

Some Aspects of Child Study Work in Faculty Meetings

by

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We must learn to perceive the spiritual archetype of man through his picture nature. In the future, man will become to some extent transparent to his fellow man. The form of his head and his gait will awaken in us an inner sympathy and understanding of a different nature from what we find in human tendencies today. For we shall only know man as an ego-being when we have this conception of his picture nature, when we can approach him with the fundamental feeling that what the physical eyes perceive of a man bears the same relation to the true supersensible reality of man just as the picture painted on canvas bears to the reality it depicts. We must develop this fundamental feeling in ourselves. We must approach man in such a way that we no longer see him as a combination of bones, muscles, blood, and so forth, but as the image of his eternal, spiritual being (Rudolf Steiner, *From Symptom to Reality in Modern History*, Lecture V).

In child study sessions, we take a group approach and attempt to fathom a human being's essence using Steiner's insights into the nature and being of humankind. There is a fundamental difference between individual research and a group approach.

Individual research, based on the individual's directed cognitive activity, relates the researcher to the research object. While this possibly narrow focus is capable of producing great insights,¹ and while much of what Steiner indicated to teachers helps prevent a one-sided view, the group approach ensures greater objectivity. Also, it adds a universal dimension not otherwise attainable. Whenever group members weave together a fabric of understanding by listening to each other, avoiding the destructive side

of intellectualism and encouraging heart-thinking in each other, then the picture built up together may touch on the eternal essence of the child and so lead to therapeutic insights. Such a conversation, which is at the heart of a child study, is often referred to as Goethean conversation.

The whole faculty should participate in child study, for the community educates the child in daily contact. Additionally, if there is a school doctor, he or she should also participate.

It is important that all teachers prepare well by reviewing their interactions with the respective child, picturing the child often. The class teacher or class guardian has traditionally given the bulk of the description, as she or he has known the child over a longer period of time and probably has contact over a longer part of each day. However, each teacher who has regular contact with the student should contribute. A description of physical aspects may be given by the school doctor.

A child study has three basic parts:

1. Observations / descriptions / reports
2. Conversation / building up the picture
3. Conclusion / indication of exercises / therapy / tuition

These parts are elaborated on the next page.

Footnote:

1. An example of such insights can be found in the book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* by Oliver Sacks.

Points for Observation and Description in Child Study

A. History of the child from conception and birth

Report on events from early childhood:

Pregnancy: normal, difficulties, maternal illness, stress, accidents

Birth: Normal, breach, Caesarean, complications

First three years: crawling, walking, speech, memory, complete sentences, when did the child refer to him or herself as "I"?

Childhood diseases and other health problems

Teething

Accidents

Play

B. Physical description of the child (Only observations are noted here, not interpretations)

Skull:

Head: large/small, round/angular

Forehead: high/low

Eyes: wide/narrow, large/small, color

Nose: large/small, snub/beaked

Cheekbones: high, flat

Mouth: small/large, thin/full

Chin: weak/strong, split/receding

Ears: small/large, primitive/complex, flat, standing off/set at an angle/upright, set low/set high (ears are usually located between the end of the nose and the eyes in a frontal view)

Earlobes: attached/free-floating, fleshy/thin

Neck and Shoulders: thick / thin, long / short

Trunk: broad-chested / narrow-chested / pigeon-breast / hollow
back / too short / too long—compared to rest of body

Limbs:

Arms: too long / too short

Hands: large / broad / thin / delicate, easily bent back, flabby / hard,
dry / sweaty

Legs: long / short—relative to body

Knees: knockkneed, knees form a hollow

Feet: pigeon-toed / pointed out, large / small, narrow / broad

Perception and movement:

Senses: go through all 12 senses and describe any peculiarities

Movements: gross / fine motor movements—describe

Gait: toe / heel first touching floor, rhythmic / uneven, shuffle /
springy

Movement: characterize the movements if appropriate, such as a nervous,
hopy, placid, flighty, heavy, determined, tentative, abrupt,
cautious, and so forth

Dominance: determine left / right dominance in eye, ear, hand, and foot

C. Aspects related to the etheric body

Temperament: sanguine / melancholic / choleric / phlegmatic / mixed

Memory peculiarities: What is the relationship to time? Always too
slow, too fast, just right, or rolling along (Time relationship is
an excellent indication of temperament.)

