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Coming to Know the World Through Waldorf Education

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The time is 8:20 a.m. Mr. Stevensen moves swiftly around the room, preparing for morning circle and talking to various 5th graders at the same time: “Timothy, this place was not clean.”

“We swept it.”

Carl Stevensen is 39 years old and has been involved with Waldorf education for 14 years. He pushes chairs to the sides of the room. “I had to rush out of here yesterday. I didn't get to do what I wanted to do,” he tells me. He places sunflowers and several pumpkins on top of an orange cloth in the center of the room. “Could we please begin everyone?” Some students are waiting outside. The ones inside the classroom exit so that they may line up at the door and enter the room when Mr. Stevenson is ready for them.

The walls of the classroom are yellow-green. Plants and natural artifacts are everywhere: pumpkins, Indian corn, gourds, bark, pine cones, sunflowers, 11 potted plants on the window sills, and two finches, Odin and Frigga (acquired and named during the 4th grade main lesson block on Norse myths). The desks, too, are made of wood, and over one of the two chalkboards is a wooden frame designed to cut off the right angles. Several ceiling lights augment the natural light that comes through thin, lacy, yellow curtains.

Mr. Stevensen shakes hands with each child. Regardless of how hassled he is before school, he tries to be friendly yet formal when he greets his students. “Good morning to you, Jessica. Please come in. Good morning to you, Sonja.”

A Study Of Waldorf Education

From the humble beginnings of one school designed for the children of the workers of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Company (hence the name Waldorf school), Waldorf education has become a worldwide K-12 educational movement. These private, nonsectarian schools provide an arts-based curriculum. That is, from 1st through 8th grades, students learn reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and geography (among other subjects) largely through artistic activities such as drawing, painting, clay modeling, poetry, and drama. In addition, all students have the opportunity to receive instruction in two foreign languages, singing, eurythmy, form drawing, handwork, woodworking, and playing the recorder and string instruments.[1] Specialists teach many of these subjects, but to enhance the stability of the curriculum, the classroom teacher often remains with the same group of students from 1st through 8th grade.

A great deal more could be said to acquaint unfamiliar readers with Waldorf education and its founder Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), but that is not my purpose here. Works by Barnes, Carlgren, Edmunds, Foster, Leichter, Piening and Lyons, Richards, and Spock provide excellent introductions to Waldorf education.[2] Writers such as Davy, Easton, Harwood, Hemleben, McDermott, and Shepherd have described Steiner's life or explained his ideas.[3] Steiner's collected volumes number over 300. Some texts that introduce his educational ideas include his autobiography, *The Course of My Life; A Modern Art of Education; An Introduction to Waldorf Education; Soul Economy and Waldorf Education*; and *The Kingdom of Childhood*.[4]

The aim of the study discussed in this article was to describe, interpret, and appraise the “ecological” character of two Waldorf schools in order to shed new light on Waldorf education and on educational matters in general. I began my study with four main questions: (1) What are Waldorf educators' general intentions? (2) What actually happens in such schools? (3) What is the educational significance of the theories and practices as exemplified in the two schools studied? (4) What do these theories and practices mean for students of Waldorf schools, and what could they mean for students in public schools?

I will not answer each question separately and exhaustively. To do so would require a much lengthier presentation. Rather I focus here on two major intentions of Waldorf educators that do indeed match what takes place in the classroom. The intentions of teaching subject matter through image, rhythm, movement, and storytelling (technical conditions) and to involve aesthetics in all that is done throughout the school day (aesthetic conditions) are expressed in Steiner's writings, emphasized in the Waldorf teacher training schools, and easily observed in almost any Waldorf classroom. I describe how some Waldorf educators teach subject matter through the various elements just mentioned, and I comment on the significance of these practices. In short, I offer examples of educational practice as subjects for contemplation. Although I do not delineate any kind of authoritative pedagogical approach and I do not argue that what I observed in Waldorf classrooms should necessarily take place in all classrooms, I do believe educators can learn much from the Waldorf approach. To borrow a phrase from Kieran Egan, I hope this article becomes a good thing to think with (*bonne a penser*).

