child who is not in their hands? One person who came up mentioned the sense of touch. There are children who would benefit from work with form drawing, drawing in the air, running, with a wet sponge on blackboard. What about working with them in sand where there is a resistance. Using their feet in sand. What can we do with these exercises, with using the feet for drawing? What can we do with these exercises that are games, that are play like picking up marbles with these feet of theirs. What can we do when we are working with modeling and this I have many questions about. Sense of touch—then take bees wax that is a part of the quality of touch—sand is about touch and move the sand—toward rising and falling the child is spreading themselves out over a surface—bringing toward, pushing away. There is a place for development in the arts curriculum, serious initial work where we can look at what are the things we can do as class teachers not for an hour four times a year but for 10 min a day for a block of time, work with plasticine exercises. There are questions about working with clay. The coldness and weight. What are you doing with this substance of the earth? Use in the whole hand where part is connected to the will, part to the feeling and part to thinking. What are we doing when we give them these substances? When children are not in their feet should we just work in the finger tips? Where does the heel of the hand, the heel of the foot work with coming into the legs and with bringing a piece of poetry and binding the poetry to the beat. There are other ways to help these children to incarnate and learn language through the arts, engage the child’s imagination and engage the will where they are working on one common theme as a group but experiencing as an individual and when they have certain kinds of exercises in bees wax, in plasticine, in classes one though five, think about what each child might need.

If we know as a circle of teachers how to learn to see the students we will have authority. We will continue to work on forces of imitation where children struggle who do not have that—develop the lower senses with the adult as a guide. If they can

experience a community of teachers who are working to see them, to develop intentionality in grades one through five—working through imagination that the teacher based on seeing those students chooses to close so that through those imaginations the children work out through that spirit into a relation with the world. The more we can learn to trust each other and trust the suggestions that Rudolf Steiner gave to hone our perceptions of children the more they are going to experience that they are in a world, in a community where they are known. Every kind of challenge and problem they will bring to us if they feel and experience that in their souls they are seen and known. There you have a radiance that warms and enlivens souls does not burden and weigh them down but is based on a certain quality of trust that seeks to be incarnated anew in our work but it is also based on trying to get to the truth of who these children are.

So we have kindergarten children in imitation in a world in which they can stand. Children in grades one through five enter a world where they can breath in the music of a faculty who begins to struggle to work together to see them. I asked Antja if she would be willing to show in three gestures a picture of what I have expressed—that is a picture spread out over time in these seven-year stages but also lives in a totality. A gesture of uprightness up grown into wonderful upright being—opening to the world of winder experience—in the lower part an embracing of the world in relation with the world around them.



No matter where we live, with whom we work, we need to recreate our education on a daily basis when we go into the classroom. The challenge to all of us—to see if we can go back to what we have been given—cultivate our capacities together to—how will we shape what we think they need. That is our work to do.

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\* Members of the Waldorf High School Project core group have edited this article and the speaker has reviewed it, however, it is considered to be in draft format lacking a complete edit. It is provided so that AWSNA schools can make use of the content.

— David Mitchell  
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