

**THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER-ARTIST
WITHIN
THE SEVEN-FOLD WALDORF SCHOOL**

Reg Down

Education is a cultural affair. Waldorf schools pursue a holistic, child-centered ideal; to maintain and engender creative capacities within children. It does this via art - not that the goal is to be an art school, but to permeate the curriculum with artistic activity. This means that all Waldorf educators must be artists; that all their teaching activity, regardless of subject taught, is filled with living artistry.

Waldorf schools, however, are made up of more than just teachers and children. They are institutions, whose purpose is to create a space for the teacher and child to meet. How can we understand the role the teachers play within the organization of a Waldorf school as cultural institution?



The words addressed to the teachers by Rudolf Steiner at the founding of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart,ⁱ and which has subsequently been used as a meditative picture within colleges of teachers, gives us an image of what stands behind a striving group of educators. Behind each individual stands their angel; above that is the working of the archangels; above that again is the wisdom-working activity of the archai. Steiner was reminding the teachers they were not alone; that collegiality includes more than their personal selves. In principle, this picture can be a working reality for any group. For a college of teachers who guide a school culturally it is especially important that this reality be striven for.

The description Steiner gives in this ‘meditation’ is a familiar one:ⁱⁱ human beings, angels, archangels, archai. Directly connected with this hierarchical picture is one relating to the higher members of the individual human being: ego, spirit-self, life-spirit, spirit-man.ⁱⁱⁱ When we have fully achieved spirit-self we will be (like) angels; when life-spirit is achieved, archangels; when spirit-man is achieved in the far distant future, archai.



When visiting a Waldorf school we meet the *faculty*; getting to know them as individuals and sensing how they relate as a group. We experience how the character of the school is affected by who they are, and how they work together.

If we return a few years later, faculty members may have left and the group working changed; the school, however, has retained its essential personality. What we are now recognizing is the element *unique to each individual Waldorf school*.

Visiting a number of schools, we perceive each school as part of an educational *movement*, which includes more than just the schools themselves: national associations, colleges, teacher trainings, foundations, publications, and so forth, are all involved in maintaining and developing the Waldorf education movement.

Looking further afield, we see the Waldorf school movement as part of a much larger phenomenon symptomatic of a *global spiritual awakening*. This presents itself in an almost overwhelming variety of initiatives, popular movements, and resurgent or freshly-minted religions and philosophies: alternative medicines and therapies, organic agriculture, shamanism, channeling, ecology, to name but a few. As part of this global awakening, the practical endeavors and spiritual-scientific world-view of anthroposophy and its daughter movements finds its place.

We can summarize our brief overview thus :-

ARCHAI	SPIRIT-MAN	GLOBAL SPIRITUAL AWAKENING
ARCHANGELS	LIFE-SPIRIT	WALDORF MOVEMENT
ANGELS	SPIRIT-SELF	INDIVIDUAL WALDORF SCHOOL
COLLEGE	EGO	FACULTY

While the overviews are put side by side, in reality they overlap and are part of a single whole.

So far we have only looked *upwards*. What then of the other half? Taking the human being as our archetype we can add astral body, etheric body, and physical body, as three members below the ego, just as spirit-self, life-spirit, spirit-man are three members above it. ^{iv} Within the physical body, the internal *organs* with their various functions are connected with the astral body. ^v Within the organs, and spread throughout the whole body, the actual *life activity* occurs in conjunction with the etheric body. The *results* of these functioning processes are made visible in the muscle, bone, tissues, and so forth, of the physical body.



The teachers present a variety of *subjects* to the children. Each subject forms a different organ of perception and mode of consciousness within the children. Within the classes the actual *activity of teaching* and learning occurs. The *results* or effect of the teaching and learning forms within the students what we might characterize as a 'living educational body', which then goes out with the children into the world.