Methodology

One research method that encourages investigators to capture, critique, and evaluate the types and qualities of conditions that students encounter in schools and classrooms is *educational connoisseurship and criticism*.[5] Employed by researchers at various universities, this form of educational inquiry renders a vivid description, interpretation, and evaluation of school and classroom life. [6] In description, the educational critic uses narrative, often literary in character, to express the essential and often subtle qualities of the situation experienced. The interpretive aspect explores the meanings and consequences of educational events, using ideas, models, and theories from the arts, humanities, or social sciences to provide the reader with means for understanding what has been described. The evaluative aspect assesses the educational significance of events described and interpreted.

Thematics in educational criticism is related to generalizing in social science research. Rather than making formal generalizations, however, I provide the reader with an understanding of the major themes that run through the schools under study. In turn, these themes provide the reader with theories or guides for anticipating what may be found in other Waldorf schools. These theories provide guidance, not prediction. Just as the story of Horace Smith in Ted Sizer's *Horace's Compromise* is about more than Mr. Smith alone, the stories of the teachers in my study are about more than these teachers alone.

In addition to Waldorf events, meetings, and festivals, I observed four classrooms (2nd and 5th grades in Hidden Valley Waldorf School, and 3rd and 4th grades in Sunnyville Waldorf School), clocking over 280 hours of observation time.[7] One school was urban, the other rural. The student population in both was predominantly white, with a strong middle class constituency. In addition to interviewing the four teachers whose classrooms I observed, I talked with four master teachers (those who teach in a training program), specialty teachers, student teachers, administrators, and a few parents. These interviews provided information from differing perspectives, presenting me with alternative views of Waldorf education. In all, I interviewed over 40 people.

When Dewey wrote about teachers' work, he pointed out that teachers do not provide experiences for students. Teachers provide conditions whereby each individual student undergoes his or her own experience. [8] I refined Dewey's notion of “condition” by explicating types of conditions. In short, through my analysis of the four Waldorf classrooms, I ascertained six types of conditions that teachers provide for students: technical, aesthetic, social, sensive, symbolic, and focal.[9] I do not suggest that this list is exhaustive, but these conditions are important. Also,

although my conceptual slicing of Waldorf education does not represent an insider's perspective in the sense that Waldorf teachers talk about technical and aesthetic conditions, some Waldorf teachers have read my study and, in general, agree with what I have written. I do believe that I capture what transpires in a Waldorf classroom, albeit in a language that is not Waldorfian.

Inside A Waldorf Classroom

Let's return now to Mr. Stevensen's 5th grade. It's morning circle time, and the students quickly form a circle. Mr. Stevensen stands straight and tall, hands by his sides. He says, “The best way to look for balance in this circle is to look to the opposite side.” Students look around and shuffle about in order to form a “balanced” circle. Then the verses and activities begin. In one, students bend down from the waist, arms stretched toward the ground and say, “The earth is firm beneath my feet.” Students rise and move their arms above their heads: “The sun shines bright above.” They place their arms by their sides: “Here I stand so straight and strong.” They spread their feet and circle their arms out in front of them: “All things to know and love.” They repeat this verse again:

The earth is firm beneath my feet,The sun shines bright above.Here I stand so straight and strong,All things to know and love.

They recite the verse five more times, becoming quieter during each recitation. Then there is a moment of silence.

Mr. Stevensen looks at the sunflower and pumpkin that he placed in the middle of the circle and begins to talk about the sunflower by referring to some of its observable features. Mr. Stevensen uses morning circle time for numerous purposes: preparing for the day, recitation, group cohesiveness. Here he breaks up the recitation of verses with a discussion about plants. Several students share their observations on the sunflower. When the conversation dwindles, Mr. Stevensen says, “Thanks to the help of a friend of ours from Sunnyville School the class is enriched with pumpkins.” He switches the discussion to pumpkins and asks students to compare the pumpkin with the sunflower.

Marianne says, “The pumpkin doesn't grow in the air.”

“Good observation. Even the simplest observation can be of tremendous importance. Do pumpkins have flowers?”

