

Partnerships of Hope: ***Building Waldorf School Communities***

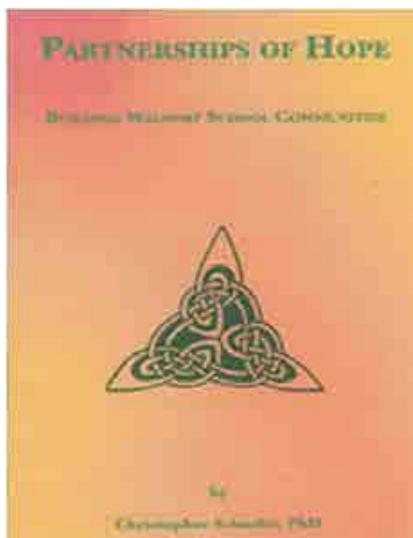
Reviewed by

Bernard ThomsonWillunga Waldorf School
South Australia**by Christopher Schaefer**

With his book *Partnerships of Hope*, Christopher Schaefer offers both newcomers as well as veterans of the Steiner Waldorf school movement a guide to the life and development challenges facing Waldorf Schools both young and old. This pocket guide comprises a series of essays containing a wealth of experience derived from a long association working as a consultant with Waldorf schools in many countries. It also includes numerous practical exercises for group work and community building.

We are reminded that all organisations are social creations which reflect the intentions, character and values of the initiators. As with human beings they too unfold a personality and express stages of development with corresponding challenges that need to be recognised. Pioneer initiatives generate an energy and dynamism which will recede over time as the organisation grows in complexity. The more mature the organisation, the greater the consciousness required in the leadership and governance structure.

Waldorf schools call upon us to practice the social art of creation, presenting us with individual development challenges as we engage with the dynamics of a college of teachers, faculty group or parent partnership. These dynamics reflect us back on ourselves and it is in the process of reflection that we encounter the antisocial character of modern individualised consciousness. In the spheres of thinking, feeling and willing we will experience forces of opposition as well as the stimulus to self-development.



Christopher Schaefer goes on to compare the art of building temples in earlier cultures with the modern social art of community building. Just as the temples provided an experience for divine revelation, so too, our school communities present us with the opportunity to engage in the spiritual practices of mindfulness, self-reflection and inner growth.

The book is full of handy tips and practical examples concerning the challenge of self-administration and school governance, leadership and cultural renewal, individual and group work. It includes a chapter on Rudolf Steiner as a social reformer and the historical background to the first Waldorf School.

We are given a timely reminder of the ever increasing requirements of State bureaucracies leading to greater compliance with standardised educational goals as well as curriculum content. These compliance and accompanying accountability requirements present an additional challenge to the task of developing organisational forms which support the impulse and culture of Waldorf education.

Dr Schaefer's composition style is refreshing and grounded in personal experience. The practical challenges facing Waldorf Schools are presented within the context of the profound spiritual vision that underpins the Waldorf Education movement. New forms of community partnership provide the social basis for Waldorf education. The hope expressed in this book is that it will fulfil its mission to strengthen the human spirit and bring about social and environmental healing at a time when these are under ever increasing threat. ❖