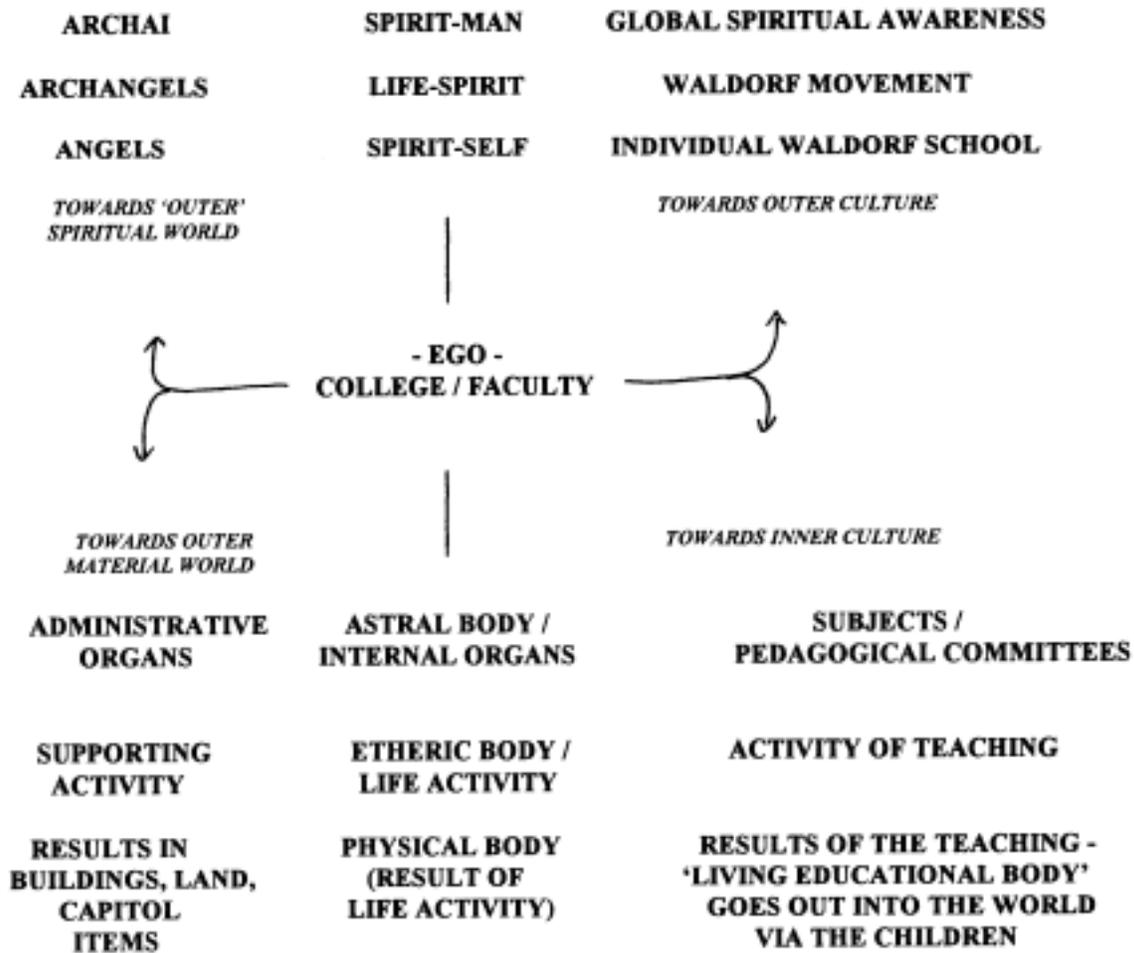
What is this 'living educational body' that lives inside each Waldorf student? If we gather all that is brought to the child - the subjects, verses, festivals, everything - and synthesize it into a single picture, what do we see? A human being! Not an ordinary, particular person, but the *archetypal* human being.



The college 'meditation', in looking 'upwards', points to the angels, archangels and archai as being the 'outer' spiritual source of strength, courage and wisdom for the school. Looking inwards we find organs within the school directed not to the 'outer' spiritual world but to the outer material world. Board, administration, fundraising and finance committees all have the function of sustaining the school legally and economically. They also interact with and administer the non-pedagogical functions within the school itself.

Within each administrative organ are the actual activities or 'life processes'. These will also involve the general parent body to greater or lesser degree. A fundraising committee can be formed, for instance, with chairperson, secretary and treasurer, but unless it is active and alive not many funds will be raised. The results of the activity of the school's administrative organs are visible in the buildings, property, capital items, and so forth.

We can now complete our overview:



A Waldorf school is a seven-membered being participating in the spiritual and material worlds. Like a beehive it is partly visible, partly invisible. This is potentially true for all institutions. The difference, however, in those institutions arising out of anthroposophy, is a striving to consciously connect in a spiritual-scientific way, with progressive spiritual beings. When this view of the school is synthesized into a single image we see, once again, the archetypal human being standing before us. Waldorf schools strive to be *human*, in the complete sense of the word.