“Yes.”

“What about the seeds of the two plants?”

Nicholas replies, “The shape is pretty much the same.”

Tom remarks, “Sunflower seeds are much smaller.”

“The sunflower seed has a shell,” adds Jenny.

Mr. Stevensen notes, “The pumpkin seed has a shell, too, except one kind of pumpkin. That pumpkin is called a . . .” No one remembers. “A Lady-godiva. Did anyone happen to notice the leaves of the godiva?” Students point out that the plant had spikes. “So deer wouldn't eat them,” says one student. “So they'd catch the water,” says another. After several other observations about the godiva and a few other plants that the students saw when they went to the nature center, Mr. Stevensen brings the discussion to a close: “The stems of the leaves were standing up straight, a little like the sunflower.” Mr. Stevensen has brought the conversation back to its starting point, like the circle they are standing in. “Nate, it doesn't look like you're getting enough water these days. Your limbs are sagging.”

Technical Conditions

Sometimes Waldorf educators want their students to acquire information or to develop competence in a skill. I have labeled these aspects of the educational process—the transmission of knowledge—as technical conditions. Before elaborating on these, however, I should stress that the Waldorf teachers I interviewed do not limit their understanding

of cognition to a technical conceptual framework. They do not regard science as the only means to knowledge, nor do they believe that rational analysis of discrete problems is the main task of education. Moreover, they do not think that technical training alone (specializing in a content domain) translates into superior ability to take charge of local or global affairs. The Waldorf educators I observed do not emphasize technical conditions at the expense of others. Technical conditions are placed alongside other conditions, such as aesthetic ones.

Waldorf teachers also *reflect* on the educational process in a nontechnical way. In telling me about teaching the parts of speech, for example—a seemingly technical task—Mr. Stevensen began by discussing the importance of imagination rather than grammar. He pointed out that in 3rd grade the teacher would refer to adjectives or verbs in imaginative ways—for example, calling them “color words” and “doing words.” Then he suggested that in the 3rd grade curriculum unit on the Old Testament, one could talk

> about Adam naming the animals. The story in the Bible. Or doing words, you know, somebody doing something like ... Adam and Eve were thrust out of paradise [and] were forced to do something with themselves and the earth. You could compare the two different kinds of experiences, the heavenly experience of paradise and the worldly experience of having been cast out of paradise.

In this way, according to Mr. Stevensen, students develop a relationship with words. The point to emphasize here is that the creation of a lesson requires imagination. Dewey pointed out years ago that whereas academics such as mathematicians want to further the development of their subject matter, teachers want to create relationships between the subject matter and their students.[10] Waldorf educators (who are not Deweyan in the sense that they read and follow Dewey's ideas) try to create these relationships through imagination—their own and that of their students. In short, technical decisions need not dominate educational intentions, as some argue should be the case, and as Freire reminds us often is the case.[11]

The emphasis on nontechnical types of conditions, however, should not be taken to mean that Waldorf educators do not want to prepare students for the modern world. The Waldorf teachers I observed teach the “basics.” They provide the conditions for students to read, to write, and to do arithmetic. They provide academic subjects such as geography, history, science, and two foreign languages. Yet the methods employed consciously emphasize images, rhythms, and movements. Also, Waldorf educators embed technical conditions in stories, which, among other results, cathectically (emotionally) charges some of the material they teach. Let's examine each aspect by seeing what Waldorf educators do and by reflecting on the significance of their theories and practices.

Image

The great power of the image is that it enables students to see or imagine concretely the topic at hand. Mr. Stevensen reviews botanical information with students by placing pumpkins and sunflowers in the center of the room. In a 2nd grade classroom I observed, the teacher, Miss Bronte, taught students to read and write by relating images to letters and even to punctuation.[12] When students wrote in their main lesson books, “The lion roared in despair, and the mouse came to his rescue,” they drew the capital “T” in the shape of a tree. When they came to the comma, Miss Bronte reminded them: “Now the traveler walking along on his journey—he needs a rest and so he dips his legs into the stream.” Miss Bronte provided students with an image of the comma to give meaning to this abstract punctuation mark.

