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A Waldorf teacher, who enriched the lives of his students with mirth, music, and mathematics, passes on.
When I was growing up, I resented the television-free and electronic-technology-free lifestyle I experienced at home and at the Denver Waldorf School. Since then, however, I have come to believe that use of electronic technologies should be closely monitored in all aspects of life, but particularly in education. Of course, in today’s society, not including technology in schools is not feasible. Electronic technologies are inescapable, and they can be useful. But they must be evaluated for their usefulness first.

The mainstream consensus about computer technology in education, promoted by government policy and industry marketing initiatives, is “the earlier the better and the more the better.” Instruction in keyboarding and other computer skills can begin as early as kindergarten. The concern is that the United States will lose its competitive economic edge in the world. Also, computer-based instruction allows individual students to progress at their own rate and to repeat a class or lecture easily. Also, it reduces instructional costs. Advocates of technology use in schools cite statistics about increased attendance, participation, and graduation rates. However, all these statistics are generated in high schools. There are no studies indicating that starting computer instruction in kindergarten is beneficial for the child as a whole person or as a student.

An important, largely neglected consideration is the effect of technology on the social life and social skills of students. Individualized technology use in schools drastically changes the interactions between students. In an article about twenty-first century education, Carneiro and Draxler write:

A successful education system is one built on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. This image is both philosophical and pragmatic, one that forces attention to the societal role of education and the consequent balance between knowledge and action, between individual and social learning. [This last—learning to live together—is] often assumed, neglected, or limited to the early years of schooling before academic and practical learning for the economic sector begins. (European Journal of Education, 43, 2008, 149)
Although Waldorf schools diverge in many areas from the mainstream culture, on the issue of WiFi they seem to have gone very much with the majority, at a conference on technology in education held at Rudolf Steiner College, Dr. Glöckler was the keynote speaker and spoke several times about WiFi technology and its possible dangers. One morning, with over 300 Waldorf teachers and administrators in the hall, I asked, “How many people are at schools with a WiFi system?” Almost everyone in the audience raised a hand. Then I asked, “Was there at the installation of WiFi, or has there been since, any discussion about possible adverse effects and health concerns?” About five people raised a hand.

WiFi is part of a larger phenomenon known as electrosmog. Electrosmog includes the ambient pulsed radio frequency radiation generated by WiFi routers, cell phone towers, cell phones, cordless phones, and even “baby watchers.” The term refers also to the electromagnetic fields (EMFs) generated by power lines, electrical motors and appliances, including computers, and by electrical cables and wires. Unlike air pollution or noise pollution, electrosmog cannot normally be perceived by the five senses. One needs, ironically, an electrical device, to detect and measure its presence.

There is a lot of controversy about the possible negative effects of WiFi, cell phones, and related devices. The people who are concerned about and bring up the topic can be an annoyance to those who do not perceive any possible danger and who do not appreciate a major source of convenience in their lives being called into question. However, we parents and educators, for our own sake and for the sake of our children, should inform ourselves about this new presence in our daily lives. At the very least, we should be aware that we are all subjects in a massive, unplanned, largely involuntary biological research project, and no one will know the results for a long time.
Dornach, Switzerland, is a small village a few miles outside of Basel. On a hill overlooking the village and the Aare Valley stands the Goetheanum. Designed by Rudolf Steiner, but constructed after his death in 1925, the Goetheanum is the center of the worldwide anthroposophical movement. It is also the seat of the Pedagogical Section of the School for Spiritual Science, which guides the international Waldorf movement, now with over 1000 Waldorf schools in some sixty countries.

In January of this year, the three leaders of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America—David Owen-Cruise, Leader of Administration, Beverly Amico, Leader of Outreach and Development, and I—had the pleasure of visiting Dornach. We had a behind-the-scenes tour of the Goetheanum by Christof Wiechert, former head of the Pedagogical Section. The huge building houses a 1000-seat hall, a second smaller theater, many offices, a library, a bookstore, a card shop, classrooms, and a bustling cafeteria. It also contains, in a special display room, The Representative of Humanity, a thirty-foot-high wooden sculpture created by Rudolf Steiner in his last years. The central figure, manifesting a perfect balance between the material and the spiritual aspects of reality, is meant to represent the ideal of the highly evolved human being of the future.

Our main purpose in going was to meet with the Board of the International Forum (formerly known as the Hague Circle), a group of Waldorf educators from around the world, which gathers regularly to reflect on developments in the worldwide movement. Toward the end of our meetings, Christof said that we three had been invited “so that our mutual groups would have a human basis on which to develop our future work together.” I was struck by this intention. In this fast-paced, instant-gratification world, where most human interaction is electronic, to invite colleagues to a meeting 6000 miles away—for the purpose of creating a human relationship for future work—was a refreshing and hope-filled gesture. One could argue that this is to be expected in our Waldorf community. However, our hosts’ surprise and delight at our accepting their trans-Atlantic invitation affirmed for me the importance of what might be called “cultivating humanness.” This is a key task for us as human beings and something about which we have much to learn.

When I think of concepts and beliefs that develop humanness, I am drawn to key values in Anthroposophy—among them self-knowledge, empathy, compassion, collaboration, moral intuition, and social and economic justice. I ask myself, “How can I, as a partner, sibling, aunt, colleague, leader, student, and friend cultivate humanness?”

Beverly, David, and I have been working hard to understand what it means for the three of us to work in a collaborative manner and to establish processes that nurture both collegialship and accountability. We each take the fruits of this effort with us to apply in our work with colleagues at member schools, with people newly inspired by Waldorf Education, and with professionals in the wider realm of education.

I am inspired by the words of Supreme Court justice Sonia Sotomayor, shared in the prologue of her book My Beloved World:

You cannot value dreams according to the odds of their coming true. Their real value is in stirring within us the will to aspire. That will, wherever it finally leads, does at least move you forward. And after a time you may recognize that the proper measure of success is not how much you’ve closed the distance to some far-off goal, but the quality of what you’ve done today.

All of us involved in Waldorf Education have big dreams, but the quality of what we do on a daily basis in our human interactions—our ability to demonstrate humanness—is in itself a real triumph.
The Association’s 2014 summer conference will explore this topic of cultivating humanness in a specific way. As the conference description reads:

While the technological world we live in is created by human beings, it has the potential to alienate and even separate us from the very roots of human existence and from our larger connection to the earth and cosmos. How can we help young people become rooted in the world through their own experience and gain the forces they need to fruitfully navigate the waters of technological culture and contribute to its ongoing evolution?

As parents and educators, we strive to engender within

*Franklin, continued*

Students cannot learn to live together if they are not interacting with each other. Learning to share crayons in kindergarten, to make lasting friendships in elementary school, to withstand bullying in middle school, and to persevere through the social challenges of adolescence are all tasks having to do with human interactions in the real world. They are not always easy or fun, but they are extraordinarily necessary. These life lessons are inaccessible when there is a screen, rather than another human being, in front of the student.

There are distinct advantages to keeping education based on face-to-face, live human interactions. CNN commentator Wendy Kopp cites the extreme benefits of having “one highly effective elementary school teacher” as including a higher likelihood of going to college, a lower probability of experiencing teen pregnancy, and earning a higher salary. She notes that “technology is a tool, not a silver bullet. And like all tools, it can be helpful or harmful depending on how we use it.”

My own exposure to electronic technology was based on the principle that underlies the teaching of all subjects in a Waldorf school—age-appropriate learning. When I and my fellow students were capable of dealing with a subject or skill, the subject was introduced. The use of computers to type papers or assignments was not allowed without special permission until high school. Computer classes started only in the ninth grade. Students were required to pass competency tests for typing before they could engage in other computer activities. Of course, most students were already computer-literate by that time. The computer classes then proceeded to increase in difficulty—as with all Waldorf curricula—working up to programming.

At the beginning of high school, I was on the lower end of the spectrum in computer competency. In my home, computer time was drastically limited and monitored. We did not have video games, and our television (also closely supervised) was nothing but a screen connected to a DVD player. Thus, my experience with electronic technology was minimal.

Nevertheless, I found that I picked up computer skills very readily. I now consider myself one of the more capable of my peers in terms of the number of programs I am competent with. So I would never say that I suffered from the slow introduction of electronic technology in my day-to-day life. I think that the conscientious manner in which the Waldorf school introduced me to technology not only adequately prepared me for today’s fast-paced world, but also protected me from it. I am grateful that my parents chose to put me in a Waldorf school and worked with my teachers to guide this aspect of my education so carefully.

If we place our children’s education in the wired hands of electronic technology, then why educate the children in the first place? Certainly if machines are capable of truly teaching—of replacing human beings in one of the most person-dependent professions in our society—then it won’t be long before they will be performing all other jobs. And if schooling is merely a marketplace for future employees who can also be replaced by machines, then why bother with the whole charade? A child’s mind is an impressionable, malleable, incomparable work of art. I think it is unconscionable to allow our children to rely on, be raised by, and taught by an apparatus incapable of feeling and knowing what it is to be human.
Preschools and kindergartens in North America have undergone radical changes during the past several decades. In the early kindergartens, the focus was on socialization and active play in an unpressured environment. Now kindergartens are a downward extension of formal schooling. Today, attendance at an academic preschool and kindergarten is considered a necessary head start on the fast track to later school success. Many kindergarten programs are using highly prescriptive curricula geared to new federal core standards and linked to standardized tests.

In order to prepare children for the increased demands of kindergarten, many parents feel it is necessary to send their children to preschools that provide formal, academic learning activities.

The result is that children’s lives today are characterized by busy schedules of structured activities, an excess of screen time, and the near absence of play. Concerned educators and child development specialists have referred to these child-rearing practices as “hot-housing,” “hurrying,” “push-parenting,” and “mis-education.” The accelerated pace of children’s lives may be leading to the loss of childhood itself.

Today’s parents are therefore under a great deal of pressure. They experience much uncertainty about how best to parent and educate their child. On the one hand, they want their child to have a happy and unpressured childhood. On the other, they worry that, if they do not provide an accelerated academic track, their child will have a damaging experience of failure early in life.

The irony is that fundamental research contradicts this trend in early childhood education. In the twentieth century, researchers such as the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) described the social, emotional, and cognitive stages of development that children go through. In doing so, he revolutionized our understanding of childhood. His ideas have been corroborated by more recent research. It has been established that not only do children think differently from adults, but they also have a different worldview. Studies by child development specialists clearly indicate that it is not productive to force too early what should come later.

According to Piaget, intelligence develops in age-related stages. Each stage sees the elaboration of new mental abilities that determine the nature of what can be learned during that period. During the preschool and kindergarten years, the young child’s mode of thinking is preoperational, prescientific, and prerational. The young child has a magical worldview.

For parents and educators, knowledge of child development is a valuable tool for understanding what can reasonably be expected in each of the several stages in childhood. One can design programs that are developmentally appropriate.

Rudolf Steiner, decades before Piaget, also discerned the stages of child development and designed an education accordingly. The Waldorf kindergarten is based on a recognition and understanding of the special quality of the consciousness of the young child. Only at age seven is a child able to do academic work, and even then that intellectual work should be enfolded in artistic and movement activities. A dominant intellectual emphasis becomes appropriate only at about fourteen years of age. Prior to that, one is actually missing the special opportunities to educate the child in a right way.

Working as a Waldorf kindergarten teacher for over forty years, I have experienced the difficulties facing parents firsthand. Especially in light of the
contemporary climate regarding preschool education, it has been, and continues to be, a moving experience for me to witness the reaction of parents unfamiliar with Waldorf Education when they visit the kindergarten for the first time. As soon as they step into the kindergarten space, any initial apprehension around a first encounter dissipates. After glancing around the room, they typically respond with “Ah, it is so beautiful in here! My child would love it!”

The lack of clutter and of commercial toys, the softness of the colors and the decorative silks, as well as the “special something” that radiates from handmade objects, all come together to create a calm oasis—an oasis that stands in sharp contrast to the busy and overstimulating typical preschool/kindergarten classroom. Parents immediately sense that their child would feel at home in the Waldorf kindergarten setting. The environment itself calls out in encouragement for children to play—good, old-fashioned, make-believe play. And as the parents often say, “This is the kind of play my child loves most.”

I have observed throughout my years of teaching young children that the child’s happiness is consistently the parents’ highest priority. This feeling of wanting to secure their child’s happiness rises to the surface spontaneously when parents are immersed in surroundings that are play-centered. It is as if parents have been given permission to reconnect, without reservation, to what they really want for their children. Most parents feel deeply that the child’s innate sense of magic, wonder, and happiness is intrinsic to childhood and should be preserved and nurtured. Parents sense that childhood should be protected, not hurried.

Why, in the face of recent research by developmental psychologists and despite the successful model of the Waldorf kindergarten, do we continue to pressure our children into early academics? Why is there a desire to speed things up?

Our culture has a strong scientific–materialistic bias. Within the framework of our contemporary, dominant cultural paradigm, a well-developed intellect, along with a strong ego identity, is seen as the desired culmination of a person’s development. Intellectual prowess and an intense, self-assertive individualism are the most valued characteristics. From this viewpoint, the prescientific and magical consciousness of the child is as an error to be corrected. Therefore, even though scientific findings indicate that there is an optimal time for the development of the intellect, the tendency is to hurry children out of magical thinking toward a more “intellectually correct” outlook as quickly as possible. The old paradigm does not die easily.