We can now, in part, answer the question posed at the beginning of the article: how can we understand the role the teachers play within the organization of a Waldorf school as cultural institution? The teachers are the *ego-principle*.^{vi} This sheds light on why Rudolf Steiner did not designate a headmaster or board of directors to direct the teachers' activity. It is a question of freedom. Teacher-artists require a free space for their activity as a prerequisite for the unfolding of a healthy educational and cultural life. The role parallels

the one artists have between their ego and the other members of their being. This group cannot be mandated or ‘authorized’, for instance, just as Beethoven could not have been mandated or authorized to be an artist. This element lay within his individuality.

This picture is not to be understood as a lessening or downgrading of the role of board, administration and parents - on the contrary. In a culture inimical to what lives in Waldorf education, their role of creating and protecting the free-space for the healthy unfolding of the education of their children is vital - even a prerequisite. Nor does it mean the teachers live aristocratically on the pedagogical mount; open lines of communication and mutual understanding are necessary for healthy functioning.

If we follow the principle of mirroring – the ego being the fulcrum – we see how the board and administration not only perform the role of allowing a school to function within society, but also, in mirroring the activity of the angels, protect and shelter the essential Waldorf nature of the school. They bear in mind the values and ideals held by the faculty and the Waldorf movement as a whole, yet connect the school meaningfully to the rest of society. When this is successful, the results of their activity are made visible in the world through the buildings, and even their architectural style. In the final analysis, if we really think about it, we can say that this work “is love made visible”.^{vii}



We have now established, albeit briefly, the ‘what’ of the teachers within a Waldorf school. The other half of the question is the ‘how’ of their role. How do the teachers perform their function as ego-principle?

The ego is a unity, and a unified faculty is necessary for healthy functioning. The teachers can choose to work *together* as a college. Doing so provides a focus for working with the higher members of the school, as well as with issues of administration and pedagogy. While it is desirable for each individual or sub-group to carry the whole picture of the schools’ being, their working will remain partial and ineffective unless it occurs within the context of a united faculty which carries the same picture.

A college generally does two things. It occupies itself with a meditation and, time permitting, spiritually enlivening studies or activities; the lion’s share of the meeting time is then given over to administrative and pedagogical issues. In reality, as with any art, spiritual working and practical working go hand in hand. While it is easy to understand a group working with administrative and pedagogical issues, it sounds rather daunting to be working with angels, archangels and archai! How does this actually occur? Through what avenues do the imaginations, inspirations and intuitions of these beings appear within the group?



We have an inner ‘physical’ ego, (point-centered in the physical body; gazing and acting outward), and an ‘outer’ spiritual ego, (periphery-‘centered’; acting from the circumference). What proceeds from within ourselves we consider our own. Harder, and often more reluctantly grasped, is understanding that what comes to us from outside is also part of ourselves. Our outer spiritual ego lives within all that surrounds us, and our ego-path through life, our biography, is made up of what we do out of ourselves *and* what approaches us as destiny. Together they form a total picture. While our inner ‘physical’ ego is *exclusive*, our ‘outer’ spiritual ego lives *inclusively* within nature, the spiritual world and other human beings.

We have all experienced how a single sentence, word, or even gesture from someone can change our life direction. If we attribute this new impulse in our lives as proceeding from the individual who spoke, we would, usually, be subject to illusion. In reality our outer spiritual ego, in the broadest sense of the word, is speaking to us. When it is we ourselves who have spoken the word which changed the direction of another’s life, it is well worth recalling in detail what happened in that moment - especially those words and gestures which seemed insignificant to us at the time.

Becoming aware of both aspects of the ego – the outer and the inner - is one of the tasks of the consciousness soul.^{viii} This has direct consequences for how the college works. Firstly, the college takes careful note of all that passes in its environment. It knows that the spiritual world is just as capable of speaking through a student, parent, visitor, board member or event, as it is of speaking within the college. In this respect the college is a self-aware sense-organ; receiving impressions or perceptions and adding the necessary concept to the percept.^{ix}

Secondly, the college looks within, and a more intensive activity is possible: *focused listening*. To what are we listening? Our colleagues. Because our outer spiritual ego lives within the spiritual world *and* within each other, we listen carefully to what our colleagues have to say to each other, to their *conversation*.

