

About Seeing with the Heart

by

Arne Øgaard

Translated by Anniken Mitchell

In his book *The Little Prince*, Antoine de St. Exupery lets us meet a little fox, who wants very much to become tame so he can befriend the Little Prince. When the two of them part, the fox tells a secret: “You can only truly see with the heart. The most essential is invisible to the eye.” This secret can be called one of the main intentions in the Steiner pedagogical approach. Many people probably have discovered that with the heart, but it is more difficult to put into words. This essay is my attempt to do just that.

How can we see with the heart? It must have something to do with feelings, but it is not that all feelings can express insights about the most essential aspects in life.

We live in a time where pleasure is essential. Therefore, it is important to stimulate the feeling life so that we can attain a high level of pleasure. Of course I want people to have good experiences, but this fixation on pleasure can also exceed a certain healthy level and become self-absorption. It is not always pleasure that gives us the most lasting enrichment or tells us something about the most essential aspect in our surroundings. Often pleasure only awakens in ourselves the need for more pleasure. Among young people, many talk about looking for “kicks.” They seek out extreme experiences in order to attain momentary intense life sensations. The drive for these kicks and these intense feelings is so big today because a good and general development of our feeling life is not naturally taken care of in our society.

Often when we talk about feelings, it is really about how people are feeling right there and then. A reporter might ask in many different connections, “How do you feel?” A larger question is how our feeling life really is connected. What are feelings? How do we meet our life of feelings? And how can we develop feelings such that they can meet thoughts in an expanded organ of perception, the thoughts of the heart?

The little infant senses with all of himself. When we experience little children who are heartfelt, it is because they both receive and give out from a heart-felt immediacy. As children grow and develop, this heart-felt immediacy gradually changes. With increased self-awareness, the child closes herself more off within herself. This process of closing off intensifies around the age of three and again around the age of six. And in the Waldorf pedagogy, we actually work with the perspective that children go through these periods every third year. When the child becomes older, these periods can express themselves as inner crises. Self-awareness can bring an experience of loneliness or uncertainty. It is a positive and important thing that self-awareness increases, but the key question is how can this happen in such a way that the heart-felt qualities can still hold warmth, so that the child can still both give and sense with the heart? This is the main challenge in all areas of the Steiner pedagogy. Here are some examples.

The Art of Education and Art Education

As in earlier childhood years, the art of storytelling during the first years of school is a central way to meet the child. The teacher has to be able to tell stories so that the children can have an experience of many different moods—sorrow and joy, anticipation and fear. A main goal is to activate the entire register of feelings in the child. This is important in the rest of teaching as well, whether it is to play the recorder or to do a chemistry experiment. This achieves a double effect: the child is enthusiastic and wakes up while at the same time retains some of the heart-felt quality. The storytelling material in a Steiner/Waldorf school is chosen so that the content also deeply touches the child. This is everything from the fairytale in first grade, to biographies and historical events during middle school years.

A story is first and foremost a picture. Out from the picture in the fairy tale, one can get a sense that it might be helpful to help the old woman who is standing locked with her nose in the little stump or to share one's food with those who are hungry or to listen to the songs of the birds. As the children develop and mature, the teacher can bring forth more logical and sensible learning facts in the stories. But the pictures always contains something that is more than what common sense and logic can reveal. They contain something that is experienced with the heart. Can it be something with Askeladden's relationship to life that opens up a sense for living?

The great challenge for a Waldorf teacher is to be an artist, somebody who can communicate what is essential, somebody who can help the child to discover the hidden treasures in the world. He or she has to strive in this direction. But the students cannot just receive. So the teacher also has to help activate the creative

forces in the child. Children are inwardly active when they listen to the stories, but they also have to practice expressing and creating on the outer plane. They have to be helped to make the connection with the artistic process in themselves. Steiner/Waldorf schools are not schools that educate artists. The aim is to develop the artistic in all people, whether they will become policemen, doctors, lawyers, factory workers, or sculptors. As best as he can the teacher tries to stimulate the capacity to create something of beauty and harmony in all the children. It is not easy to explain why something is beautiful, but the heart senses what is beautiful, and perhaps something essential can come to expression.

In the artistic expression it is striking how different the different students solve the task. In their variety of expressions, the individual comes to expression. In mathematics and grammatical rules, we have to follow the objective world. The same rules hold for all. But in the domain of the artistic we have endless possibilities to express something and create something that is beautiful. And because the individual quality can come to expression, through the artistic work we come to awareness of the individual in ourselves, and we also have the possibility to discover and value the individual in others. It is often pointed out that Steiner/Waldorf school students develop a sense of self, as opposed to self-assurance, perhaps because through the years of artistic work they have discovered something essential within themselves.

