

# Will Developed Intelligence – guest speaker – Bernard Graves

## Report of the 14th Fellowship of Waldorf Teachers in New Zealand Conference – hosted by Taikura Rudolf Steiner School, Hastings

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Bernard Graves was teaching a Class 11, holding an acorn between his two fingers to discuss the science behind it with the class. Suddenly, the acorn spoke to him. “You have never put me in the ground” it said, “You have never nurtured me and watched me grow. And you think you can teach children about me?” It was a moment that changed his life. Bernard gave up teaching and from then on, made it his mission to implement practical learning methods into classrooms: learning through doing.

Mark McGavock from Taikura Rudolf Steiner School, Hastings, went overseas in 2007 to undertake sabbatical research into practical educational opportuni-

ties that had developed in Europe and the UK. On this quest, he met Bernard Graves. It turned out to be an inspirational visit. And so, on the 28th of September 2008, the Fellowship of Steiner Schools in New Zealand was gathered in the hall of Taikura, listening to what Bernard had to bring. The lectures were timetabled in the afternoons while the mornings were devoted to practical workshops. This was in accordance with Bernard’s message that practical work is not just the afterthought, something to be done in the afternoon after the intellectual work, but that it is the main menu. The following is my interpretation of what he said during those afternoons. It is by no means the correct

or even complete record and for more detailed information I recommend a visit to Bernard’s website:

<http://www.pyrites.org/publications.html>

In today’s world, we have a lot to celebrate. Modern inventions and technology have taken a lot of hard work from our hand, which creates a lot of freedom and free time. This development, however, comes at a price. We have no longer skills that our forefathers used to have, skills that may seem for some outdated and unnecessary, but which are vital for our individual, societal and environmental development. In the UK, about 85% of Year 4 children can handle a keyboard, while only half of these can

chop a carrot. It is hard to get a carpenter or a plumber these days. By losing manual skills, we are losing our independence and sense of self worth and once we have lost that for ourselves, the same happens towards our neighbour. Mainstream education has noted this development and is working at getting craft skills back in the curriculum. After all, we do not want to be without our trade's people to do the jobs for us. "But here", said Bernard, "lies the difference." He not only urges the craft skills back as a society that needs their tradesman, we need to bring them back for our development, for the education of our senses, our will, our path of inner transformation. Not because of the lack of carpenters.

Unlike animals, who gain their skills merely by being born into it, we need to work on craft skills. A spider knows how to create a web. Knitting or embroidering a similar piece takes lots of hours of practice, lots of mistakes and lots of motivation, a process in which lots of will is created. By transforming materials



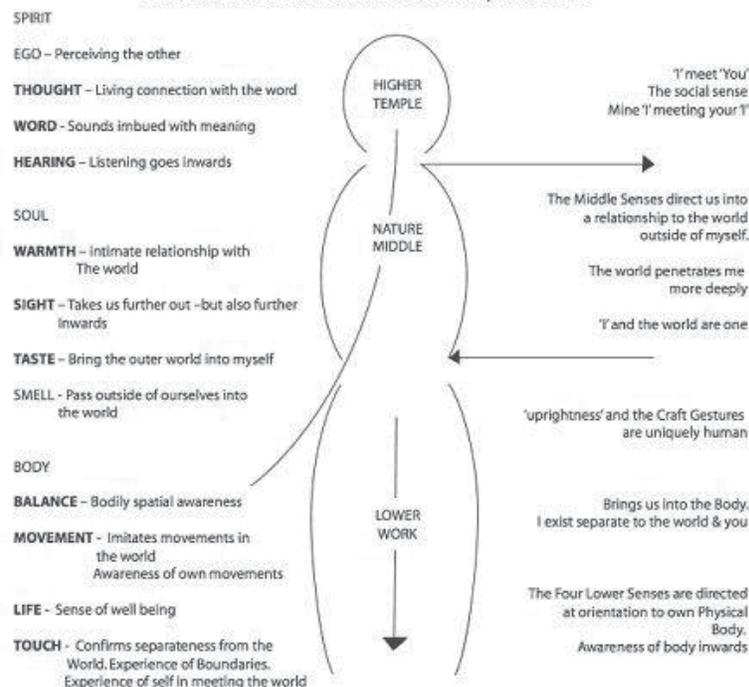
Strike while the iron's hot

with our hands, we transform ourselves inwardly. Fairytales are full of pictures of this: the flax has to be spun into gold, the spindle of the industrious, beautiful sister falls into the well, the shoemaker who is helped by the elves: the characters in these stories transform through doing, through transforming raw materials into useful and beautiful objects. Using our hands in a meaningful manner educates our senses, particularly our lower senses.

Trying to educate the higher senses without first addressing the lower senses doesn't work. Only by nurturing and educating the lower senses, the middle and higher senses can be transformed.: in order to kiss the princess in the tower we need to climb the tower first.