The first warnings about the possible downside of hurrying children came in the 1980s. Enough time has gone by to assess the results. Studies have shown that there is no lasting benefit in providing children with an academic jump start. Instead, children are burned-out and turned-off to school before they reach an age when an academic approach is appropriate. The reforms in early childhood education that pushed children out of childhood and created credential-obsessed parents and performance-driven teachers have now been met by a counter-reformation. We are learning that later may be better than sooner, and less may in fact be more. We are learning that children need to be children, which is to say, they need less structured activity and more time to play, less screen time and more active time, less didactic instruction and more imaginative exploration.

Restoring play in kindergartens has become a major focus of this counterreformation. As the emphasis in early education shifts from a premature intellectual approach to a more holistic one, the wider range of skills fostered by play becomes appreciated. As leading education and health professionals point out:

Research shows that children who engage in complex forms of socio-dramatic play have greater...
language skills than nonplayers, better social skills, more empathy, more imagination, and more of the subtle capacity to know what others mean. They are less aggressive and show more self-control and higher levels of thinking. (Joan Almon and Edward Miller, “Crisis in Early Education: A Research-Based Case for More Play and Less Pressure,” www.allianceforchildhood.org, November 2011)

Today, rather than unwittingly hurrying their children out of childhood, more and more parents are asking the questions: Do we really want to place our children on a fast track to be overly competitive in a materialistic world? Is there something intrinsically valuable in the glow and wonder of childhood that needs to be better understood? Are perhaps these precious qualities, which are distinctive to childhood, a treasure to be rightly included in the education process?

A New, Expanded Paradigm of Human Potential

A major paradigm shift—a fundamental shift in values and in our understanding of human nature and human potential—is taking place today. This shift has the potential to create major and long-lasting changes in early childhood education.

Drawing on perennial wisdom teachings from many cultures as well as modern transpersonal psychology, the new paradigm points to another step in mental development and self-identity and to a richer picture of human possibilities. It sheds light on the inherent value and meaning of childhood and the important part childhood plays in providing a firm foundation for a meaningful and soul-satisfying life.

According to the new paradigm, humanity has reached the culmination of the development of the “lower mind”—the faculty by which we perceive, understand, and control the material, outer world. We need to cultivate a higher faculty—what might be called intuition—and to turn our attention toward the world of meaning, both within us and outside of us. We need to build a bridge in consciousness to spiritual realms. Cut off from its spiritual source, the human intellect has been misused and selfishly misapplied.

To a substantial degree, this emerging paradigm was presaged by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) a century ago. Steiner emphasized the importance of activating the “I,” or Higher Self, so that the human being can access the spiritual as well as the material dimension of reality:

In what is red, green, light, dark, hard, soft, warm, cold, one recognizes the revelations of the corporeal world; in what is true and good, the revelations of the spiritual world. In the same sense in which the revelations of the corporeal world are called sensation, let the revelation of the spiritual be called intuition…. The soul, or rather the “I” lighting up in it, opens its portals on two sides, toward the corporeal and toward the spiritual. (Theosophy [Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1994], 51)

Steiner also writes of the faculty of intuition, or “heart cognition,” as distinct from the reasoning, concretizing mind. When heart cognition begins to develop—as the result of conscious spiritual training—there is a major shift in self-identity. The egotistical self-centered personality, which focuses on what satisfies one personally, starts to be reoriented and transformed. Since intuitions connect one to eternal truths, one is less in the transitory and more in an “imperishable reality.”

In a similar way, the transpersonal psychologist Roberto Assagioli (1888–1974) makes a distinction between different levels of human consciousness. The superconscious is the region from which …we receive our higher intuitions and inspirations—artistic, philosophical, scientific, or ethical “imperatives” and urges to humanitarian and heroic action. It is the source of the higher feelings, such as altruistic love; of genius; and of the states of contemplation, illumination, and ecstasy. In this realm are latent the higher psychic functions and spiritual energies. (Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings [Amherst, MA: Synthesis Center Publishing, 2000], 17-18)

When this consciousness is reached, the person identifies both with his or her individuality and with universal life.

There wells up a realization that life is one, and an outpouring of love flows through the awakening individual towards his fellow beings and the whole of creation. The former personality, with its sharp angles and disagreeable traits, seems to have receded into the background and a new and lovable Individual smiles at us and the whole world, full of eagerness to please, to
serve, and to share his newly acquired spiritual riches. 
(Psychosynthesis, 46)

A contemporary writer, Frances Vaughan, describes this as the transpersonal or transcendent stage, the third of a three-stage progression. The prior prepersonal and personal stages are only precursors to this higher state.

Magical Consciousness / Transpersonal Consciousness

The current, dominant cultural paradigm—unspoken, unclear, yet dutifully honored—implies that the intellectual human being, materially successful, is the ultimate goal. The relationship between child and adult, or between magical consciousness and intellectual consciousness, is one of mutually exclusive, polar opposition.

The new paradigm sees childhood as the first stage in a threefold developmental process. It includes the first two but goes beyond them to a third stage.

With the addition of a third step in the development of consciousness, the necessary polarity between the magical (child) and the intellectual (adult) consciousness is transcended. The third stage of awakened intuition has much in common with the child's consciousness. The experience of unity is the basis for the distinct qualities of childhood. Children feel deeply the living spirit of stones, plants, and animals as the same force that lives within them, and they experience the world with wonder and awe. Childhood is a stage of unconscious unity. The third stage, that of the Higher Self, is one of conscious unity.

Both the first and third stages also are characterized by love. Children send their unconditional love out to people, animals, plants, and objects in their environment—indeed, to the whole of creation. Similarly, the realization of the Higher Self results in an outpouring of love toward all that exists.

In the course of human development, the child's experience of unity and spontaneous, unconditional love dims and disappears. Consciousness and love become individualized as the child enters the second stage, that of conscious separation. This is a necessary step, because it is only on the foundation of a developed individuality that the journey into transpersonal dimensions can begin. However, a rich and unhurried experience in the realm of unconscious unity will provide a secure support when the child, much later as an adult, is ready to find her way consciously out of separation, back to experience of universal oneness, with its quality of spontaneous, unconditional love.

From this perspective, the child’s stage of development contains in seed form what may flower later. It has intrinsic value and meaning in the unfolding of the child’s life and destiny. As parents and teachers, we have a sacred trust to help make the childhood years as rich and safe as possible and to verify the child’s innate sense that the world is good and worthy of trust.

The child’s very presence in our midst is a reminder of our own, as yet unfulfilled, potential. Children tug at us to drop our hard edges, our busyness and various preoccupations so that we may come to feel the magic, joy, and wonder of creation and of human life. Rather than seeing the child’s magical consciousness as an error to be corrected, we should see that it may hold a key to restoring spiritual nourishment to a world that is spiritually hungry. We are beginning to see that perhaps we adults should become more childlike rather than trying to turn children into little adults.

GESINE ABRAHAM received her training as a Waldorf early childhood educator at Emerson College in England and at the Waldorf Institute in Detroit, Michigan. With four decades of teaching experience with young children, she currently teaches at Star of the Morning Children’s Center in Jacksonville, Oregon. When she is not busy in the classroom, Gesine loves to knit, bake, and read.
Education journals are increasingly noting the fact that boys are having more difficulty in school than girls. Boys have more behavioral and learning problems. They are diagnosed much more frequently with attention disorders and with autism spectrum conditions. Most of the children prescribed Ritalin are boys, as are, overwhelmingly, the children who drop out of school. Statistics indicate that these trends are all becoming stronger. Some observers suggest that one factor in boys’ difficulty in school is their initial experience of academic learning in kindergarten.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the influential French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) wrote a book entitled *Emile, or On Education*. In that treatise, Rousseau describes reading as the “plague of childhood.” He writes, “Books are good only for having to babble about what one does not know. I am convinced that in matters of observation, one must not read, one must see.”

In the early nineteenth century, this idea inspired the Swiss educator, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. In the school that he established in Frankfurt, there were no lectures and almost no books. A hallmark of his pedagogy was taking the children on long walks through the countryside. Through the cultivation of their power of observation, the children learned geology, botany, zoology, and other subjects. Pestalozzi put into practice Rousseau’s conviction that education should be based on firsthand experience.

One of the teachers in Pestalozzi’s school was Friedrich Froebel. At that time, children under the age of seven were believed to be too young for school. In fact, in many German states, it was illegal for children younger than seven to attend school. Froebel, however, believed that the ideas of Rousseau and Pestalozzi could be beneficially extended to children ages three to six. In 1837 he opened his first school for just this age group, later using the term *kindergarten* to describe the model. The young students were cultivated in this “children’s garden,” and they in turn had an opportunity to cultivate the earth. Each child was given a small garden plot to plant and to care for and also worked in a communal garden under the teacher’s supervision.

By the 1860s, kindergartens had spread throughout Europe and North America. In the United States, however, a different model was already trying to introduce preliteracy skills to kindergarten children. This impulse grew, despite the vehement opposition of the doyenne of the kindergarten movement of that era, Elizabeth Peabody. She referred to such initiatives as “false kindergartens that cater to adults who want to see youngsters doing academics when what is really good for kindergarteners is playing.” (cf. Leonard Sax, “Reclaiming Kindergarten: Making Kindergarten Less Harmful to Boys,” *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* 2, no. 1 [2001]: 3-12)

Rudolf Steiner was an admirer of Pestalozzi and Froebel. He too believed that early academics are opposed to the developmental needs of the young child, holding that only after the age of six is a child ready to begin such work. Steiner also believed in a “hands-on” education in which observation and direct experience play a central role. Steiner used these principles in founding the first Waldorf elementary school—in Stuttgart in 1919—and in designing its curriculum. Before his death in 1925, Steiner gave advice to several teachers about what a Waldorf kindergarten should be. For a few months before his passing, one of these teachers, Elizabeth Grunelius—trained in the Pestalozzi–Froebel method—had a small kindergarten group in the Stuttgart school. In 1926 she was given her own classroom at the school. Through the work of Grunelius and of others, the Waldorf...
kindergarten movement spread rapidly. Grunelius left Germany in 1938 when the Waldorf schools were closed by the National Socialists. She emigrated to the United States and founded a Waldorf kindergarten in Kimberton, Pennsylvania, in 1940.

The indications for kindergarten education that Rudolf Steiner gave were based on his research into human nature and child development. For Steiner, the child is a spiritual being who slowly descends into a material, physical body that has been inherited from the parents. Steiner’s view is consistent with the metaphor that Saint Francis of Assisi used to describe the relation between the true, Higher Self of the human being and the physical body that allows us to live in the world. Our Higher Self must learn to ride a donkey—the physical body. We should never confuse the coarse, unruly physical body with our true self. Rather, the physical is something we must tame, ride, and control.

For Steiner, parents and teachers should honor and support the child as he struggles to take the reins of the body and to deal with its quirks and stubborn nature. In the preschool years, the child needs above all a healthy, safe, homelike environment where he can develop socially and physically.

In the past one hundred years, there has been a struggle between the model proposed by Froebel and Steiner, in which play is central, and the idea that kindergarten should prepare children for later academics. In the past forty years, government policy has strongly favored the academic model, despite the protests of many prominent psychologists and child development specialists. This policy is driven more by politics than by research. What is being realized more and more, though, is that the current system is leaving many children behind, especially boys.

**Boys Are Different!**

Every parent of a son soon learns that boys have what seem to be innate distinctive interests, tendencies, and ways of going about things. There are unexplained mysteries: Why are almost all boys drawn to toy cars, trucks, and other machines and show little interest in dolls? Why are they so strongly attracted to guns and other weapons—often in spite of parental squeamishness about these same objects?

For Steiner, every child goes through the process of incarnating fully into the physical body. But he also held that, in general, this process takes place differently for boys and for girls. Boys tend to incarnate a little too deeply, while girls not quite deeply enough. According to Steiner, this is the basis for the general differences between boys and girls. Obviously, however, there are individual variations in both sexes. That boys incarnate too deeply accounts for physical differences—they are generally bigger and stronger—as well as differences in their interests. Boys are fascinated by physical power and strength. The less deeply incarnated female child is more drawn to aesthetics—the realm of beauty—and to social relationships.

Some modern researchers attribute the sex differences to the effect of testosterone on the fetus. The higher exposure to testosterone experienced by the male fetus during gestation has been associated with fast and accurate maze learning; the ability to throw and catch objects and perceive movement; and an aptitude for building. By contrast, lower testosterone exposure experienced by the female fetus is associated with high levels of language development, communication and social skills, and the perception of color and texture.

**Schools Have Changed, But Boys Have Not**

As mentioned earlier, boys are having much more difficulty in school than they were twenty or thirty years ago. This increase correlates exactly with the trend toward making kindergarten into a first-grade academic
experience with instruction in reading, writing, and math, and with worksheets, homework, and even tests. There is a disconnect between the current mainstream model of kindergarten and the reality of boys in terms of maturation, verbal skills, activity level, and need for hands-on learning opportunities. In contrast, Waldorf schools, which have maintained the model of kindergarten as a protected place of creative play, seem to be much more receptive to the real developmental needs of boys.

Maturity

Boys tend to be stronger and more physically active than girls. However, between five and seven years of age, boys are usually less mature than girls. They tend to lag in impulse control. Also, after a stressful experience—for example, an argument at home before coming to school—boys take longer to settle down emotionally and be ready for learning. Girls are more resilient, returning to stability and to learning readiness more quickly.

In mainstream education, the common practice is to “graduate” children into the first grade according to their age. Sometimes, boys are kept back to give them an advantage in later athletics (a practice called “redshirting”) or, if they have a summer birthday and are among the youngest in the class, to improve their chances for academic success. The preference, however, is to keep a child with his age group.