A remarkable passage, spoken by Maria, appears in Rudolf Steiner’s mystery play, *The Portal of Initiation*:

When many people join in conversation,
 their words present themselves before the soul
 as if among them stood, mysteriously,
 the Archetype of Man.
 It shows itself diversified in many souls,
 just as pure light, the One,

reveals itself within the rainbow's arch
in many-colored hues.

It can come as an inner jolt to realize, when meeting with colleges of teachers in different parts of the country, that the same Being is present in each one. Later, on becoming more familiar with the experience, the mood is more one of home-coming.

In conversation we discuss a subject held in common. A group can also choose to include what lives invisibly in their midst. This element expresses itself to the group via the word. If we open up and listen attentively, we can become conscious of what needs to be said via the thoughts which light up in us. Where one person cannot grasp what needs to be said, the other can. In this way a single stream of thought is expressed; not necessarily by one person, but by different members of the group. A communal conversation occurs. What is expressed is no longer personal opinion, but the-thought-that-lives-amongst-us.

Initially, conversation seems too prosaic, too ordinary to be of importance. The problem with the spiritual world is not that it is so far away, but that it is *so close*. We fail to see in the seemingly ordinary the extraordinary revealing itself. It really should not surprise us, however, that progressive spiritual beings manifest themselves in our conversation. They approach us with the utmost respect for our freedom; neither impinging on our will, nor overwhelming our feelings. They approach us delicately, through our thoughts, which we are free to accept or reject.^x Nor do they approach us with a pre-packaged idea or thought content. Their thought is above individual language, and we must struggle to mold it into a form suited to our own situation. The scope of this way of working does not confine itself to a closed group of college members and spiritual beings. The higher selves of the children, parents, and all those connected with the school may, at any moment, be involved in the process. Indeed, this approach can be especially fruitful in discussions around a child in difficulty, for instance.

What is the nature of the activity we engage in when listening with all our soul to our colleagues and strive to grasp the-thought-that-lives-amongst-us? Creative, artistic activity! It is no different from the way a composer listens to the music he is about to set down, or the eurythmist listens for the source of her movement. The teachers must work with no less artistry, are no less artists within the college, than they are within the classroom. Indeed, a successful college *is* an artist; is as much a creator being as the archetypal human being of which the school is an image.

ⁱ) See Dr. Johannes Tautz, *The Founding of the First Waldorf School in Stuttgart, transcript of lectures given in Spring Valley, New York, 1982. Published by the Council of the Pedagogical Section of the Anthroposophical Society in North America.*

ⁱⁱ) *Extensive material is to be found on the spiritual hierarchies. The reader who is unfamiliar with the subject will find numerous references to the spiritual hierarchies in Rudolf Steiner's lectures and writings. See: Occult Science, Rudolf Steiner Press, London; The Mission of Folk-souls, Rudolf Steiner Press, London; The Spiritual Hierarchies and their Reflection in the Physical World, Anthroposophic Press, New York.*

ⁱⁱⁱ) *See Rudolf Steiner, Theosophy, Rudolf Steiner Press, London, as well a numerous references in Steiner's lectures.*

^{iv}) *See note 3.*

^v) *This is meant in the general sense that an internalized astral body is necessary in order to have internalized sense and metabolic organs. See, Rudolf Steiner and Ita Wegman, Fundamentals of Therapy, Rudolf Steiner Press, London.*

^{vi}) *Lest there be unclarity around this point, there is no automatic conferring of ego-status on any individual or group of teachers. Just as a person can have a weak ego, or even, in certain circumstances, no ego-presence at all, so too can a school be in this position and yet continue to function - even, seemingly, quite well. It is entirely possible to have all the accoutrements of Waldorf education and yet be a shell.*

^{vii}) *Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet, William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1975.*

^{viii}) *See note 3.*

^{ix}) *See Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy of Freedom, as well as numerous other authors working out of anthroposophy.*

^x) *While the college 'meditation' refers to strength, courage and wisdom in connection with the angels, archangels and archai, Rudolf Steiner's Foundation Stone meditation connects "Thought" and "Spirit-vision" with these beings.*