When young children paint wet-on-wet, it is often quite quiet. They are totally living with the colors that are expressed on the wet paper and living deeply into the beauty of the colors. As the children grow older, and their awareness becomes stronger, children can become frustrated because they cannot paint the way they would like to. They now have particular inner pictures as to how the painting should look. But these inner pictures are quite difficult for them to actually express on paper, so then a problem exists, and perhaps the outer frustration will mess up the painting and make the student feel that painting is stupid. In artistic work the children will come up against themselves and their limitations, and this at times can be painful. Most of us do not like to be reminded of the areas in which we are not so accomplished. Instead of acknowledging our weaknesses, and starting at the level where we now find ourselves, we tend to withdraw from the challenge. It can be especially difficult for children who have had a rough childhood, and who have few areas where they have experienced safety or self-assurance. For many it is often necessary to start with something more handwork-oriented. They have to first experience that they can make something, to give form to something simple in a personal way.

To guide today's children in the world of artistic exercises can be challenging, especially in movement subjects such as eurhythm. Here the child has to expose many different sides of him- or herself at once, in movement and body awareness, in musicality and rhythm, and in his capacity to move in conjunction with others. Eurhythm is not an achievement-oriented subject, where it is the most important to be the best, but is a subject where the aim is to do as well as you can. In such a subject the teacher can still see sides of the child that comes forth. Not all children will show that they get rather restless, and because of this it can be easier for them to act in a play where they can be disguised as someone else. In these artistic exercises the teacher is trying to get the child to forget him- or herself and fully enter the process of experience. To the degree that the teacher manages to get the child to experience form and movement, so she can also help strengthen the child's connection with the heart space in himself. It will become easier for him to sense what is essential, what really gives him something, but also to develop what is essential so he has something to offer others.

Phenomenology

The natural sciences are often referred to as areas of pure knowledge, but in the Steiner/Waldorf schools they are also something more: exercises in observation. The teaching of phenomenology starts with observed phenomenon. The teacher sets up the experiment. It can be as simple as adding acid and base to the juice of red cabbage. Most people will observe that different colors are formed, and the students can quickly draw their own conclusions. They will also be able to experience that the colors that have been created are very beautiful, and for many at this point that is even more essential than the rules and scientific laws that they are extracting with their pure reason. Why do we get just these colors? Why do we experience them as beautiful? Those questions are not so easy to answer, and it will be this way with all experiments. We understand much of what happens in nature, and the students will gain this understanding as well, but they also must have the possibility to experience that nature has secrets that we cannot look through so easily.

Many people today are so absorbed in their own views, dreams, and worries that they do not sense much of what is actually happening around them. But to what extent we are able to engage vision, smell, hearing, and other senses, it will become easier to live into what actually is happening around us. That we use the senses actively is a prerequisite to connecting ourselves through our feelings. This means that we are really observing with our hearts.

One of the main points in the Steiner/Waldorf pedagogy is that we choose phenomena and stories which touch the children at their different developmental stages so that they can connect with the content of the lesson with enthusiasm and feel the essential nature of what is being presented. In first grade when the children hear fairytales, it is the capacity for connecting and living into the story that are important. As the children develop, the intellect will be activated increasingly and the teacher will stand before different challenges. Some of the children will prefer to remain in the intense inner experience, and they will find it more troublesome and difficult to work systematically with the forces of thinking. Other students might be awakened intellectually early, and they have already picked up different perspectives from media and from the adult world, which they have transformed into their own opinions. With these students it is important to help them get movement into their thinking so they do not become too fixed too early in their opinions. When the first group of students might struggle with mathematics, another group might get it right away. But the day that the assignments get more difficult, the ones in the last group also have to activate their own thinking, and not always do they have the energy. During the middle school years, it can be a great challenge to activate all students in their thinking, yet not have the students get lost in a purely theoretical world of thought.

The natural science subjects have been designed so that the process of thinking starts in realities that the students themselves can experience. Everything we have experienced also appeals to the feelings. The students have to think about something to which they have had a feeling connection. In this way it is possible for thoughts and feelings to be connected in the experiential world of the students. The students can find ideas they both think and feel are true. At the end of their secondary education, the students are first fully able to distinguish between models of reality, and then we can move into purely theoretical understandings, which we can discuss and make conscious through questions. How is it experienced to work with purely theoretical chemistry as opposed to the phenomenological approach?