In Waldorf schools, each kindergarten child (boy or girl) is carefully evaluated to determine whether he or she is ready to advance to the first grade. Certain physical markers such as physical coordination and fine motor skills are considered, as well as indicators of social maturity. One indicator of readiness—which Steiner considered very important—is the first appearance of adult teeth. This willingness to wait until a child is physically, mentally, and socially ready for academic work is a hallmark of Waldorf Education and particularly benefits boys. It is slowly gaining credence in the wider world of education.

Verbal Skills

Girls typically start to speak earlier than boys and, by age six, they are often a year ahead of boys in verbal development. In general, girls are better than boys at reading and spelling, memorizing, and speaking with accuracy and fluency. Also, they are better able to express their feelings and to engage in reciprocal, collaborative verbal exchanges. Thus girls are more likely to succeed in the language-based curriculum used in most schools.

Boys’ verbal skills develop more slowly. Boys are not necessarily able, as is the common expectation today, to read by the age of six or seven. The danger is that, thrust too early into academics, they will struggle and experience themselves as failures. (cf. S. Baron-Cohen, The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth About Autism [New York: Basic Books, 2003])

In Waldorf schools, academic work begins in the first grade and becomes more intense gradually through the grades. Throughout the grades, the academic work is permeated and accompanied by artistic and other activities. In addition, there are many nonacademic subjects such as handwork, eurythmy, gardening, and drama, which give boys an opportunity to perform well and to experience themselves as capable and successful.

Activity Level

Many experts agree that physical activity helps children to learn. However, most schools have reduced recess and outdoor play in order to make time for preparation for state-mandated standardized tests. Even in kindergarten, the children sit at desks for much of the day doing academic work. This is particularly stressful for the boys and may cause them to exhibit behavior that can lead to a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder.

In the Waldorf kindergarten, the children—boys and girls—are in movement much of the day. The children engage in free creative play, both indoors and outdoors; they go for walks in nature with the teacher; they do movement games during daily circle time; they have eurythmy classes; and they help with food preparation, cleanup after meals, and other chores. There are no desks in a Waldorf kindergarten. In some schools, this is true in the early grades as well.
Recently, many Waldorf schools in North America have created a “forest kindergarten,” in part to deal with the reality of “boy energy.” In a forest kindergarten, some or all of the school day is spent outdoors in a natural setting, every day, all year around. The forest kindergarten began in Central Europe and was introduced to North America by Helle Heckmann, a Waldorf kindergarten teacher in Denmark. In Denmark, one in ten of all schools today has a forest kindergarten.

Mainstream education has completely lost touch with the original model of the kindergarten as a place where the child is protected and is allowed to follow his or her natural path of development. Instead it has chosen to make kindergarten an “academic hothouse” that is distinctly “anti-boy.” In some countries, such as Finland, children in the public schools start academic work two years later than in North America. Those students consistently outperform American and Canadian students on international academic tests. Still, the No Child Left Behind philosophy and policy hold sway here.

Hands-on Learning

Boys seem to learn best when they interact physically with the world around them, touching, moving, and manipulating actual physical objects. Sitting at a desk without moving and doing purely mental work is inherently stressful for them and does not promote learning. In the Waldorf kindergarten, the children imitate the physical work the adults do—kneading bread dough, cutting carrots, sweeping the floor, pulling weeds in the garden, carrying firewood. They also do simple handicrafts such as finger knitting. For boys, especially, learning to work with their hands and bodies creates a solid emotional and kinesthetic foundation for later learning.

Teacher Gender

In Waldorf schools, as elsewhere, almost all kindergarten teachers are women. This can be problematic for boys in several ways. A female teacher may find it hard to muster much enthusiasm for the machines, weapons, robots, and competitive games that interest the typical boy in her class. Also, her concept of “good behavior” may not coincide with the natural tendencies of boys to wrestle, roughhouse, and to be in a constant state of competition. Unconsciously, the teacher may better relate to and even favor the girls in the class over the boys. Also, obviously, a woman teacher cannot provide a complete role model for a boy.

Waldorf schools are trying to deal with the compromises inherent in having kindergarten boys experience only women teachers. Many schools actively recruit male kindergarten teachers or hire young men, not yet fully trained, as kindergarten assistants. Fathers and grandparents of students as well as local workmen are invited to come to school and guide the children in woodworking, gardening, building, and other activities. Many Waldorf kindergarten teachers consciously strive to bring into the classroom elements that appeal to boys, to provide stronger guidance in behavior for boys, and to adjust their standards for what “being good” is.

Waldorf kindergartens, too, struggle with meeting the challenges of teaching young boys. However, there is in Waldorf Education a tradition of recognizing the slower maturation of boys and their later development of verbal skills. Also, the Waldorf kindergarten curriculum, which is based on free play, outdoor activities, contact with nature, hands-on learning, and imitation, is well suited to meet the needs of boys. Many adults experience in the atmosphere of the Waldorf kindergarten a kind of magic. This magic may stem from the fact that the Waldorf kindergarten is one place in the modern world where the challenge of growing up as a boy is honored and supported.

THOMAS POPLAWSKI, Renewal’s staff writer, lives in Northampton, Massachusetts. He is a psychotherapist and also a trained eurythmist. His wife, Valerie, also a eurythmist, teaches kindergarten at the Hartsbrook Waldorf School in Hadley, Massachusetts. Their two sons are both Waldorf graduates.
Should we be worried about our boys? We seem to be. In the United States, for every ten Google searches for the phrase “Is my daughter gifted?” there were about twenty-five searches for the phrase “Is my son gifted?” A recent spate of books about the special challenges faced by boys includes titles such as The War Against Boys; Boys Adrift; and The Minds of Boys: Saving Our Sons from Falling Behind in School and Life.

The concern is well-founded. The majority of children diagnosed with ADHD and other learning challenges are boys. Today, only one-third of high school students recognized by the National Honor Society are boys. Thirty years ago, young men earned sixty percent of the undergraduate degrees in the United States. The U.S. Department of Education predicts that soon males will comprise less than forty percent of college graduates. This decrease raises important questions:

• What has happened in the intervening decades to cause the relative decline in the academic achievement of males?
• What changes in education have played a role in this trend?
• And, for Waldorf educators and parents: Are we doing a better job than mainstream education with our boys?

Boys and Girls are Different

Soon after the founding of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Rudolf Steiner gave a series of lectures on education, in which he addressed differences between boys and girls. Regarding children in the elementary grades, he said:

We must consider the differences between girls and boys in our education leading up to this age [i.e., leading up to adolescence]. We must make the effort to develop the girls’ moral and ethical feelings in a way that they are directed toward the aesthetic life. We must take special care that the girls especially enjoy the moral, the religious, and the good in what they hear in the lessons. They should take pleasure in the knowledge that the world is permeated by the supersensible…. In regard to boys, it will be necessary to provide them with ideas and mental pictures that tend toward strength and affect the religious and ethical life. With girls, we should bring the religious and moral life to their very eyes, while with boys we should bring the religious and beautiful predominantly into the heart, the mind, stressing the feeling of strength that radiates from them. (From a lecture delivered June 21, 1922, in Stuttgart, available as “Education for Adolescents” at www.rsarchives.org)

In another lecture at about the same time, Dr. Steiner also spoke of children in the middle school...
and beyond. The “astral body” mentioned below is that aspect of the human being related to emotion, affect, aesthetic sensibility, and also to movement and thinking.

What we see initially is that the astral body has a stronger influence in girls than in boys. Throughout life, the astral body of women plays a more important role than that of men. … Much of what are really cosmic mysteries is unveiled and revealed through the female constitution. The female astral body is more differentiated, essentially more richly structured, than that of the male. Men’s astral bodies are less differentiated, less finely structured, coarser.

If we bear in mind these differences between boys and girls, we shall understand that the blessing of coeducation allows us to achieve much [for the healthy development of each student] by a tactful treatment of both sexes in the same room. A conscientious teacher who is aware of his or her tasks in approaching such a coeducational situation will still differentiate between girls and boys.

Naturally, we must not take these things to an extreme, should not think of making the girls into aesthetic kittens that regard everything merely aesthetically. Nor should the boys be made into mere louts, as would be the inevitable result of their egotism being engendered through an unduly strong feeling of their strength—which we ought to awaken, but only by connecting it to the good, the beautiful, and the religious. We must prevent the girls from becoming superficial, from becoming unhealthy, sentimental connoisseurs of beauty during their teenage years. And we must prevent the boys from turning into hooligans. These dangers do exist. We must know the reality of these tendencies and must, during the whole of elementary education, see that the girls are directed to experience pleasure in the beautiful, to be impressed by the religious and aesthetic aspects of the lessons; and we must see to it that the boys are told: “If you do this, your muscles will grow taut, you will become a strong, efficient young man!” The sense of being permeated by the divine must really be kindled in boys in this way. (From a lecture, as yet unpublished in English translation, but included in Erziehung und Unterricht aus Menschenerkenntnis, GA302a)

Current Research on Sex Differences

Steiner’s assertion of fundamental differences between boys and girls has been corroborated by scientific research. In a recent study, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania mapped neural connections in the brains of over 1000 boys and girls. They found that in the typical female brain, the dominant pattern of connections crosses between the right and left hemispheres and is concentrated toward the front. In the typical male brain, however, most of the connections are within each (right and left) hemisphere, with a broader distribution both front-to-back and top-to-bottom.

These different patterns of gender-determined “hardwiring” are established during adolescence, when sex hormones are causing the development of secondary sexual characteristics such as facial hair in men and breasts in women. These differences may explain why, in general, men are better at spatial tasks involving muscle control while women are better at verbal tasks involving memory, analysis, and intuition. They may also explain why psychological testing consistently indicates that men excel at some types of mental tasks and women at others.

According to Professor Ragini Verma, director of the Pennsylvania study:

The neural networks in the brains of boys (at top in blue) are primarily within each hemisphere. In girls’ brains the networks (at bottom in orange) are primarily between the two hemispheres. (Ragini Verma, University of Pennsylvania)
mammals (e.g., kittens, elephants, whales) and is even present in nonmammals such as ants! They maintain that roughhousing is necessary for healthy development, particularly of boys. It engages different parts of the brain, including the amygdalae, which process emotions, and the prefrontal cortex, which makes high-level judgments. It involves the entire body as well and helps development of strength and coordination. In addition, playful roughhousing can awaken a sense of honor, integrity, morality, kindness, and cooperation. The authors conclude:

Play, especially active physical play—we are not exaggerating (much)—makes kids smart, emotionally intelligent, lovable and likable, ethical, physically fit, and joyful.

The authors observe that girls also like to roughhouse, though to a lesser degree than boys. Boys tend to tease, shove, and hit more than girls. Girls are more likely to fall into “relational aggression”—damaging gossip, a dirty look, or the cold shoulder, a tendency which, the authors maintain, might be reduced by actual physical tussling. It might help them be more open and direct about their feelings.

Fergus Hughes, author of the book Children, Play and Development, writes:

There is a correlation between the appearance of this activity [roughhousing] and the maturity of the frontal lobes of the brain. The executive functions of the frontal lobes include reflection, imagination, empathy, and play/creativity, and when these develop, they allow for greater behavioral flexibility and foresight, for well-focused, goal-directed behavior. As the frontal lobes mature, the frequency of rough-and-tumble play goes down, and damage to
the frontal lobes is associated with a higher level of playfulness.

Thus, rough-and-tumble play reflects frontal lobe development and also promotes it. Active, energetic, spontaneous physical play may facilitate neurological development.

According to my observation—and I have verified this with many teachers and parents—the archetypal physical play of girls involves spinning and expressive movements. Gymnastics, including cartwheels, most types of dance, and certain children’s games provide this type of movement. The important role that rough-and-tumble activities have in the development of boys may be played by these spinning and expressive movements in the development of girls.

A Theory about Play and Child Development

Bringing together the insights of Dr. Steiner about sexual differences and the work of Dr. Albert Tomatis (1920–2001)—an otolaryngologist who studied human hearing—I have developed a theory about the typical play preferences of boys and girls. It is just a theory, but I have applied it with some success in the movement program in my school.

Tomatis notes that the sensory cells of the inner ear and the tactile cells of the skin have the same origin. The skin and ear basically evolve from the same embryonic tissue, the ectoderm; thus the skin is differentiated ear, and we listen with our whole body. Tomatis calls the ear “the Rome of the body,” because almost all cranial nerves lead to it, and therefore it is considered our most primary sense organ.

According to Rudolf Steiner, human beings have four "physical" senses—touch, life, movement, and balance—in addition to eight other subtle senses. It seems to me that in rough-and-tumble play, the touch and life senses are most engaged and affected and that in spinning and expressive movements, the movement and balance senses are most engaged.

My theory is that:

• Through rough-and-tumble play, all children can develop their frontal cortex with its modulating of executive function.
• Rough-and-tumble play is one of the modalities humans (mostly boys) use to establish their places in the social hierarchy.

A Balanced Program for Boys and Girls

In my opinion, these two types of activities must be brought back into the movement curriculum of the lower grades because they promote the healthy physical and intellectual development of both boys and girls. The rough-and-tumble activities typically involve competition, some degree of physical contact, and the testing of one’s strength and speed against another person. Paired activities include wrestling and balance beam wrestling, while group activities include tug-of-war, “armyball,” and modified Australian football. Armyball (pictured on page 14), a game for children in grades five through eight, involves pushing or rolling a very large canvas ball across the opponent’s goal line. Players may push, pull, and

Two interrelated developmental loops: The red, favored by boys, is promoted by rough-and-tumble play. The blue, favored by girls, is promoted by spinning and expressive movements.

• Through spinning and expressive movement, all children can develop the vestibular (balance) system and language centers in the brain.
• Spinning and expressive movement is one of the modalities humans (mostly girls) use to develop the neurology for language, through which they establish their places in the social hierarchy.
sports, and to any area of life where one’s will is tested. A strong will, the ability to think ahead, and an awareness of one’s own strengths and weaknesses are always assets.

