

# The Inner Life and Work of the Teacher

*Margaret Duberley*

**A**gain and again, the question came: “What is the difference between State education and Steiner education?” How often, as I have been working in Steiner education, usually in a conversation on a bus, or during a walk, or in a new group of people, or a new group of students, I had to try to find an essence, to create a nutshell picture, to make sense of something vast in just a few moments.

Now, through twenty-five years of struggling with this, and finding in these years that gateways have been opening in the souls of many, I have found personally that I can speak, at such times, as also with students and new teachers, of the truly holistic nature of Steiner education: that we are working with every aspect of the child, which can be termed body, soul, and spirit. So we try consciously to work with many levels, from the most physical to the most mysterious. A conversation can often lead to the question of the inner work of the teacher. Sensing what is appropriate for each occasion is vitally important.

What follows here is, then, a brief resumé of some aspects of that work, as applied particularly to those who work with the young child under seven years of age. Most of it is very basic but, I hope, not to be undervalued in its repercussions. In *The Education of the Child*, Rudolf Steiner writes:

What the adult does, feels, and thinks are all imitated by the child under seven years, so complete attention to the task in hand, with a care, love, and joy in the doing actually helps in the formation of the child’s physical body.

**Be conscious that the way the adults work together, or not, will become an example for the children to imitate.**

Arrive well before the children. (Very easy to say. More and more this becomes a problem area.) When we take off our coat outside the door, we leave it, with outdoor shoes, and any excess baggage there. It is essential to leave at that point, consciously, those worries, grievances, tensions, which would sap the life energy that is needed for all our work with young children. It is healing for us to free ourselves consciously so that we can give to each task in the day the devotion that gives the young child a worthy role model for imitation. (I have found it a blessing to come out of the kindergarten room at the end of a day’s work with children and realize I have been totally free of all those worries for hours. How healing to have to be in the moment!)

Create a quiet space in the room. If there are colleagues, assistants, students, or visitors, ensure that you have arranged a regular time to meet, say “good morning,” along with a verse, song, or some short exercise to focus attention, calm down, bring a morality into the room, and set the tone for the day. It really does alter the space for the children—and the adults. For example, there is a verse for each week of the year, collected in *The Calendar of the Soul* by Rudolf Steiner, which can link our inner soul life with the seasonal round.

Teachers often use the following verse, also by Rudolf Steiner, either to begin the day or to begin a meeting:

We have the will to work,  
Letting flow into this our work  
That which, from out of Spiritual Worlds,  
Working in Soul and Spirit,  
In Life and Body,  
Strives to become human in us.

A verse given at the end of the basic lecture course for teachers is also recommended. In the original translation of Steiner's *Study of Man*, it reads:

Imbue thyself with the power of imagination,  
Have courage for the truth,  
Sharpen thy feeling for responsibility of soul.

The Christian Community priest Adam Bittleston has written many prayers and verses, including one for each day of the week, collected in a little book called *Meditative Prayers for Today*:

Dwelling in silence on the beauties of life  
Gives the soul strength of feeling.  
Thinking clearly on the truths of existence  
Gives the spirit the light of Will.

There are many other possibilities. I have worked with the eurythmy "Hallelujah" and also with "I, A, O," as also with a song. What really matters is that you can feel connected to whatever you choose.

Be conscious that the way the adults work together, or not, is an example for the children to imitate. Try to set an example of cooperation amongst the community of adults, which includes teachers, assistants, and parents. (I shall not forget an occasion when an advisor, visiting a kindergarten, remarked that it was no surprise that the children were quarrelsome, as the adults were setting a fine example in that group!)

Having worked through the day in the kindergarten, and prepared the next day, time is set aside before sleep to take all that work, along with the preparation for the following day and a loving inner picture of each child in the group, into the night, into one's sleep. The first part of that preparation is the review, in which one travels in one's mind and memory backwards through the day, taking a maximum of fifteen minutes. I try to picture the child, with his angel behind him, and the parent(s) with their angels also. Then ask those beings for help and guidance on the following day. This means that I am not trying to work alone, or out of my smaller self, but with my higher self, consciously working with the Spirit Being

of each of the children. I have all the support and loving help of my own angel, the angel of each child, and many other higher beings.

At that stage, a meditation will support the process of connecting my individual self with Universal Wisdom or Light: microcosm within the macrocosm. I, and others, have used:

I carry my sufferings  
Into the setting sun;  
In its light-radiating lap.  
Purified through love,  
Transformed through Light,  
They return as helpful  
Thoughts, as strength  
For deeds of sacrifice done  
In full joy.

One then takes a few moments to picture the day ahead inwardly, along with the true being of each child. One can perhaps picture from the day a joyful moment for that child. To feel a restfulness is then a prelude towards giving all that up to all the invisible beings, to continue what has been begun, through the night, when in sleep; and I am then

at one with all those we have experienced as separate individuals through the day. The mysterious world of sleep then takes over the work.