Presentation: healthy / unhealthy looking, easily flushed / mostly pale, low /
high pain threshold

Relationship to modeling: clay / beeswax

D. Soul forces—aspects related to the astral body

Characterize thinking/intellectual capacities:

picturing/abstract conceptualization/relationships/
sequence/logic/etc.

Characterize feeling and emotional capacities: sensitive/insensitive,
deep empathy/callousness, tempers/always
calm, cruel/sympathetic

Characterize will nature: instinctive mode of action/deliberate mode
of action, follow through/leaves things unfinished,
difficult to start/difficult to finish, gets stuck easily/
able to ask for help, able to plan action/always needs
guidance before beginning action, leader /follower

Characterize imagination: strong/weak/bizarre/ artistic/visual

E. Social and ego relationships

What are the relationships and interactions with classmates/
siblings/parents/ teachers/ strangers?

What is the social behavior? Temperament?

What is the relationship to nature, to plants, to pets, etc.?

What is the relationship to work: Does she/he take responsibility?
Does she/he take pride in good work? in completion? in
beautiful work?

What are the artistic capacities?

Describe work in modeling/ drawing/painting/music/speech/
drama/eurythmy

F. Learning profile

Type memory: visual/aural/tactile

Relationship to music: learn by imitation/by figuring out by self/
by being talked through/by acting out the relevant
patterns/by repetition

Group Dynamics

However rich and superbly demonstrated the information is that we gather together in the description part of the child study session, it will be for naught unless a real process of discovery is begun. For the information to become transformed into insight, specific group interaction has to take place. This could take several forms.

The child study could be spread out over two or three sessions. In this case, the following three parts should be separated in time so that digestion of events takes place, and a picture may come about.

The main concern during this time of group interaction is building up a picture of the student. All teachers should participate equally—not only the class teacher—as this is a group effort to form a picture of the individual under consideration. This is the crucial part—a successful conclusion depends on successful faculty work in building up a picture. Without a picture, no real insight is possible (only intellectual conclusions, which are not the same as insight based on the spiritual nature of the human being). Careful conversation focused on understanding the individual with a positive attitude helps build up the picture, which serves as the basis of the third part. Goethean conversation is most useful because it is quite focused—participants need to listen intently to the presenting person. The group creates an organ of perception, and this builds up the picture of the child.

Conclusion/Results/Special Therapy/Special Exercises/Tutoring

Out of the picture of the essence of the individual arises the inspiration or the answer about what to do to help the child, to intensify the learning experience, the sensory experience, and so forth. We have now described the contents of these three parts of the faculty work leading to a successful child study. However, there are also considerations of style.

Remarks on the Style of Group Interaction

It is best if these three portions of the study are separated over time. It is particularly good to have them spaced over three weeks. (Over two weeks is certainly preferable to having all three parts pushed into one short session.) If a complete child study is done in one session, sufficient time must be allotted. It is best to let the description rest for a week. Then, let the picture that has been built up by the faculty also rest for a week. Finally, in the third week decide on the kind of help the child needs, and what faculty can provide it.

1. During the observation / description part those who have something to offer should speak, moderated by the class teacher. Usually all teachers are asked prior to the study to focus their observations on the child for the week.
2. While the picture is built, Goethean conversation should prevail—all teachers, knowing the child, intimately or not, should participate as they wish. Letting the picture speak is the heart of group-oriented child study.
3. On the basis of the picture, all faculty (particularly those who have some helpful expertise including tutoring, artistic, medical, curative) should now transform the picture into a deeper, fuller more complete one in line with the types of children, (fantasy / memory / iron / sulfuric and so forth) described by Steiner in his *Curative Course*.

It may be helpful to realize that the first part—the report—is most closely related to cognitive activity, the second part—group work—involves the realm of feeling as the agent of picture transformation into intuitive image, and finally the third part—resolution—is related to the sphere of will.