There are many resources for such activities, available in physical education books from the last century. The resources section of movementforchildhood.com contains pdf files of a number of out-of-print books and suggestions for further reading.

JEFF TUNKEY has been teaching both physical education and the Extra Lesson (a Waldorf-based remedial approach) at Aurora Waldorf School, near Buffalo, New York, since 1993. The school’s unique movement program incorporates traditional games, life sports and team sports, weekly tumbling/gymnastics, and whole-class developmental movement based on the Extra Lesson. Students have three or more periods a week of this program, in addition to two periods of eurythmy. Jeff is also a member of the board of the Association for a Healing Education and teaches in its professional development courses. Jeff is a graduate of the Spacial Dynamics in-service training. His website is www.movementforchildhood.com

A coed tug of war tests strength, persistence, and the competitive spirit.

At the annual school circus, students in the recreational gymnastics classes demonstrate the various skills they have acquired.

Developmental Polarities for Further Exploration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLARITY</th>
<th>BOYS (stereotypically)</th>
<th>GIRLS (stereotypically)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Physical structure/organ</td>
<td>SKIN</td>
<td>EAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Senses</td>
<td>Touch sense, also Life</td>
<td>Balance sense, also Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play characteristics</td>
<td>Rough-and-tumble play Strength</td>
<td>Gymnastics, spinning, dance Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of movement</td>
<td>Imressive movement (i.e., pressing in, not “awesome!”)</td>
<td>Expressive movement</td>
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<td>Neurologic development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple intelligences model</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning style</td>
<td>Right brain; whole to part Visual and Kinesthetic learners</td>
<td>Left brain; linear-sequential Auditory and Reading-Writing learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning difficulties</td>
<td>“On the surface” - evident in early grades Attention Deficit - Hyperactive Dyslexia</td>
<td>“Hidden secret” - may not manifest until upper grades Attention Deficit - Inattentive Type Dyscalculia</td>
</tr>
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Let us imagine that my wife and I go to a birthday party. We meet and talk with many people. It is a slightly confusing experience of random, separate encounters.

On our way home, we exchange impressions, mention a highpoint of the evening, remember a particularly striking individual. The party becomes a bit more of a comprehensible, unified experience.

The next morning, we discuss how the guests are connected to each other and to the host, what we learned from them, how we may want to celebrate birthdays, and other questions. We again dissect the experience, look for insights, and ponder implications for the future.

This three-phase pattern of dealing with experience, of learning, evident in an experience of everyday life, can also be applied to an eighth-grade physics experiment—and to main lesson blocks in other subjects in a Waldorf school.

Phase One: Experiencing, Observing, Being on One’s Own

The eighth-grade students stream out of the school building. They gather around a piece of flexible, transparent tubing, over 12 meters long and 3 centimeters in diameter, lying on the ground. The tube is marked with a line at intervals of 2 meters, and at the first line there is a little flag marked “2 m.” The tube has a plug at each end and is filled with colored water. Next to the tube is a bucket filled to the brim with water. The teacher and two students pick up the tube and set it vertically next to the wall of the building. A teaching assistant reaches out a third-floor window and takes hold of the tube to support it.

The teacher has one student put the lower end of the tube into the bucket, causing it to overflow. Another student reaches into the bucket, and after counting “one, two, three,” pulls the lower plug out of the tube. Water flows into the bucket, causing it to overflow more, but most of the water remains in the tube. The water level settles down at around 10 meters. Now, however, from the top down to about 8 meters, the tube is contracted as if someone were squeezing it together.

The bucket is refilled with water. The students count the marks down to the surface of the water in the bucket. Even when the tube is pushed deeper into the bucket or when the bucket is lifted up, the water level in the tube remains the same.

The lower end of the tube is lifted out of the bucket for a moment, and 1 meter of water runs out. Air enters the tube and rises as a stretched bubble. The water level in the tube goes down several meters.

The upper plug is pulled out and the water in the tube shoots into the bucket, again causing it to overflow. The tube is allowed to fall to the ground. It is no longer contracted in the middle.

Phase Two: Shared Recollection in Class

Back in the classroom, the teacher leads the students in a recollection of what they observed and experienced. He tries to evoke some of the emotional content of the event. The tube lying on the ground seemed at rest, but when it was hanging in the air, there arose a tension. Would the water come running out? Would anyone get wet? And wasn’t it remarkable that all the water didn’t run out of the tube and overflow the bucket, that some sort of barrier had been created?

This recollection should be carried out with sympathy and benevolence toward the objects, the phenomena, and toward the human beings taking part. The teacher lets the comments come spontaneously from the students. Each observation is acknowledged and accepted. The teacher writes down key words on the blackboard. The aim is to get a clear picture of what happened and in what sequence. The teacher might call attention to the closed-in water, to the way it ran out of the tube, and to the
surrounding air. This hint may lead to an anticipation of an explanation of the phenomena, but now there should be no theorizing about cause and effect.

Phase Three: Questioning, Integration, Relevance

At home, the students make a drawing of the experiment and write their own personal account of it, which should not be an impersonal, technical description.

In class the next day, the teacher asks evocative questions:

- What prevents all the water running out of the tube?
- Does the upper plug hold the water column from above?
- Does the water bucket hold the water column from below?
- What is in the tube above the water level?
- What causes the contraction in the tube?
- What role does the surrounding air play?

Gradually, it should become clear that it is the surrounding atmosphere that supports the column of air, that this air pressure against a vacuum will drive water to a height of 10 meters above the surface of the water upon which the air is pressing, and that the contraction of the tube is due to the vacuum created in the tube. The conversation might also move to the fact that variations in the weather (higher or lower air pressure) and changes in altitude would change the height of the column of water. But the explanation should not sink into the purely quantitative aeromechanical realm. Vaguely qualitative terms like “endless ocean of air” and *horror vacui* (nature’s abhorrence of a vacuum) will evoke a sense of wonder and help the students relate to the phenomena also through their feelings. This motivates them to an ongoing striving for knowledge and understanding.

In Phase One, the teacher provides objects and phenomena in an elaborated experiment. In subjects other than science, the teacher might provide a story, music, or a visit to a museum. The student observes and then sorts and stores his perceptions as inner pictures. This is hard work and requires an act of will. In this phase, the teacher leaves the students on their own to confront their new experience. Being given this freedom can lead to a feeling in the students of being overwhelmed, alone, and helpless.

Phase Two, while it seems to be a repetition of the information in Phase One, is completely different. Here the feeling life is activated. As each student makes a contribution to create a whole picture, there arises a cheerful sense of community, of optimism, of “Yes, we together can describe and recreate what happened.” The students become mentally refreshed. They start to see connecting links and to perceive the larger context. They feel a sense of accomplishment. Phase Two is the beginning of the redemption of the feelings of helplessness, isolation, and even despair that may arise in Phase One.

In Phase Three, the students, refreshed through sleep, first discuss the questions raised by the teacher, exchange ideas, and arrive at the basic facts of the experiment. Then it is time for the teacher to put things into a broader context. He speaks about the importance of the subject, the special tools and measuring devices used in the field, technical applications, and ecological implications. Now, feelings of community and sympathy and common purpose arise. The overcoming of the negative feelings associated with Phase One is carried further.

This three-phase process of learning engages the three human capacities of willing, feeling, and thinking and takes hold of the entire adolescent person—body, soul, and mind. The process develops the powers of observation, imagination (creating inner pictures), memory (both short-term and long-term), and understanding (grasping cause and effect and seeing phenomena in context). Also, since it can open the mind of the student to the intrinsic character of the world and of the human being, it can lead to a renewed commitment to the world and to his own development as a human being. A process that begins with a barrage of sensory impressions and information can culminate in personal growth. Learning—rather than being an abstract transfer of information—becomes...
a step in the development of a mature, self-aware human being, interested in and engaged with the world.

**Phase One**
An attentive observation, with all the senses active

**Phase Two**
Looking back on and feeling one’s own experience, sharing, and receiving the experiences of others

**Phase Three**
Analysis, looking for cause and effect, letting thoughts become imaginative

MANFRED VON MACKENSEN was born in Potsdam, Germany, in 1936. Early in his career, he was a research chemist in Berlin but moved to Kassel in 1970 to become a Waldorf teacher. Mackensen taught natural science in the Waldorf high school there and in 1983 cofounded the Kassel Waldorf teacher training. In his teaching, he sought to awaken an understanding of natural phenomena based on experience. And he sought to be less a source of facts than a facilitator of social learning. His aim was to promote in each student the full development of soul, spiritual, and creative potential. Manfred von Mackensen died on November 23, 2012, in Kassel.

**Thinking Like a Plant: A Living Science for Life**

BY CRAIG HOLDREGE

Craig Holdrege was for many years a Waldorf high school biology teacher and is currently director of The Nature Institute in Ghent, New York. There he does research into plants and animals as beings integrated into the natural environment. Craig also gives workshops and courses on nature and science, which are very popular with Waldorf class teachers and teachers of science.

This book is a call for a transformation in how we human beings think and how we experience the world. It is also a practical handbook for achieving that transformation.

Holdrege distinguishes between two types of thinking—objective thinking and living thinking. Objective thinking experiences the world of nature as something “out there,”
What a Waldorf School Has Taught Me About Parenting

BY AMY MARQUIS

When I enrolled my older child in the Waldorf School of New Orleans, I had a feeling that it was a special place. I don’t know if it was the ethereal quality of the kindergarten classroom or the homey weekly rhythm with its finger knitting and bread baking. Somehow, even though I had no experience with Waldorf Education, I sensed that this place was a perfect fit for my daughter’s sensitive and burgeoning soul. At the time, I expected the school to influence and benefit my child, but I had no idea that it would also change me as a parent.

Raising children is a daunting task. Much responsibility lies in shaping a person, yet parenting is a nebulous undertaking. Every child is different, and every parent comes to the job with a different background and skill set. There are no manuals. That leaves a lot of room for improvisation. I loved being a parent, but I based my mothering simply on instinct and the example my parents had set for me—until my family became part of a Waldorf community.

The first lesson I learned from Waldorf Education was the importance of rhythm. Rhythm means simply embracing the events that happen time and again each day, every week, and throughout the year. From nightly bedtime routines to weekly grocery shopping to celebrating another birthday each year, rhythm is a natural part of everyone’s life. It creates a soothing and reassuring familiarity, for which I gained a deeper appreciation through my daughter’s Waldorf kindergarten experience. Rhythm was at the heart of her days. Every day, circle time, snack, and outdoor play took place at the same times of day. Each week had a rhythm, too, with painting on Tuesdays and laundry folding on Fridays. With each new month, the class teacher introduced a new set of circle activities, and my child came home singing new songs, playing new games, and reciting new verses. As the years went by, we came to look forward to celebrating Martinmas each autumn with its lantern walk and potluck meal shared with the families who had become our community. Our family had always had its own innate rhythm of activities and celebrations. School life drove home the importance of rhythm on a grander scale, and I became increasingly aware of my responsibility to both embrace and implement it for the benefit of my family. I also discovered the value of a slower pace of life, that “slow is beautiful.” In today’s fast-paced world, with its...
pace of development. A network of parents who share like values and a similar approach to parenting makes it much easier to uphold one’s ideals. When my children are on a playdate at the home of another Waldorf family, I need not worry that they are watching an inappropriate television show or eating a lot of sugary snacks. It has not occurred to my eleven-year-old daughter to ask for a cell phone. This is in part because none of her friends has one. My daughter has no interest in video games, because she and her classmates prefer to play outside, blissfully unaware of that alluring two-dimensional world. As children grow older, they are subject to pressures to develop skills prematurely. They are expected to read and do mathematics before they’re developmentally ready. They are introduced to reading, writing, and math when their minds are hungry for academics. In a Waldorf school, the children are not burdened with homework at all. They are allowed to discover the joy of reading rather than being bogged down in a slow and frustrating process that they are not ready for. When a child is ripe for academic learning, the result is quick success and a building of self-esteem. My new appreciation for a slow and natural pace made it easier to further enrich our family life. In the Waldorf school, my young children were not stressed by homework. They were free from the pressure of becoming digitally literate so early in life. I came to understand and appreciate that the natural unfolding of childhood can and should be protected. At our Waldorf school, I also enjoyed the value of a supportive community. Embracing diversity is important, but the support of other like-minded parents is helpful in protecting a child’s natural...and seasonal rhythms, such as the May Day festival, in which the entire school community—all the students, teachers, staff, and parents—takes part.

The typical Waldorf school community is a safe haven from the hurry and stress of modern life. Children are allowed to be children. They are not thrust into academic work before they’re developmentally ready. They are introduced to reading, writing, and math when their minds are hungry for academics. In a Waldorf school, in the early grades, the children are not burdened with homework at all. They are allowed to discover the joy of reading rather than being bogged down in a slow and frustrating process that they are not ready for. When a child is ripe for academic learning, the result is quick success and a building of self-esteem.

My new appreciation for a slow and natural pace made it easier to further enrich our family life. In the Waldorf school, my young children were not stressed by homework. They were free from the pressure of becoming digitally literate so early in life. I came to understand and appreciate that the natural unfolding of childhood can and should be protected.

At our Waldorf school, I also enjoyed the value of a supportive community. Embracing diversity is important, but the support of other like-minded parents is helpful in protecting a child’s natural...and seasonal rhythms, such as the May Day festival, in which the entire school community—all the students, teachers, staff, and parents—takes part.