On awakening, it is advisable to give some moments of attention to any new thought, insight, feeling which has "come out of the night" (for example, a realization about a child, especially one that has been a puzzle, a way forward towards a new step for one who has a difficulty). Then, picture each child, followed by a review of the day to come.

The verse, or meditation, uniting the teacher with the divine then leads into a feeling of being supported by the Angels, Archangels, and Archai. I have used this verse for many years:

O God, grant that in regard to my  
personal ambitions  
I may entirely obliterate myself,  
And Christ make true within me  
The words of St. Paul:  
"Not I, but the Christ in me,"

**What must I  
change so that  
the children can  
enter joyfully  
into this?**

That the Holy Spirit hold sway in the  
teacher.  
This is the true Trinity.

As the day unfolds, perhaps the most important quality is to have an openness towards what each child is expressing, in his skin color, his demeanor, his play: for example, how he joins in, or not. As my experience of teaching grew, I knew and saw clearly that I was not the teacher. The teachers were there before me. All I needed to learn was to be open to the messages they were giving me, thus, to learn to observe objectively, and then to be open to letting go of what might have been prepared if the behavior of the children is showing a mismatch.

One great gift my teacher Margaret Meyerkort gave me, as I began my kindergarten work at Wynstones Steiner School in England, was the following verse by a Dutch anthropologist named Ledebur:

Inner labor	Outer experience	Peace within
Works outward.	Works inward.	Love to the world.
Do not judge	Do not turn away	Say nought
But listen;	But seek;	But suffer;
Do not wonder	Do not resist	Do not ask
But look —	But endure —	But wait —
Love them all.	To the end.	Until you receive.

This simple verse has, over my years of teaching, proved so helpful and affirmative as a way of being within the early years' work and then also with advisory work.

In the course of visiting those newer in the work, I so often see teachers who have laid on themselves false expectations of a "kindergarten morning," so that, for example, they feel obliged to have a twenty-minute circle time, no matter that not one child is still with them after one song! The children are not naughty. There is no point in blaming child, or parent. But if one were to live with these words:

Do not judge, but listen.  
Do not wonder, but look —  
Love them all.

a changed response would begin to emerge in the teacher, who would learn to listen, look, observe the children, and be prepared to admit that these message is that "I, as the teacher, must change."

Perhaps, to go back to the example above, just try an opening song, a poem, and then a song to lead out, if the children are not captivated, not engaged. Then one must ask: "What must I change so that the children can enter joyfully into this?" It could be too slow, and so to work more with such polarities as slow/fast, large/small, sitting still/moving briskly, contraction/expansion might be what is needed. So, above all, learn to observe the children, and be prepared to take on what that says to me. The children's behavior is my best teacher.

Circle time for me became an increasingly special time. The children began to spontaneously and joyfully create in the center of the ring exquisite small "gardens," with candle, veils, flowers, and so on. I used the time around the morning verse and song especially to connect with the angel being of each child. One day I will not forget. I had two older boys, polar opposites in character: one who would love nothing better than to scale up an apple tree and look down on us from high above; the other who had spent two years

sitting on the periphery, not joining in any play outwardly and, who seemed to find it painful to dirty his hands in sand, water, and so forth. At that precise moment when I was quietly connecting with the one who seemed more inwardly active, the outwardly active one said gently to me: "Margaret, sometimes the flower comes out before the leaf."

I needed no other sign that here was a word from the angels, and all those steps outlined above needed, for me, no other "proof of the pudding." Put another way: "Inner labor works outward." The child had in those words concisely expressed a new helpful way to look at the rid-

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dle of the child who had puzzled me for nearly three years. That “riddle” has now become a successful artist. The work with young children indeed led me to the realization that I am not the teacher, but the facilitator, and my job is not so much to speak as to listen. Then, the awe, the marvel, the privilege, the joy, and the healing of this work can grow.

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*Margaret Duberley had a joyful, warm, and caring approach to everything she touched, and worked tirelessly for Waldorf early childhood after gaining her diploma with Margaret Meyerkort in 1982. (She was a qualified teacher before this.) She worked at Wynstones School from 1980 to 1988 where, after qualifying, she became involved in teacher mentoring. She also completed the class teacher-training course, which helped in her project with the Snowdonia Steiner School in Wales. There she taught children from six to ten years old in a variety of subjects until 1994, when she moved to the Dublin Rudolf Steiner school as kindergarten leader and trainer, and also class teacher.*

*In 1996, Margaret became an educational consultant in Steiner Waldorf education, helping to establish and run the early childhood training program in Ireland as well as working as a Fellowship advisor for kindergartens throughout Ireland. In 2001, Margaret became the coordinator of advisors in Ireland for ISWECA, the Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association, organizing and leading workshops, including visiting all the kindergartens and initiatives, where she was welcomed and loved for her unstinting support, helpful observations, and advice.*

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is a vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.

– C.G. Jung