A workshop I observed included an impressive display of how to build on the teaching of images. During a social studies lesson, master Waldorf teacher Gary Solomon recounted the story of Hannibal's intent to conquer Rome. He portrayed the difficult path to Rome by narrating how Hannibal had to cross the Alps through treacherous and untrodden areas. At one point, obstructed by a boulder blocking a small passageway through the mountains, Hannibal commanded that everything the army had be burned—even spears and saddles. The fire heated the boulder, and when the boulder was red hot, Hannibal poured wine on it and it cracked. “You can carry this over into geology class next year,” Solomon noted, reminding teachers that the image of Hannibal cracking the boulder would be useful in teaching about limestone. In this way students learn new material by building on a foundation—what Broudy calls an *allusionary* base.[13]

The significance of teaching with images was realized at least by the time of Comenius (1592–1670), who created a Latin textbook with pictures. Dewey also believed in the importance of images. He wrote, “I believe that the image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it.”[14] More recently, Rudolf Arnheim and Elliot Eisner have expounded upon the importance of images.[15] In addition, recent work in cognitive science has revealed the importance of imagery in thinking.[16] In short, attaching images to the learning of new words, ideas, and concepts is an important pedagogical approach. One could go so far as to say, if one cannot see it (using “seeing” metaphorically), one may not know it.

Three points ought to be made. If teachers cannot teach their subject through images—that is, using a form of representation that enhances the possibility for a student to ascertain a sensory image—then they may not be prepared to teach that subject. (Note that I do not limit image to the visual mode alone. Steiner used the German term *vorstellung*, which has connotations beyond vision.) Teachers may use this simple criterion to evaluate their own knowledge of the subject. In addition, Steiner suggested that teachers should teach students through images with which they can grow. Static images may produce static thinking. Educators concerned with imagination should want their students to actively “image(in).” The image should provide flexibility and not a narrow one-to-one correspondence between image and concept. Finally—and this point concerns researchers as well as teachers—I suggest that the process in which images, metaphors, analogies, jokes, and gestures develop and evolve, appear and disappear, forms a thread that weaves in and out of the different curricula. I refer to this as a *curriculum thread*, and it may indicate the development of an allusionary base. When implemented with thoughtful reflection and purposefulness, curriculum threads become powerful pedagogical tools, as Gary Solomon's example reveals. How teachers use curriculum threads—the way such threads are developed, sustained, or abandoned—could be the unit of analysis for research in many educational settings.[17]

Rhythm

Attention to rhythm in education, as Whitehead once pointed out, is a sadly neglected area, “a main source of wooden futility in education.” [18] Whitehead was concerned with creating productive rhythms of teaching and learning to encourage students to sustain a sense of wonder and interest in the world—to keep curiosity alive. Although the Waldorf teachers I observed work out of a different conception of rhythm, the desired intentions are similar.[19] In fact, Waldorf teachers talk about using rhythms to teach in a cognitively economical way.

How do they try to accomplish this kind of teaching? Mr. Stevensen had students playing recorders and doing math for short periods of time (approximately 10 minutes and 15 minutes respectively) after the morning verses. In this way, he accomplished his goal of having students put in the necessary practice time to sharpen musical and math skills. Waldorf teachers talk about alternating “thinking,” “feeling,” and “willing” activities. While thinking activities tax the brain, feeling activities touch emotions, and willing activities have students doing things with their bodies. In keeping with Rudolf Steiner's suggestions, the Waldorf educators I observed believe that students remain interested in subject matter longer, become less bored, and may even learn faster when education is taught in a rhythmic way.