The Waldorf philosophy provides guidance for teachers, but it also offers practical wisdom to parents. While the Waldorf perspective isn’t a panacea for all of life’s challenges, it has awakened me to so many solutions that have helped to protect and enrich my children’s childhood. I credit our Waldorf school for much more than educating my child. It has shown me the value of rhythm. It has taught me how to embrace the slow pace of childhood. It has given me a community that supports me and helps me carry out my vision as a parent. Looking back, at first glance I sensed Waldorf Education was special, but it has turned out to be much more than that. A Waldorf school is a place of profound learning—not just for my children, but also for me.  

AMY MARQUIS is a freelance writer and mother of two, both of whom attend the Waldorf School of New Orleans. She lives in the city with her husband, children, two cats, and a recently acquired goldfish.
This teacher was very sensitive to electromagnetic influences (electrosmog) and tried to raise awareness about the problem. He left his class in the middle of fourth grade due to health issues.

At the close of her interview with the concerned parent, Caroline Askew, herself a mother of young children and a person with broad interests, agreed to read through the binder of material. Most of the documents were abstracts of scientific studies on the effects of cell phone use and exposure to the pulsed radio frequency radiation emitted by cell phones. The studies also included research on possible health concerns related to WiFi routers, cordless phones, and cell phone towers. The research had been conducted at various universities and research centers in Sweden, Australia, China, the United States, and other places around the world.

Two documents from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe expressed deep concern about the “potential dangers of electromagnetic fields and their effect on the environment.” One article mentioned that the World Health Organization had identified pulsed radio frequency radiation as a class two carcinogen. Another reported that some public school systems in Canada had removed WiFi from their schools out of concern for the health of the children. A letter from David O. Carpenter, MD, Director, Institute for Health and the Environment, University at Albany–SUNY, strongly advised against the use of WiFi in schools. One recurring point was that whatever ill effects pulsed radio frequency...
emissions may have, children, because of their size and ongoing, rapid growth and development, would be particularly vulnerable.

Caroline shared the concerns with her colleagues. She asked Betsy Leighton, director of IT at the school, and Bob Amis, a science teacher, to read through the material and offer additional perspectives. In February 2011, Caroline and other City of Lakes staff attended the regional Great Lakes conference at the Chicago Waldorf School. The keynote presenter was Michael D’Aleo, a highly respected Waldorf high school science teacher. Caroline asked Michael if he thought the concerns about WiFi were credible. He answered in the affirmative and added that he is one of the small percentage of the population (about 3%) who are electrosensitive (ES), i.e., extremely sensitive to electromagnetic and radio frequency influences.

Following the regional conference, a presentation of the issue was made at a City of Lakes weekly staff meeting. Most staff members were open to further investigation, although there was significant reluctance to eliminate the convenience of WiFi. Some people had recently purchased iPads, which cannot function without a wireless connection to the Internet. A few faculty and staff were and remained staunchly skeptical.

At this point, the mother who had initially raised the concern and was now a parent in the school offered to pay for an inspection of the school building by a company called Intentional Environment. The company specializes in creating healthy environments by identifying and eliminating energetic interference created by electromagnetic fields (EMFs), pulsed radio frequency radiation, and other factors.

One weekend, the company’s two owners spent many hours assessing electromagnetic fields and radio frequency radiation throughout the school building, using a variety of electronic meters and measuring devices. In many places they found high levels of RFR from the school’s WiFi routers as well as from WiFi transmitters outside the building.

When the building WiFi was turned off, they were able to assess the levels of the AC (alternating current) electric fields coming from building wiring, appliances and other electronic devices. In some areas, they detected what is called “dirty electricity.” This is AC current that has tiny energy spikes in the sine wave of the current flow. Dirty electricity is also considered a possible health risk.

The team discovered other problematic factors:

- Fluorescent lights emitting unnecessary RFR
- Electric cords wrapped around metal water pipes and creating very strong electromagnetic fields
- A strong EMF created by a large transformer located on a pole right outside one of the lower-grade classrooms
- “Dirty electricity” being generated by the motor for the school elevator

Following the assessment, the company gave the school a sixteen-page report, describing the problems present and recommending measures for remediation. The first and most important recommendation was to remove the WiFi routers from the school and have staff and faculty connect to the Internet by Ethernet cables instead. Other recommendations included rewiring lights, putting long extension cords in metal conduits, using outlet filters to eliminate dirty electricity, installing metal window screens to prevent radio frequency radiation from coming in from the outside, and not placing student desks in particular areas of certain classrooms. The recommendations were not particularly costly, and the school was able to implement many of them. Additional improvements have been made each year since.

City of Lakes Waldorf School has not chosen to publicize its decision to remove WiFi. Staff and faculty have adapted to the wireless environment. Parents and visitors to the school are not surprised when they discover they cannot get a WiFi connection to the Internet with their laptop or smartphone. There are, after all, “Cell Phone Free Zone” signs in the school lobby. A visitor with a laptop can, if necessary, access the Internet via a hardwired connection.
Is WiFi Really Harmful?

In the binder presented to the school by that first concerned parent, there were about fifty abstracts of scientific studies. Some focused on the effects of cell phone use: the combined impact of the heat and the pulsed radio frequency radiation that cell phones generate. Those studies indicate the following problematic effects of relatively long-term (ten years or more) cell phone use:

- Oversecretion from the parotid (saliva) gland on the side used for the cell phone
- Increased risk of tumors in the parotid gland
- Increased risk of glioma (a brain tumor that develops from glial cells)
- Increased risk of acoustic neuroma (a tumor in the ear that develops from nerve cells)
- A correlation between the amount of cell phone use and behavioral and mental health problems

Most of the studies involved the effects of short-term exposure to pulsed radio frequency radiation on human beings, on animals (rats, mice, rabbits), and on plants. Some of the studies were carried out on the actual subjects (in vivo), and others involved cells taken from the subject and exposed while in a test tube or other vessel (in vitro). These various studies indicated that exposure to pulsed radio frequency radiation does the following:

- Changes electroencephalogram (EEG) patterns in the brains of human beings—in particular, a reduction in alpha waves, associated with relaxation, with women being more affected than men
- Reduces the ability of human adults to do tasks involving spatial memory
- Decreases the attentiveness of young adults when performing memory tasks
- Affects melatonin levels during sleep
- Affects the changes in blood chemistry related to the circadian rhythms of waking and sleeping
- Causes breakdown in DNA strands and thus changes the structure and functioning of genes, i.e., is genotoxic (an in vitro study of human cells and an in vivo study involving brain cells of rats both indicated this effect)
- Adversely affects the quality, viability, duration and motility of sperm cells (this effect also was observed with human cells in vitro and rat cells in vivo)
- Negatively affects the function of the thyroid gland (in rats)
- Decreases the function of endocrine cells that secrete digestive hormones (in rats)
- Affects the function of the inner ear (in rabbits)
- Affects the function and structure of normal human hemoglobin (in vitro)
- Disturbs the normal functioning of worker honeybees
- Causes genetic damage in mung beans and inhibits their germination and root formation
- Compromises the blood-brain barrier (the BBB is a selective permeable barrier that allows into the FVEMR¾YMHXLIRYXVMIRXW[EXIVERHSXLIVXLMRKW the brain needs, but keeps out potentially toxic substances; the relevant study involved rats)

These and many other studies are readily available on the Internet. The website of the National Center for Biotechnology Information, whose mission is to advance science and health by providing access to biomedical and genomic information, can be found at www.ncbi.nlm.gov/pubmed

It should be noted that there are also studies that indicate little or no ill effect from cell phone use and exposure to WiFi. These studies, like the studies just cited, are of necessity short-term studies. Even a study focusing on the effects of ten years of cell phone use is, in the context of a normal human life span, a short-term study. In any case, there is as yet no unanimity in the scientific community about these issues. Studies funded by the communications industry tend to find no harmful effects.

Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf Education, considered electricity a realm of “subnature.” Early in the 1900s, Steiner predicted that by the end of the century there would be so much electrical influence in the environment that it would be detrimental to human health.

Dr. Michaela Göckler, who is head of the Medical Section at the Goetheanum, the center of the world anthroposophical movement located in Dornach, Switzerland, has for some years been warning about the dangers of WiFi. This past February at a conference on technology in education at Rudolf Steiner
College in California, she addressed the issue. Dr. Glöckler explained that a WiFi router, even when it is not in use, is constantly emitting a very regular high frequency pulse of energy. The human body also operates with electrical energy, and the cells communicate by means of electromagnetic fields. However, the pulsation is slightly random and irregular and not exactly the same speed as that of the router. Thus, the pulsed WiFi signal can interfere with the natural, optimal functioning of the body.

Dr. Glöckler stated that we can and should use electronic technology. However, we should use it only when it is necessary. She strongly advised against the use of WiFi in schools when wired connections can serve the same purpose. She emphasized that children, due to their small size and rapid development and growth, are particularly at risk. Dr. Glöckler also advised people with serious health problems to avoid WiFi environments, since exposure may compromise the immune system. She pointed out that work spaces can usually be arranged to provide Internet access via a cable and, if WiFi is an absolute necessity, at least the router can be turned off when not in use.

In Dornach, Switzerland, the Goetheanum contains many offices, lecture rooms, a cafeteria, and other spaces where one would expect to find WiFi. However, WiFi is available only in a limited area on the ground floor of the building and only for visiting conference participants. In talks and private conversations, Dr. Glöckler has often speculated that WiFi may be the asbestos of the twenty-first century—something universally accepted as perfectly safe and then, in time, after much harm has been done, discovered to be a serious hazard.

Recent research has provided some evidence of the possible short-term effects of electromagnetic fields and pulsed radio frequency radiation. At this point, however, no one can know or predict the long-term effects. WiFi networks and the continuous exposure to radio frequency radiation are recent—only within the past fifteen years—factors in our daily lives. Long-term studies have not yet been possible. Until time allows such studies to be conducted, we and our children are subjects in an extended biological experiment.

In the decision to have WiFi in a school or in our homes, it is perhaps wise to apply the Precautionary Principle. This principle, developed in the early 1980s, is meant to guide decision making regarding ecological and health policies. In the agencies of the European Union, the Precautionary Principle is officially recognized as a determinative guideline in making decisions that affect the environment and public health.

The Precautionary Principle states that when a new device, activity, or policy is proposed, and before it is implemented, those who will provide and profit from it must prove conclusively that it is not harmful. The burden of proof should be on those proposing and promoting the innovation. Those who question or oppose the innovation should not be required to prove that it is harmful.

At this time, no one, including the very powerful electronic communications industry, has proven conclusively that exposure to WiFi is safe. There is no proof that short- or long-term exposure to WiFi for children or for adults is benign.

City of Lakes Waldorf School took a courageous and perhaps prescient step in eliminating WiFi and going back to hardwired access to the Internet. The school ran the risk of being perceived as alarmist and for taking a side in an unresolved scientific controversy. However, the school chose to act out of concern for the health and well-being of the students entrusted to its care.

The school is in good company, though. The Israeli Department of Education, the French National Assembly, the European Environmental Agency, the Council of Europe, and the German government are but a few of the many governments, government agencies, and scientific authorities which are now warning about and/or banning WiFi in schools.
Dealing with WiFi and Cell Phone Radiation

BY MICHAEL D’ALEO, MA

Michael D’Aleo studied mechanical engineering at Rutgers University (New Jersey) and later earned a master’s degree in education at Sunbridge College (New York). Michael is one of the founders of SENSERI—The Saratoga Experimental Science Research Institute and is director of research for the institute. Michael has taught chemistry and physics at the Saratoga Springs (New York) Waldorf High School for many years.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I worked in the electronics industry and was peripherally involved in the development of some of the first-generation wireless technologies. At that time, the focus was on using the infrared section of the electromagnetic spectrum—there was some concern about the health effect of using microwaves. In the end, the microwave technology won out as the basis of wireless communication.

In 2005 I developed electrosensitivity (ES), a hypersensitivity to electromagnetic fields (EMFs) and to pulsed radio frequency radiation (RFR). I later learned that the condition is not uncommon among people who have worked for a long time in the electronic communications industry. I began to feel acute symptoms—difficulty sleeping, a feeling of unease, and physical exhaustion—when in a WiFi environment or when close to someone using a cell phone or computer with a wireless connection. I could (and still can) actually sense the disturbing, external electronic activity in certain parts of my body. Working with a physician who practices anthroposophically extended medicine, I was able to reduce my electrosensitivity significantly. Part of the treatment involved homeopathic remedies.

I am still very interested in and concerned about electronic pollution in the environment. I do not own or use a cell phone. I do not have WiFi in my home. Recently, I have begun giving talks and workshops around the country on the effects of cell phones and WiFi. Some of the groups who invite me are connected to Waldorf schools and some are not. The interest in the issue is growing and becoming more mainstream. While only a small percentage of people are electrosensitive, everyone is being affected to some degree, whether they are conscious of it or not. ES people are like the canaries in the mine.

As a teacher, I am, of course, very concerned about WiFi in schools and about the use of cell phones by young children. The frequency of pulsed microwave radiation (millions of cycles per second) is very close to the frequencies used by the human body to regulate some of its life processes. An external electronic influence can create what is called entrainment, a forced deviation in the body of its normal electrical patterns. In my opinion, some of the problematic behavioral and cognitive changes that teachers have observed in children in recent years are linked to cell phone use and exposure to WiFi.