The Helper Parzival

Puberty brings with it an intensifying of the feeling life. One of the dangers during this developmental phase is to become too self-absorbed and too body-fixed. In the Steiner/Waldorf schools we try to counteract this with an increased awareness towards our environment.

Not a lot needs to happen in order to awaken enthusiasm. When the storms of puberty are over, there is a new critical point. In the eleventh grade it can

often be amazingly quiet in many classrooms. Some students go through different crises and become a little more uncertain in their relationships to others. It seems as if they are looking at themselves with new eyes, and what they see is not always something about which they feel enthusiastic or confident.

One of the main lesson blocks during this year is intentionally the epic story *Parzival* from the Middle Ages. As a young man, Parzival rides out with a clear and strong vision to become a knight. For a long time this career seems to happen by itself, but then the problems start to mount, and Parzival ends up in crisis. What can help him is to find the road to the Holy Grail. Already as a young man he had the possibilities to find the Grail, but he missed this opportunity through his lack of independence and his lack of wisdom. Completing his schooling with the wise hermit Trevezant, Parzival is given a new possibility, and he now understands that it is important to ask the right questions. And how is he going to ask the right question? Yes, through compassion. The Holy Grail is the picture of something essential, something that points beyond what the eye can see and intelligence can understand. It has something to do with the essential kernel in life, the kernel none of us will find if we do not have compassion for our fellow human beings and for nature, so we are able to ask the right questions.

Goethe's Road to Knowledge

Steiner/Waldorf pedagogy seeks in many ways to advance Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's intentions around the process of knowledge and the essential being of nature. In his main work, *Faust*, Goethe describes the learned one who has thorough knowledge of all scientific areas but is distraught because he is not a master of what is essential.

Even though I have more wisdom
than all Philistines, clerics and popes, doctoral magistrates,
I have no scruples, I have no fear
for the devil and hell. All dread is dead,
but also my joy was lost with this.
I do not think I any longer know what is right,
I think I cannot give people a part
In what frees the human soul.

In order to find his way out of this inner crisis, Faust makes a choice to cooperate with Mephistopheles. In the hopes of gaining Faust's soul, Mephistopheles offers different forms of pleasure. In the first book he tempts Faust with a young woman Gretchen, and in the second book the temptation is to attain power in society. The agreement with the devil says:

If I can say to the second:
You are so beautiful! Stay here! Linger!
Then you can bind my soul with chains
And I will happily meet my end.

But so content, Mephistopheles has difficulties in chaining the longing soul of Faust.

Goethe himself sought happiness and meaning in other areas. He was especially concerned with the development of a scientific method that could give people more than what the science had done to make Faust so distraught. He describes his connections: “I let very peacefully the world of objects work in on me. Then I observe their effect and then try to describe the effect carefully and to the point. This is the secret of what we usually call genius.”

In other words Goethe is sensing not only with the eyes but with all of himself. He was not only a very awake observer but also a sharp thinker. But Goethe was also aware that the human being has the tendency in his thinking to become more concerned with his own perspectives than to truly see reality. He admonished against the dangers of abstractions. In his lecture “Goethe’s Secret Revelation,” Steiner says:

Goethe belongs to those people who in the sharpest way distance themselves from the fundamental premise that knowledge is only gained through our observations and only through our thought capacities. It is a prominent and very fundamental aspect in Goethe’s being that he more or less clearly states that, if the human being will solve the riddle of the world, the entire human soul has to work out of all its forces.

If we are going to use all of our soul capacities, we have to use our feelings. It is a goal in the scientific world today to exclude feelings, since feelings are looked upon as subjective, but science needs to be objective. In order to understand Steiner and Goethe, we need to have a more exact and refined understanding of what is meant by feeling life

In our language traditions we have many expressions that clearly point to feelings as being very subjective—“I like blueberries and my wife likes strawberries,” and so on. We are attracted and repelled by different things, and our feelings on that level are dictated by sympathies and antipathies which are obviously felt subjectively. But Steiner points to the fact that we can use our feeling life so that it becomes a tool for objective experience. In his lecture about Goethe’s secret revelation, he says further:

So therefore it is actually possible to distinguish what is personal from feelings so that what in the things themselves that awaken

feelings are not any longer a reflection of us as personalities. It has nothing more any longer to do with us as people, with sympathy or antipathy, but is a revelation of the essential being of the thing itself.