To educate the senses means we need to let them breathe. Children need to experience nature, touch, smell and wonder. The senses are our gateways into the world and the means whereby we take in the world into ourselves and begin to make sense of it. By carding wool, preparing leather, shaving wood, weaving flax we use our hands, we experience, we process the world,

#### Inter relationship of the Senses The World – the Self & Social. Soul life & to the Spiritual World

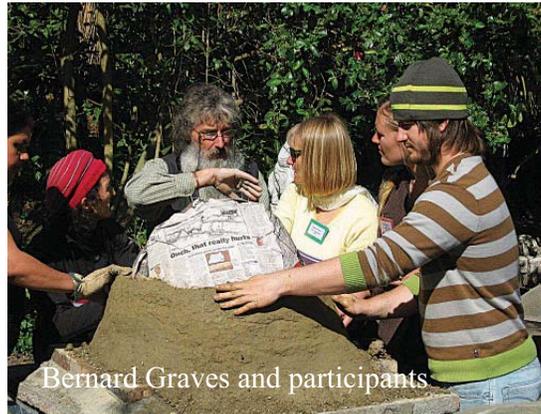


we understand the world. Often we say Steiner education is education of the Head, the Heart and the Hands, but it is actually the other way around: we educate first the Hands, then the Heart, then the Head. The hands are "the eyes of the rhythmical system", working with the hands influences the heart. When we work with materials Mother Earth gave us, we experience joy, wonder, frustration, happiness; our heart forces are touched upon. We experience the satisfaction of a job well done. Through craft, we not only leave an imprint on materials, the materials leave an imprint on us. This is what Bernard calls the "dual action: the craft gesture".

At the same time, the touch and movement stimulates the rich network pathways of nerve tissues atrophies which stimulates the thinking. Modern research confirms this; according to neurologist Mattie Bergstrom children who do not use their hands become "fingerblind". The connection between hand and head is undeveloped and thinking then becomes so as to speak, 'wooden'. Hence Steiner's famous quote: "Knitting begets thinking."

Living in a "headistic", a "push the button with instant result" culture has

another consequence, we have become dislocated from our space and time. Schools, and that includes Steiner Schools, buy clay, unaware that the clay is actually right there, under their feet. We fly in resources from all over the world, regardless of seasons, unaware of the time it takes for these resources to grow and mature, unaware of their value and their place in the landscape. When we collect our own raw resources, we learn about these aspects. We learn that for everything there is a season and that things take time. When we split wood, we stack it and then we have to wait until it is dry, ready to be burned. This waiting is an important quality to develop in our souls and a vital antidote to our instant gratification culture. Bernard is not saying that every piece of clay ever used in a school should be hand dug from the local environment, but it is important that children have this experience, so when they work with clay they make the wider connection. Likewise with wool, plants, leather(!). We learn to appreciate these resources, we understand them, we love them and therefore we will care for these resources. Hence, sustainability develops from craftwork. And last but not least: the future. Steiner refers in his lectures that what the hands do in this life, determines the forming of the head, the thinking in the



Bernard Graves and participants

next life... Over the last hours, my hands have done nothing else than clicking the keyboard of my laptop. Time to get out into nature and use a craft gesture.

The old Lakota was wise:  
*He knew that the heart of a human being  
 Became hard when he is not connected  
 To the natural world.  
 He knew that this lack of connection  
 And respect for living things results in  
 The lack of respect for ourselves and our  
 fellow beings.  
 Therefore he made sure that his children  
 Were brought up living with the gentle  
 influences of and in harmony with nature.*

Is not the core of Nature already in the Human Heart?

In the words of Emerson:  
*'Nature was once our Nursery today she is  
 our Hospital'*

From Goethe:  
*"To educate through Art is to awaken  
 the human being to his/her own nobler*

*attitudes and qualities and to quicken his/her perception of the world he/she lives in, so that he/she may come to know his/her self as the being who gives meaning to creation. Unless the human being can re-create his/her self through an orderly education of the heart as well as head, unless his/her will can be guided to serve spirit as well as matter, he/she may cease to be a human being and become a prototype of his/her misconception of his/herself: a beast without a mission."*

*"We cannot do spiritual work, work of soul and spirit, except with the continuous participation of the body. When we do bodily work the spirit and soul within us takes part only in so far as our thoughts direct our walking, or guide our work. But the spirit and soul nature takes part in it from without. We continuously work into the spirit of the world; we continuously unite ourselves with the spirit of the world when we do bodily work. Bodily work is spiritual; spiritual work is bodily, its effect is bodily upon and within the human being. We must understand this paradox and make it our own, namely that bodily work is spiritual and spiritual work bodily, both in the human being and in its effects on the human being. Spirit is flooding round us when do bodily work. Matter is active within us when we do spiritual work." Rudolf Steiner (1966) The Study of Man, Steiner Press, London.*

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