Ways to reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields and to pulsed radio frequency radiation include the following:

1. Do not have WiFi in a home or work environment. Use a hardwired connection to access the Internet.
2. If you can’t live without WiFi, turn it off at night and when it is not being used. A router reboots in just a few seconds. Skeptics should turn off the WiFi for three nights in a row to judge its effect on sleep.
3. Whenever possible, use a hardwired instead of a wireless connection. If you have access to a landline telephone, use it rather than a cell phone. Do not use a wireless printer-computer connection.
4. Work as far away from the WiFi router as possible. Also, use a hands-free cell phone that doesn’t need to be held against the head. The effects of EMF and RFR rapidly drop off as the distance from the device increases.
5. Never use a laptop on your lap, especially if you are connected to WiFi.
6. Consult the website cellphonesprocon.org to find out which cell phones have the lowest and highest emissions. They vary greatly.
7. Limit the use of cell phones by children. The Department of Health in the United Kingdom suggests that children under sixteen make only short, essential calls.
8. Avoid using cordless phones. Some emit more radiation than cell phones.
9. Do not carry a cell phone in a pocket or against your body.
10. Unless you are expecting an important call, have the cell phone turned off and in “airplane mode.”
When the first Waldorf school was founded in 1919 in Stuttgart, the teaching of modern foreign languages was unusual in Germany. Latin and Greek were taught, but not the languages of other nations. For Rudolf Steiner, however, the study of foreign languages was critical for all children. In the Stuttgart school, all students had three classes each week of English and three classes of French, in addition to classes in Greek and Latin. And the foreign language instruction began in the first grade—something unheard of in that time. So strong and unique was this impulse that the Stuttgart school became known to the general public primarily for its main lesson schedule and for its emphasis on foreign languages.

For Steiner, each language is the manifestation of the Folk Soul of a people, the cosmic being who stands behind and protects that “folk.” The language carries within it the particular set of human characteristics that distinguishes that folk and serves to engender and strengthen those characteristics in each person born into the folk.

Thus the study of a language other than our native tongue brings us into contact with another Folk Soul. This study can broaden and enrich our own character, eliciting and encouraging characteristics that might otherwise lie dormant. Language study can make us more complete, well-rounded human beings. In lecture 11 of the course on education that Steiner gave in Ilkley, England, in August 1923, he observed that every language takes hold of us, reveals a different aspect of our inner being, and cultivates a different aspect of our humanity. A child’s mother tongue affects the child in spirit and soul but also physically. The effect of the mother tongue must be balanced by the study of other languages. (A Modern Art of Education [Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2004], 160)

Study of another language also can give us a deeper understanding of and sympathy with another people or nation. It allows us to transcend our narrow national, inherited outlook. Steiner foresaw that the world would become smaller and smaller, that the destinies of the world’s peoples would become more and more interconnected. Hence it is crucial that human beings be able to understand persons and cultures other than their own. For Steiner, learning another nation’s or culture’s language is an effective way to achieve that understanding, to become “cosmopolitan.” Rudolf Steiner’s ideal of education in 1919 was not one of human beings who are restricted by their sense of nationality, but of human beings who think—and therefore feel—in an international, cosmopolitan, multilingual way. For this reason, he gave foreign language such an important place in the life of the first Waldorf school.

Unfortunately, Steiner did not create a clear curriculum for foreign languages as he did for the other main subjects. However, he did make a number of detailed references to teaching methods. Some of these recommendations are very challenging. Most are found in lecture 10 of Practical Advice to Teachers (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2000).

A key pedagogical principle—for Steiner, the ideal—is that for the first three years, from first grade through third grade, all foreign language instruction is based on the conversation between teacher and pupils. The class consists entirely of dialogue between teacher and students, and between student and student, and everything grows out of these living exchanges. Grammar is not taught explicitly in these first three years. Learning to speak and to listen
In other words, for example, in a North American school, one person would be responsible for teaching both German and French. He also suggested that the same person be the foreign language teacher from grade one through grade eight. Thus, in the same way that the class teacher, working with students for eight years, can build each year’s work, the foreign language teacher could also create a rich, ongoing learning experience. Steiner also recommended that the foreign language classes should take place in the morning in one of the two periods following main lesson and no later.

These suggestions comprise a very rigorous ideal. This ideal was not realized in the first Waldorf school, and there were many discussions on how to improve the foreign language classes. These continued through Steiner’s final meeting with the teachers in 1924. The standards Steiner set for foreign language teaching are still an unrealized ideal in Waldorf schools around the world today. Waldorf Education is soon to be one hundred years old. In the realm of foreign language teaching, as in all other realms of our work, we have to take stock and see how we can improve.

First, we need to have foreign language teachers who will commit to teaching a class for six to eight years. Currently, it is common for a class of children to have a new language teacher every two or three years. There is no continuity and no building on what has gone before.

Second, the foreign language teacher needs to see his teaching as an intensive working together with the students. Teacher and students are engaged in a common task with the goal of building competence. The foreign language teacher should have a clear idea of what he wants to achieve in a given class or a given week. However, he should not rely on a rigid class plan that indicates which rule or principle and understand is the only goal. The children learn to speak the foreign language in the same way they learned to speak their mother tongue—through listening and imitation.

After this initial period, which ends roughly at the nine-year change, the children study grammar, including the parts of speech, in the fourth through sixth grades. In the last two years of elementary school, roughly from age twelve to fourteen, they study syntax and sentence structure. Even the study of grammar should grow out of conversations between the students and teacher. The students are to be given only the rules, no examples. There should be a friendly competition among students, teacher, and parents to find original, witty examples that demonstrate the rules. Steiner believed that these eight years of study would give the students a basic mastery of the language.

In the high school, the emphasis should be on refining language skills and on the study of the literature of the foreign language. Everything must grow out of the interaction, the contact, the living exchange with the pupils. In the upper school, particular grammatical themes should be chosen and studied in the context of literature, and there should be a final, systematic, complete review of grammar.

Steiner also recommended that the same faculty member teach all the foreign languages.

Learning the months of the year in Chinese—literally, “first moon, second moon”—and the days of the month—literally, “first sun, second sun,” and so on
will be presented at each point in the class hour. The foundation of the language lesson should be conversation and interaction between the teacher and the students. The teacher should be able to pursue issues and interests that arise in the course of these conversations. This creates a vitality in the classroom that will keep the students interested and alert.

Third, we need to grant foreign language teachers a status equal to that of the class teacher and to encourage collaboration between the two. Foreign language lessons are as important as the lessons with the class teacher, because in a Waldorf school, education is not confined to the main lesson alone but occurs through the creation of moments of learning in all subjects. If a language teacher has made an eight-year commitment, then that person and the class teacher can work effectively to create an integrated, enriched experience for the children. They might even engage in team teaching.

We might even take this a step further and create bilingual classes or schools. For example, in North America, a German teacher might team with the class teacher and they would share the teaching for the six or eight years of the elementary school. Some of the classes and blocks would be taught in German and some in English.

Also, we should make use of the comparative study of language, looking at how different languages use different images and pictures. For example, when the morning mists lift, we say in German that “the sun comes through” (Die Sonne kommt hervor). Americans say: “The sun burns the clouds away.” English and French people learn things “by heart” or par coeur. Germans learn them “inside out” (auswendig). Germans say setz dich (sit down), while the English say “have a seat.” This kind of activity stimulates the pupils’ imagination. Comparing sayings and proverbs is also great fun; one enters the realm of images and of imagination. Such comparative observations are suitable from grade four onward. Rudolf Steiner suggested that we should compare typical elements of the various languages in the higher classes. Comparative language studies stimulate the learning process immensely.

Finally, we need to be aware of the origin of many of the common techniques of foreign language teaching today. Fill-in-the-blank texts, pattern sheets, fixed dialogues that are repeated over and over, forming a sentence out of three or four elements, and multiple choice tests—these are all founded on a behaviorist, reward-and-punishment philosophy. Get the right answer and you get a treat. We ought to be aware of the spirit underlying these methods if we use them in the Waldorf school. They are not in the spirit of cultural progress.

The work of the foreign language teacher is very challenging. Into each class she needs to bring a review of the previous class, plus conversation, new material, vocabulary, a grammar point or two, and a writing exercise, perhaps—all within forty-five or fifty minutes. And she must do all this, speaking with the students rather than at them. The foreign language teacher needs presence of mind, concentration, a sense of humor, empathy, the ability to respond to her students, and a good sense of time. She needs to create a relaxed and productive atmosphere and a mood of expectation.

This work of the foreign language teacher is crucial for the students and for all of humanity. Foreign language study creates connections to the Folk Souls of other peoples and prepares children to become citizens of the global village, able to participate in a creative and positive way in a cosmopolitan world future.
Where Is Ophelia’s Will?
A Tragic Heroine’s Relation to Our Own Time

BY KRISTI HERRINGTON, MA

Shakespeare’s dramas are, above all, character dramas. The great interest which they arouse does not so much lie in the action, as in the wonderful exposition and development of the single characters. The poet conjures up before us a human character and unfolds its thoughts and feelings.

Thus spoke Rudolf Steiner in a lecture on Shakespeare delivered in Berlin on May 6, 1902. For Steiner, Shakespeare’s characters are not merely reflections of the playwright’s inner world, but rather a reflection of humanity.

Shakespeare’s tragic hero Hamlet expresses this same idea when giving advice to the actors in the play:

…the purpose of playing … both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature; show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (Act III, scene 2)

Though Hamlet was written more than four hundred years ago, part of its enduring power is that the characters transcend their time. Even today they are relevant. They are mirrors of ourselves and our young people, and can help us understand and deal with the challenges we face today.

In my Shakespeare seminar with the eleventh grade, some of the young women are particularly drawn to the character of Ophelia. I began thinking about Ophelia and how she seems to reflect a loss of will forces. I began to see Ophelia’s suicide differently. Ophelia’s final act in the play is ultimately not an action of the will; rather it is due entirely to a lack of will. The suicide act itself seems will-less. As Gertrude, Hamlet’s mother, explains, Ophelia was weaving flowers into long garlands. The branch on which she was sitting broke, and she fell into the water. Once in the water, Ophelia did not struggle to save herself. Instead, she sang her songs of madness and, when the water saturated her heavy garments, she sank beneath the surface.

Where, then, has Ophelia’s will gone?

Ophelia is usually understood to have been a teenager. She was in a stage of development when formation of character is the primary task of the young person. In her book about adolescence, Between Form and Freedom (Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 2009, 89), Waldorf educator Betty Staley writes:

Character develops as youngsters become separate from the adults and learn to make moral decisions on their own. It develops in freedom; it cannot be imposed by any other person.

The formation of character is essentially an activity of the will, of conscious individual intention. The young person must use her or his own forces of will to make decisions—often difficult ones—and to act on them. If the opportunity to develop character by making decisions and dealing with their consequences is withheld, if the expression of character is suppressed by another overbearing person, what happens to the adolescent’s will? What happens to those forces that are closely linked with this essential developmental activity?

Ophelia is a dutiful and obedient daughter. When her father, Polonius, demands that she end her
romantic relationship with Hamlet, she agrees. However, when her father perceives a chance for personal gain in the coupling, he instructs Ophelia to trick Hamlet. Again, she acquiesces. When Hamlet, suspicious of the ruse, asks where her father is, Ophelia is forced to lie on Polonius’s behalf. Polonius, in co-opting Ophelia’s decision making, thwarts her own expression of character and diminishes her will forces.

In the midst of adolescence, teenagers enjoy the birth of the intellect and their newfound reasoning ability. Betty Staley writes:

The force of intellect is a tool for questioning the social structure, the human soul, and the nature of life itself. It also is a tool for probing hypocrisy. (28)

Hypocrisy is the discrepancy between what one avows and what one in fact is and does. Adolescents are hypersensitive to hypocrisy and react to it immediately. In Hamlet, the arch-hypocrite Polonius wishes to give advice, but no one is inclined to seek him out for it, least of all the two young people in the play, Ophelia and Hamlet.

Laertes is Ophelia’s brother, and he also is full of advice for her. On his departure for France, Ophelia warns him to take his own advice—and hence avoid hypocrisy:

Do not, as some ungracious pastors do, Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven, Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine, Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads.

Like Polonius, Laertes does not allow Ophelia freedom to act from within. Both father and brother instruct and command Ophelia, but never question her, never elicit her own thoughts or intentions. Thus they appropriate her will. They make her choices for her and, in doing so, block her development.

Hamlet, too, works against Ophelia’s independent growth. In their last encounter, she tries to give him back some “remembrances,” but he immediately and rudely denies ownership of them. When Ophelia insists that the objects are in fact his, Hamlet laughs at her and questions her integrity. Later, he bullies her with sexual taunts, and she can only reply again and again, “Ay, my lord.” Here, a different aspect of her will is being diminished, that which gives permission to engage sexually with another. Even this most vital element of freedom, sexual freedom, is stripped from her. This scene, the heart of the play, is her last encounter with Hamlet before she goes, in a way now free of pretense, mad.

According to Rudolf Steiner, each human being has an attendant, guardian angel. The spiritual aspect of this angel is not visible, but it is reflected in water, in the pattern of light around water. Thus water is a potent source of spiritual strength. It is not surprising then that Ophelia, thwarted in the development of her will, would immerse herself in water. Her suicide attempt to connect to a source of will.

How can we help the young women of our day develop strength of will?

Though four centuries have passed since Ophelia’s sad story first took place on stage, her struggle is still relevant. Each adolescent girl is an Ophelia needing to form her character, to express what kind of human being she wishes to be. And we adults—mothers, fathers, teachers, counselors, friends—can either help and support her in the process or, like Polonius, Laertes, and Hamlet, thwart her.