In the twelfth grade we work further with the difference between Newton's and Goethe's theories of color. Out of Newton's thought construct, today's scientific world has arrived at a view of color as electromagnetic rays with different wave lengths, and this can be useful in many connections. But Goethe wanted something more. He wanted to have as experience and know the essential being of the colors. This he did not do by promoting a theory but by revealing the phenomena of color through many-fold examples and exciting experiments.

Most of us experience that color is something that engages us deeply, that color has something to say to us human beings. Today's natural scientific world cannot give us more about this, but Goethe tried to lead us in on a different path of knowing. Today's scientific world has done a great job in describing the different phenomena in great detail, but it says very little as to what holds it all together. It is interesting that we still talk about having a feeling for the whole. From *Faust*:

If living things are to be known and described,
we first have to ban the spirit.
Then we stand there with the parts in our hands,
but oh! without the living thread of the spirit.

We do not understand the whole inner world where we are more and more often taking radical steps. This can be of great consequence for the future and also for the whole of human development. There are many reasons why we have to strive to expand our capacity for knowledge.

The Schooling of the Teacher

The challenge for the teacher is to communicate something essential, something more than just knowledge and capacities. Knowledge and capacities are useful tools, but it is the essential aspects of life which help us find direction in our lives. How are we teachers going to be able to do this?

The starting point has to be that the teachers themselves actively strive in this direction. This is not something that can be learned once and for all, but is a world in constant development, and has to be regained again and again. For those who seek in this arena will discover that behind one level there is always another and deeper level, just like the Norwegian mountains—behind one there is always a new mountaintop. Every day has to be full of new discoveries and

new insights. The Waldorf teacher has to become both artist and scientist. This makes it an incredibly exciting vocation!

In his task as scientist, the teacher must use himself as instrument, and this instrument also has to be developed and perfected. In this regard we have Steiner's anthroposophy, a body of work that also has to be read with an open heart if one is going to take a hold of what is essential. Especially useful is his book *How to Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*. What is most surprising when we study this material thoroughly is that to a large degree it is about how we attain knowledge about the physical world and the social world.

As opposed to many others who talk about personal development, Steiner is not so concerned that we should attain spiritual experiences. His path is to reach insights about higher dimensions through an increased awareness of the immediate world around us. He starts off with recommendations about the schooling of our feeling life. By developing a sense of awe for everything that surrounds us, we are, to a large degree, able to meet our surroundings with an open heart. When we develop a sense of inner equilibrium, we are more able to break through our sympathies and antipathies and truly meet the phenomena as they present themselves. And therefore we are more able to sense what the other, both in the human world and in the world of nature, is offering us.

Many of Steiner's exercises start out with concentrated observation followed by wakeful observation of the response in our inner life. He says:

The beginning has to lead the soul's awareness towards the process in the world around us. On the one side, the sprouting, growing, and life-filled life, and on the other side, all the phenomena that are connected with withering, death, and decomposition. Wherever people turn their eyes, these processes have been there simultaneously, and everywhere they call forth naturally feelings and thoughts in people. But under our normal circumstances we do not pay sufficient attention to these feelings and thoughts. We are hastening way too fast from one impression to the next. What counts is to very consciously direct an intense level of awareness towards these experiences and facts. Where we observe flowering and blooming of a whole specific quality, we also have to ban from the soul all other thoughts and just pay attention to this impression. We will soon be able to observe that a feeling which is called forth and which earlier was just hastily ignored, grows now and takes on an energy and strength of its own. This feeling form we have to peacefully let express itself in our inner being. It has to become quite quiet in our inner; we have to close ourselves off from the outer life in order to quietly pay attention to this inner after-image.

Steiner's path of development is often explained in this capacity to pay attention to the after-effects in the feeling life. This demands that a feeling has

arisen, but for many people this does not happen. Many people will experience that their feeling life is rather cooled down. We have grown up in a culture which has little room or encouragement for development of these sensitive feelings, so therefore we are not always as able to perceive through the heart.

We are therefore standing with a double mission: on the one hand we have to work intensively with ourselves, and on the other hand we have to work with the children and the young people in such a way that they have a better starting point from which to approach what is truly essential.

The poet Kate Næss ends her collection of poetry *Blindwalkers* with a vision in this direction.

We are on the path after a new and better reality,
which perhaps exists not so far away from here.
It is fully in the neighborhood
of what the heart understands.