Usually Waldorf educators work with rhythms in the main lesson—a concentration on a particular subject that occupies an extended period of time each morning. Main lessons may be disciplinary (e.g., a unit on math) or interdisciplinary (e.g., a unit on ancient Persia). They usually last four to five weeks. Then some teachers discontinue working with the material entirely until they return to it later in the year in a different block on the same theme. According to Mr. Stevensen,

> You want to present a subject, to work with it for a while, intensively, and then to let it rest. . . . That's what we've done with arithmetic. . . . We didn't touch math for five weeks. . . . But we got back into mathematics three weeks ago, and I found that the children were able to take up the work immediately. When we had concluded the last time, it seemed that they had . . . absorbed as much of a conceptual nature as they could for that time, and any progress beyond a certain point was becoming difficult. . . . But when we began again, they

> picked up the work with renewed energy, and . . . what was difficult at the end of the last block became very easy.

Mr. Stevensen was worried about dropping arithmetic entirely. Although he intuitively felt he was teaching in an appropriate rhythm, he could not be absolutely sure. In addition, parents were worried about his rhythmic decision, which increased his anxiety. However, his method seemed to work, as he indicates above. After a break from the subject matter, students returned to math with renewed vigor, and almost effortlessly their conceptual understanding of the material had progressed.

This rhythm of presenting material in blocks interspersed with extended breaks is like situations in which, when working on a particular problem, one may have to leave the task entirely in order to return to it with fresh insight. In Piagetian terms, one could argue that students need time to assimilate and accommodate the new material. One cannot simply push material into children's heads. According to Piaget, if students are not cognitively prepared to grasp an intellectual idea, then no amount of training can alter this condition).[20] The learning of logical structures takes time.[21] Deciding on the optimum time for breaks between the teaching of subjects is a wide open topic for further research. Greater attention must be paid to prudently planned gaps when subject matter is purposely omitted.

Movement

Another important pedagogical method related to rhythm is teaching through movement. Many students in Waldorf schools march about the room and clap their hands while reciting their math tables. For example, in Mr. Stevensen's room, students formed two circles, one inside the other. When they performed the “twos table,” the outer circle of students walked counterclockwise as they counted, “2, 4, 6,”—up to 16. Next, they counted to 14 and clapped and walked one step backward on the beat of 16. Then they counted to 12 and clapped their hands and walked backwards on the beats of 14 and 16. Eventually, students walked backwards 16 steps. The inner circle moved in the opposite direction. Waldorf students do these kinds of number activities beginning in 1st grade. Regarding this activity, Mr. Stevensen told me, “We start the day out with a concentration exercise. The point is to just get everybody to be awake in the classroom. We'll take that exercise and develop it throughout the week.” Counting by twos is an easy task for 5th graders, but coordinating numbers with bodily movements requires attention.

Whether teaching through movement in this way is more technically effective than other modes of teaching remains to be seen. All of the Waldorf educators I observed used variations of this method to supplement math activities. Teaching through movement, however, does recognize that the body is important in learning. The question, “How does the body affect what we know?” is usually limited to the head, and in particular to the brain. Steiner, however, suggested that the entire body is involved in the process of knowing; and others after him, such as Merleau-Ponty and Madeleine Grumet, have made this point as well.[22] The entire body is a source of knowledge. Teaching through movement takes this claim seriously.

Also, what should not be lost in this discussion is another consideration that Dewey and more recently Noddings have emphasized: the quality of present experience.[23] Let's say for the sake of argument that students who practice math with worksheets and timed quizzes do better on computation than Waldorf students. If, however, these students do not really enjoy math, whereas Waldorf students do, then how shall we decide which students are better off? The Waldorf students I observed seemed to enjoy these activities, and that is important in itself.

Stories

Teaching through image, rhythm, and movement are key methods of Waldorf education. In addition to these, a fourth important teaching device that Waldorf educators use, one that incorporates image and rhythm, is storytelling. Waldorf teachers usually begin their main lessons with a story. Over the course of two weeks, I observed the following pattern of teaching:

1. Students recapitulate the previous day's story or lesson,

2. The teacher asks leading questions to prepare students for a new story,
3. The teacher tells an imaginative story (lasting from 5 to 15 minutes),
4. The teacher begins a creative activity (e.g., drawing, painting, sculpting), and/or
5. Students write and draw in their main lesson books.

Stories contain a number of pedagogical virtues. Stories grab students' attention and relate information in provocative ways. In fact, Kieran Egan argues that storytelling should be the basic metaphor of education.[24] My point, however, is that a good story cathectically (emotionally) charges the information at hand, providing a moral context for technical conditions. How?