Given the adolescent’s allergy to hypocrisy, we need to be truthful and sincere in our speech and actions.
In school, there are various ways teachers can foster the will forces in female students. We can choose plays and stories in which there are strong female characters, such as Shakespeare’s Juliet and Belacane in Parzifal. In my drama work with students, I include drawing and translating assignments and give the girls an opportunity to direct as well as act. In history and science class, we can bring to the fore women such as Harriet Tubman and Madame Curie—women who have stood for something and left their mark on the world. Also, we need to make sure that the female students are as actively engaged in woodworking, metalworking, and blacksmithing as they are in sewing. Parents can help by giving their daughters access to activities that engage and foster the will, such as music lessons, horseback riding, and competitive athletics.

Ophelia is not just a cautionary character; she is a reflection of our times. Her state of diminished will readily resonates with our daughters and students. She becomes to them “poor Ophelia,” struggling and worthy of sympathy and compassion. We need to help our young people go beyond romanticizing Shakespeare’s heroine, to support them in developing their own will forces so that they can express and realize their own character and humanity.

If we warn our daughters about overuse of their smart phones, we can’t spend the evening gazing transfixed at our own little screens.

We need to provide a support network of adults. At my school, each student has a faculty mentor, an advisor, who takes an active interest in the student and is always accessible for help and counsel. Mentors work together with parents to support the student.

Challenging issues, such as sexuality, alcohol, and drugs should become topics of open, free discussion. We adults need to be as skilled at listening to and honoring the ideas and experiences of our young women as we are at offering advice, standards of conduct, and our own lessons of experience.

The popular culture encourages young women to create an identity based on sexual desirability—this, ironically, in spite of forty years of women protesting against being objectified sexually. We need to help our students and daughters understand that immodest dress limits their own development and also causes others to perceive them in a particular way. It attaches to them a label, which they may not intend. Low-cut, skintight jeans and a plunging neckline are not only a violation of the dress code. These clothing choices may also be a violation of one’s self, of one’s potential and true worth.

KRISTI HERRINGTON is a high school humanities teacher at the Waldorf School of San Diego. A native Californian, she grew up in Fair Oaks and attended college at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She completed her teacher training and master’s degree program at Rudolf Steiner College in Fair Oaks. Kristi has also worked with underserved high school students in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego. Her daughter, Kordelia, is four years old and in the Sunflower nursery class at WSSD.
A Second Classroom
Parent–Teacher Relationships in a Waldorf School

BY TORIN FINSER

Torin Finser is a veteran Waldorf class teacher and also, as chair of the Education Department at Antioch University, New England, a teacher of Waldorf teachers. In this book he draws on over three decades of experience in Waldorf Education to address one of the most challenging issues in Waldorf schools—the relationships between parents and teachers.

A school is a community and the success of a school community is largely determined by the quality of the human relationships in the school. The relationships between parents and teachers—between those adults who have brought the children into the world and those adults who have taken on the responsibility of educating those children—is of paramount importance. Studies indicate that children thrive when their parents are involved in and happy with their school and teacher. Finser urges both parents and teacher to work together for the benefit of the children. There are many sad stories of schools nearly rent apart because of difficult relationships between parents and teachers.

Finser treats the many aspects of the parent–teacher relationship and the issues that can arise. Among them are:

• challenges for the new teacher and the new parent
• parent–teacher conferences
• parent evenings and class nights
• hard-to-handle parents, including the “übervolunteer”
• veteran teachers who can be dogmatic and rigid
• ineffective parent–teacher organizations
• barriers to a parent’s involvement in a school
• conflict resolution

For each area of concern, Finser offers practical advice to parents and teachers to create successful relationships. For example, the advice he gives to new teachers includes: From day one, consider the parents to be as important as their children; communicate regularly with them about their child; keep an accurate record of those interactions; show an interest in the parents’ lives; work with the fathers as well as the mothers; respect the choices the parents make for their homes; share your enthusiasm for teaching and for their children; and always observe confidentiality.

For parents new to a school, Finser’s advice includes: attend school events (parent evenings, school assemblies, talks, festivals, and school fairs); be involved as much as possible; communicate frequently and regularly with the teacher; feel free to express concerns to the teacher but back off once an issue has been resolved; practice conscious trust and give the teacher space for his own growth and development; get to know the other parents in the class; be realistic about your expectations, as teachers are human and fallible.

The chapters giving practical advice in certain areas are interspersed with chapters considering broader philosophical, but related, topics. Finser is also General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in America, and in these chapters he draws heavily on Rudolf Steiner’s work to illuminate such themes as the essential nature of the human being, self-development through techniques of self-awareness and meditation, recognizing and meeting the needs of others, and our relationship to the spiritual dimension of reality. Finser looks outside Anthroposophy, too, and has, for example, a chapter on Martin Buber’s concepts of the “I-Thou” versus the “I-It” relationship.

A Second Classroom is an informative and thought-provoking book that offers much of value to Waldorf parents and teachers.

—R. E. K.

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A Life of Bridges
Versatility and Resilience in the Life of Frederick Law Olmsted

BY WHITNI MCDONALD, MA

Young people today are not likely to have just one or two careers, as their parents probably have had. The rising trend is for students, in the course of their lives, to have a “portfolio of careers” of seven or eight or even, according to one expert, as many as seventeen different roles in the workforce. We educators need to prepare our students for this tumultuous new age.

Waldorf Education seems ideally suited for this task. It seeks to help students to develop certain capacities—imagination, creativity, compassion, respect for others, gratitude, adaptability, and resilience, among them—that will enable them to survive and thrive in whatever situations and tasks their lives present to them. Through the integrated mix of academics, the arts, and practical activities, through the development of head, heart, and hands, our schooling nurtures a well-rounded individual who is capable of taking on different and diverse responsibilities in life.

However, as we inform our students about what lies ahead for them in the workplace, we must also offer inspiring examples of people who have led lives of challenge and change and done so with grace and success.

Recently, I was asked to give a talk to the high school students at the Rudolf Steiner School of New York. I wanted to tell our students about the adventures that await them in today’s non-linear era. But I was torn, because I also wanted to introduce them to the remarkable life of Frederick Law Olmsted. Fortunately, I was able to do both. Olmsted, best known for his design of New York’s Central Park, had been a “jack-of-all-trades” throughout his life, interested in many fields and possessing an abiding passion to explore new areas of activities, to take on new projects.

At the assembly, I began by telling students about the new era of the portfolio-career model. Also, I challenged them to look to the past, as they are trained to do in a Waldorf school, to find exemplary and inspiring role models. Then I told them the story of Olmsted’s life.

Olmsted was born in 1822 in Hartford, Connecticut. As a young, man he studied engineering and science, had an early interest in what was called “scientific agriculture,” and for a time had a farm on Staten Island. He became a travel writer, publishing in 1852, after a walking tour in Europe, Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in Europe. An opponent of slavery, Olmsted spent three years (1852–1855) in...
the South as a correspondent for *The New York Times* reporting on how slavery affected the region's economy. His book *The Cotton Kingdom* (1861) describes the world of the antebellum South.

In 1857 a park was proposed for New York City that would be, in effect, an attempt to improve on nature. The plan proposed by Olmsted and British architect Calvert Vaux was accepted. The project progressed slowly, however, and was not completed until 1876. In the meantime, Olmsted served as a publisher of a literary magazine called *The Nation* and, during the Civil War, served as General Secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of the Red Cross.

As Olmsted’s reputation as a highly skilled administrator grew, so did his scope of opportunity. He moved his family to California, where he managed a gold mine and, as an avid environmentalist and explorer, was instrumental in the establishment of Yosemite National Park. Following the opening of Central Park, Olmsted was recognized as the leading landscape architect in the United States. Many monumental projects followed, including Prospect Park in Brooklyn, the “Green Necklace” of parks in Boston, the grounds around the Capitol Building in Washington, DC, and Stanford University. His crowning achievement was a private commission for George Vanderbilt, The Biltmore Estate, in Asheville, North Carolina. The grounds plan for the estate laid the foundation for the National Forest Service.

Both Prospect Park and Central Park, like Olmsted’s life, are marked by bridges. Olmsted loved bridges, and Vaux designed lovely arches to span pathways and waterways throughout Olmsted’s landscapes. I stressed to the students that Olmsted was able to accomplish so much in so many diverse fields by building and maintaining strong bridges with persons of similar interests and aims.

To give the students a more complete picture of Olmsted’s life, I spoke about his struggles and the means he used to press through the many hardships and tragedies that he experienced even while enjoying great professional success. Olmsted’s collaborator, Vaux, and his mentor, Harry Codman, both died by drowning. His brother John, who was his closest friend, died at a young age of tuberculosis in Italy. Olmsted’s firstborn son died in infancy.

Through all his life, Olmsted kept up an expansive, ongoing correspondence with friends and family. In times of crisis, this flow of letters written and letters received allowed him to express his sorrow and to receive condolences, encouragement, and support. Without the convenience of email, Facebook, or Instagram, Olmsted stayed in constant touch with his family and friends throughout his busy life, maintaining these important bridges of human contact.

I hope the students were inspired by Olmsted’s curiosity about the world, about his sense of mission, and his desire to make the world more beautiful and society more just. I hope the students realize that this era of multiple careers can increase their opportunities to explore the world, make strong connections with different people and places, and benefit humanity and the planet in ever-evolving ways.

**WHITNI McDONALD** was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and grew up in Orlando, Florida. Her urban upbringing engendered a deep interest in city parks, which led to her fascination with Frederick Law Olmsted. Whitni has an MA in English and was the second-grade class teacher at the Linden Waldorf School in Nashville in 2007–2008. For the past four years, she has been a teacher and librarian at the Rudolf Steiner School of New York. Whitni is planning a through-hike of the Appalachian Trail in 2015 and will document the experience in film and on a website.
In 2011, I visited Russia as part of a team of educators. During that visit, it became obvious that the greatest challenge to Waldorf Education there is the public perception that Waldorf schools are art schools and that the children do not gain the skills necessary to succeed in modern life. Hence, for our return visit in 2013, I familiarized myself with the research that has been done on Waldorf graduates and how they fare in the world. Meanwhile, I had become intrigued by the theory of generational shifts, how recent generations—“Baby Boomers,” “Gen Xers,” and “Millennials”—differ in basic ways and how those differences affect interactions in Waldorf communities.

Both in Irkutsk, which is in Siberia near Lake Baikal, and in Kirov, east of Moscow, I started my presentation with having the Russian audience break into groups by generation, so that the people in each group all had come of age within the same two decades. Each group was asked to characterize the period in which they had become adults and to describe the qualities that they had developed as a result of growing up in that period. As soon as the groups were formed, intense animated conversations began in every cohort. Later each group presented to the whole gathering the results of their deliberations.

To my surprise, the generational characteristics among the Russians were much like those among North Americans, despite the vastly different social conditions and history. For example, those born between 1945–1960 (their Baby Boomers), who came of age during the gray and grim Soviet period, spoke of the idealism, enthusiasm, and romanticism associated with their participation in the Young Pioneers movement. They felt that their work was needed to make great things happen in the world, and they were prepared to sacrifice. They did not worry about their future or being out of work. There were societal guarantees. An image arose of us all, Russians and Americans, of that generation, regardless of birthplace, “holding hands” as we descended to our various places of incarnation on earth.

The Gen Xers in Russia (born between 1961 and 1980) grew up in the challenging 1980s and 1990s. It was a time of change, instability, hope, and then disappointment. In about 1985, Gorbachev came in with glasnost (opening) and perestroika (restructuring). For a time, there was hope for a better life and a brighter future. But in 1990 the Soviet Union collapsed, and in 1993 the Putsch rebellion occurred. People’s savings were wiped out by a currency devaluation. Powerful criminal organizations arose, and a kind of lawlessness reigned. On the plus side, there was more freedom in the cultural realm, and the first Waldorf schools were founded. As a result of all this, the Russian Gen Xers tend to be survivors. They are less idealistic and less likely to selflessly devote themselves to something outside themselves. They value the well-being of their child over that of the other children and of the school as a whole. They have a “just do it” attitude and can achieve great things if given practical, achievable goals. The Gen Xers want a work/family life balance and are not interested in a path of total sacrifice.

The Russian Millennials—born between 1982 and 2003 and now coming of age—have grown up in a time of increasing material prosperity, at least for portions of the population. Because of the Internet, they have an
them for the future, for conditions and challenges which no one can predict.

After our small group discussions, a Russian psychologist joined us and advised that parents should make a life-plan for each child before it is born. After our discussions, it was very clear that a plan based on the past and made before one has even “met” the new baby could not prepare that child for a future quite different from the past. It became obvious to me, and I believe to the others present, that a critical strength of Waldorf Education is its development of skills for meeting the future and responding in new ways appropriate to new problems.

Notes


MARY LEE PLUMB-MENTJES, a native of Washington, DC, discovered Waldorf Education at age eighteen while a co-worker at Camphill Village Kopake (New York). She then studied Anthroposophy and Waldorf Education at Emerson College in England. Mary Lee was instrumental in founding the Anchorage Waldorf School (Alaska) and was active in that school community for twenty-one years. Since her first visit to Russia in 1989, Mary Lee has visited that country many times. Mary Lee retired recently after thirty years in the field of environmental regulation. She and her husband now live in Austin, Texas.
Fondly Remembered

Harald Christian (Harry) Kretz

June 7, 1928 – December 5, 2013

BY PATRICE MAYNARD, MA

Harry Kretz passed away on December 5, 2013, at 2:00 a.m. at his home in Hillsdale, New York, with his wife, Almuth, at his side. Musician, mathematician, raconteur, Waldorf class teacher, and teacher of teachers, Harry had spent more than half a century serving Waldorf Education. Soft-spoken and mild-mannered and blessed with a dry wit, Harry was much beloved by colleagues and students. In the words of longtime colleague Dorit Winter, Harry was “a true melancholic, ever funny, and, for the children and adults he taught over many years, a steadfast model of being truly human. His example of what it means to be a teacher will live on in all of us who had the great good fortune to enjoy his teaching.”

Harry was born in Flintoft, Saskatchewan, Canada. His father was Russian and his mother German. They had emigrated to Canada after the First World War. Flintoft was a small town in an agricultural area, and Harry’s father ran a general store—selling lumber, nuts and bolts, food, fabric, and other necessities to the local farmers.

After his high school graduation, Harry was asked to teach the older children in the town’s one-room school, which he did for two years. Harry then went to Toronto to study music and, in particular, the trumpet, at the Royal Conservatory of Music at the University of Toronto. However, Harry got very sick in the big city and had to give up the physically demanding trumpet. He took up the recorder instead, and the university created a special degree program in recorder for him. Harry was an avid musician throughout his life. He also played the piano and the horn and once completely restored a derelict harpsichord.

Harry’s first encounter with esotericism was in Toronto when he learned about Theosophy. He went to New York City and got something resembling a job (librarian, perhaps) at the Rudolf Steiner School of New York. Harry met Englishman Francis Edmunds, a leading anthroposophist, when Edmunds came to the New York school to lecture. Edmunds facilitated getting Harry to Emerson College in England. Francis Edmunds had a great influence on Harry, who completed the Waldorf teacher education program at Emerson and then returned to New York.

Harry took a first-grade class at the New York City school, saw them through to eighth-grade graduation and then took another class in fifth grade. He was a class teacher for a total of twelve years. Harry was always the music teacher for his classes.

After the many years in New York, Harry wanted to move his family (now consisting of wife, Almuth, a class teacher, and three children, Rachel, Katherine, and Evan) out of the city and into the country. He took a job as a year-round counselor at Camp Glen Brook in New Hampshire, an outdoor activities camp operated by the Waldorf School of Garden City and visited by classes from many area Waldorf schools. After two years there, the family moved to Harlemville, New York, home of the newly founded Hawthorne Valley School and Farm. Harry managed the Visiting Students Program at the farm for a time. He then took a class at the school. When the high school began, Harry taught blocks in mathematics and geometry. Science, solid geometry, and projective geometry were his great loves, along with music. Later, Harry traveled the country visiting Waldorf schools and Waldorf teacher training centers, teaching blocks in his favorite subjects. He referred to his teaching of mathematics and recorder as “deterrorizing” students in these realms.

Harry Kretz was a gifted musician, an excellent mathematician, and a witty and inventive raconteur.
Harry also was a person who loved children and who trusted in their capacities and conscientiousness. And he loved teaching. When Harry stood in front of a class, there was always in his eyes a twinkle of merriment, which bespoke his love of the students and of the magic of the classroom. Harry's teaching confirmed the idea that “Where there is great love, there are always miracles.”

Harry could lead a math-challenged eighth grader through an algorithm and help that student feel able, even competent. He could write a song that started out sad but then unexpectedly turned into a round and ended happily. He could tell a story that initially seemed so simple and clumsy his students felt compelled to help it along with ideas for plot and solutions. By the story’s end, though, Harry had punctuated it with a song or a tune played with a whistle and brought in a moral that made the children laugh with surprise and appreciation.

Once, at a faculty gathering, Harry used a garden hose held in a circle by duct tape as a musical instrument and played an original, very beautiful, “Concerto for Garden Hose” in three movements. Harry built community wherever he went, with wit and music. Very close to his heart was the community orchestra that he helped build up in Harlemville and that played together for years.

Harry Kretz’s love of fun and learning extended into his last years. Often he would hide a riddle under his dinner plate to be presented in the middle of the meal as a challenge for the family—especially his grandchildren—to solve.

I knew Harry Kretz in the last two decades of his life. His generosity and humility were extraordinary and his patience seemingly unlimited. In my first years as a class teacher, I strived to bring these qualities, as well as Harry’s pedagogical skill, into my own teaching.

Harry’s old friend, Rudolf Copple, was my mentor. While talking to Rudolf, I would often express my admiration for Harry along with my discouragement about my own work. As comfort, Rudolf would tell me a story that usually began “You should have seen Harry when he started out…” and went on to describe a misadventure on Harry’s part from his first years at the New York City Rudolf Steiner School.

Later when I saw Harry I would repeat the story and ask him, “Is that what you really did?” Harry would frown and shake his head slowly so that I would then ask, “Oh, it didn’t happen?” Harry would say each time, “Oh yes, it did. But it was much, much worse than the way Rudolf told it.”

When this fine teacher, much beloved by many, was asked—right up to his last days, “When you come back, what would you like to be?” Harry Kretz replied, “A better teacher.” It struck me as somehow appropriate that Harry Kretz crossed the threshold of death into the spiritual world on the same day as another lover of life and people, Nelson Mandela. Half a world apart in geography, they were comrades in uniting people, in tireless teaching, and in being themselves models of self-discipline and forgiveness. Imagine their conversation as they met on their new path after life. It must have been extraordinary!

PATRICE MAYNARD, Director of Publications and Development for the Research Institute for Waldorf Education, taught for thirteen years as a class and music teacher at the Hawthorne Valley School in Harlemville, New York. She was on the founding board of the Merriconeag Waldorf School in Maine, is a former leader in AWSNA, and is the proud parent of three Waldorf graduates. She lives in Harlemville, New York.
separate from us. It sees the individual phenomenon also as out of context, not connected to other aspects in its environment. To each particular phenomenon objective thinking affixes a concept. Once this concept is in place, there is no need to observe and experiencing the phenomenon. There is an abstraction and coldness in objective thinking.

Living thinking, in contrast, is a participatory thinking, which experiences a connection to external perceived phenomena and which see the connections between phenomena. Living thinking is active, changing, constantly growing with experience, even as plants metamorphose through their life cycles. It sees that all organisms are totally integrated, each part dependent on all the other parts. It realizes also that each organism exists within a certain environmental context, is an expression of that context, and is intimately connected with all aspects of it. Living thinking has a warmth that grows out of a connection to another organism.

Each of these types of thinking has implications for how human beings act, how we treat each other, and how we treat the world around us. With objective thinking, experiencing things as objects, not connected to us, or to each other, we are much more likely to use, exploit, and even destroy them to suit our own purposes. The giant enclosed cattle feedlots that exist in the Midwest could not exist without objective thinking. On the other hand, in contrast, living thinking engenders empathy, compassion, and respect and concern for the other.

Holdrege, a lifelong student and teacher of Goetheanistic phenomenological science, gives suggestions rooted in phenomenology on how to develop living thinking. One important technique is close, open-minded observation of the phenomenon at hand, be it a flower, an insect, or a mountain. In the actual presence of the phenomenon one asks, What does it look like in color and shape? What does it feel to the touch? How does it smell? Rendering a phenomenon in artistic form, in a drawing or a piece of modeled clay, or writing an exact description, can help.

Just as a plant develops through a process of expansion and contraction, this observation should be followed for a time by a pulling back, a meditation on the experience and perhaps gathering more information through study or conversation. Then one can return to the observation again. All organisms exist in process, and hence the study of a phenomenon must be carried out over time.

Another technique is inner re-picturing, or what Goethe called “exact sensorial imagination.” Here the aim is to create an inner imaginative picture of the organism or phenomenon through memory without any external sensory impression.

Holdrege mentions three benefits of exact sensorial imagination. It allows us to connect consciously and vividly with what has been experienced. It reminds us that we need to observe more carefully, and it helps us experience concreteness of the sensory world rather than just abstract concepts.

In one memorable chapter, Holdrege shares the results of his own deep study of the common milkweed (asclepias syriaca), a common roadside plant in the Northeast. He draws on his own very close observations and on the work of other researchers. Many remarkable facts emerge. A colony of milkweed shoots, numbering hundreds or even thousands of shoots is actually just a single plant, all shoots being connected to a common underground stem, a rhizome. In four to six weeks in May, the shoots can grow to a height of 1.5 meters. At least ten insect herbivores—including moths, beetles, aphids, bugs, and a butterfly—have the milkweed as their sole source of food. After reading this chapter, one can look on a milkweed plant only with reverence and wonder.

At several points, Holdrege notes that the teaching of science in Waldorf schools is based on the phenomenological approach he describes and recommends. He also observes that a central aim of Waldorf Education is to help students develop “living thinking,” a sense of being deeply connected to the world outside themselves with an attitude of respect, awe, and concern. This book is a paean to the world of plants. It is also for us an invitation to let plants become an important part of our lives and a means to transform our thinking and our experience of the world.
The Invisible Boat

BY ERIC G. MÜLLER, reviewed by Meg Gorman

The Invisible Boat is a children’s novel, an amazing adventure that will delight any reader from fourth grade and up. It tells the story of two school-aged children, Julie and Leo, who are leaving the farm they love and moving to the big city. Their hardworking parents are in financial difficulty and have decided to sell the farm.

On their last day on the farm, the children find a mesmerizingly beautiful purple blossom with seven petals. They also encounter Curly Beard, a mysterious dwarf, who once gave their grandfather the task of finding a magical key, engraved with a seven-petalled purple flower. The dwarf now gives the children the same challenge, which leads to a fantastic excursion to help save the earth. Once living in the city, the children meet a third child, Annabel. The girl is a crippled shut-in, but, with Julie and Leo’s support and a magical boat, she is able to join them on their adventures.

The book is filled with wonderful descriptions of the natural world, encounters with invisible beings that are busy with nature beyond the sense-perceptible world, and with exciting adventures—such as a trip in a magical boat down a kitchen drain pipe. There the children meet an underground King and a watery Queen, who weeps tears of bubbles containing the sad and joyful memories of human beings. The plot unfolds quickly and with imaginative twists so that it is hard to put the book down.

This fantasy book for children, written by a longtime Waldorf class teacher, is an exciting adventure story. But it is also a book that deals with profound issues—the health of the planet; human responsibility and stewardship for the earth; evil, and the transformation of evil. In its pages is a profound wisdom reminiscent of what one finds in J.R.R. Tolkien’s works. The Invisible Boat is a wonderful chapter book that can be read aloud to young children and that older children can enjoy on their own.

Misadventures of a Parenting Yogi

BY BRIAN LEAF

Brian Leaf lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, with his wife, Gwen, and their two young sons. The older boy attends the Hartsbrook School, a Waldorf school in neighboring Hadley.

Leaf has written a light-hearted, humorous, thought-provoking parenting guide that is informed by the spiritual perspective of the author’s yogic path. The forty-three, mostly short chapters deal with a wide range of topics, including home-versus-hospital birth, circumcision (Leaf, though Jewish, opposes), toilet training, communicating with children, germs, sex, and meditation (as a family event).

Chapter 41 is entitled “Choosing a School,” and in it Leaf gives a brief but engaging characterization of Waldorf Education.

“In Northampton, Massachusetts, if you are embarrassed to own a computer…you send your child to the Waldorf school. This means that Noah will learn to knit before he learns to read. It means that I have two, maybe three years of being better than him at drawing, painting, identifying the instruments in a symphony orchestra, and caring for livestock. It means that very soon, he will be, in general, a better, more well-rounded person than his dad.”

This is a book that Waldorf parents, especially those with young children, will find entertaining and useful.
Chris Schaefer is a well-known lecturer, writer, facilitator, and consultant within and beyond the Waldorf and anthroposophical worlds. His specialty is organizational change and social renewal, particularly within Waldorf schools. This book focuses on the challenges and possibilities for building community and creating a partnership “among teachers, parents, administrative staff, and friends of the school.” Among the specific topics dealt with are self-administration and governance, working together in groups, consensus decision making, and transformation and renewal in school communities.

The various members of the school community will each find something particularly relevant and useful to them. A new member of the board of trustees will learn about the history of Waldorf Education within the context of Rudolf Steiner’s philosophy and his practical initiatives in other areas, including that of social organization. Those who are involved in founding a new Waldorf school will find helpful guidelines for nurturing their initiative. Those who work in more mature institutions will find suggestions for making the transition from simple modes of operation to more sophisticated administrative forms. New Waldorf parents will see how Waldorf schools seek to foster healthy interpersonal relationships. Administrators and members of leadership groups will learn strategies for working together. Not only do the essays present the concepts necessary for institutional development, but each ends with suggested activities to help the readers apply the concepts.

The golden thread through these essays is the importance of our conscious creation of the social environments in which we live and work. This involves individual personal development and also conscious collaboration with others in creating viable, positive social forms and vital supportive communities. We must become social artists in all aspects of our lives. Schaefer understands well the barriers to this work and gives helpful practical processes and exercises (individual and group) to overcome the hindrances.

For example, how people relate to and listen to each other in meetings is crucial. He also gives very specific suggestions as to how meetings should be run, with certain people having specific roles, so that the meetings are run efficiently and effectively. Schaefer suggests that we develop and use three types of listening: “head listening,” which tells us facts, concepts, ideas, and arguments; “heart listening,” which tells us emotions, values, mood, and experience; and “will listening,” which gives us energy, direction, motivation.

Particularly helpful is Schaefer’s analysis of the three-stage life cycle of Waldorf schools. First is the pioneer stage, with its enthusiastic and dedicated workers and “everybody doing everything.” Next is the administrative stage, with the need for more organization and clearer roles and accountability. In the mature phase, there is a need for renewal of energy and enthusiasm and a new pioneering impulse, even while the administrative forms are retained. It is important that a school can objectify itself, realize the stage that it is in, and make the necessary changes for that step.

Partnerships of Hope is a book to be read and studied by every person—parent, teacher, administrator, or friend of the school—committed to creating a healthy school community.

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