If we think of stories as an art form, then we can apply Tolstoy's observation about art to stories:

> The activity of art is based on the fact that a man, receiving through his sense of hearing or sight another man's expression of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it.[25]

Through voice, cadence, rhythm, tone, and structure, teachers can transmit a story set in an emotional context that informs students on how to feel about particular situations. In this way, as Tolstoy also observed,

> art . . . is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity. . . . So, thanks to man's capacity to be infected with the feelings of others by means of art, all that is being lived through by his contemporaries is accessible to him, as well as the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago, and he has also the possibility of transmitting his own feelings to others.[26]

Waldorf teachers may not be aware of Tolstoy's theories, but they do believe that stories elicit children's feelings, which can help them learn. Second grade teacher Miss Bronte says it this way:

> It's very important for children at this age [2nd grade] to feel their teacher as well. They need to have a real feeling of who you are and they need to feel moved. They need to feel strong emotions. They need to feel your joy, your pleasure, your approval, that may come not only through stories but in your relationship to them. They also need to feel very strongly your disapproval or the sense that something isn't right. And this doesn't need to be expressed in a pedestrian way: "this is right" and "this is wrong." But it needs to come through lots of things—through the curriculum, through you essentially as a person.

According to Miss Bronte, one does not teach students right and wrong by declarative statements, but by doing right and by telling stories that elicit emotions of feeling good by right conduct and of feeling bad by wrong acts.

Of course, the dynamics of teaching morality through stories is a complex affair, and Waldorf educators recognize this fact. There is no one-to-one correspondence between a story and a child's reaction. Much depends upon the way one interprets the tale. Still, as Tolstoy's observation suggests, much can be gained through stories. (I remind the reader that my point here is not to discuss moral education in Waldorf schools, but to highlight an important pedagogical function of stories.)

In short, stories are a good way to elicit students' emotions. When stories link feeling good with moral conduct and feeling bad with immoral acts, then children are engaged in moral education. Though some educators may stress the importance of reason in moral education, encouraging proper feelings may be even more important.[27] After all, sometimes people can tell right from wrong, but they still choose to act wrongly. What is needed, said Aristotle long ago, is not only correct tutoring, but also correct feelings. Children need to feel the rightness of moral conduct. In this way, "the good . . . is assimilated into the child's very being; the child comes to see virtuous conduct as an integral part of who he or she is."[28] In short, children need to learn to feel good about acting virtuously. Stories (drama,

mystery, comedy, and tragedy) teach students how others have reacted to people, places, and things that they are coming to know.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this article is not to argue that good teaching depends upon the implementation of the analysis presented here. Many contextual variables come into play.[29] In a large classroom of unruly students, movement might create havoc rather than learning. Nevertheless, as a general guide, teaching through image, rhythm, movement, and storytelling makes good sense. Although each topic deserves a complete article delineating its characteristics and qualities, I include them in one article in part because Waldorf educators think about these dimensions of teaching together. Also, as Waldorf educators would undoubtedly remind us, a number of elements related to technical conditions make learning rich, varied, and fun. The constellation created by these four elements is as important as their independent existence.

Educators would do well to think about whether their lessons have adequately used image, rhythm, movement, and storytelling in meaningful ways. Below are some questions teachers and administrators may consider:

- Does the lesson teach ideas and concepts through vibrant images?
- Does the lesson provide images with which students can grow?
- How do the images in one lesson relate to other areas of the curriculum?
- Are the days, weeks, and months organized in ways that balance thinking, feeling, and willing activities?
- Do students have an opportunity to express themselves in kinesthetic ways?
- Are facts, ideas, and concepts taught in narrative modes of pedagogy?
- Do the narratives elicit students' feelings? What kinds?

Aesthetic Conditions

In addition to the transfer of knowledge, Waldorf educators also teach to a number of other educational concerns. They attend to the whole child. Of the various conditions that Waldorf educators provide for students, this article includes discussion of aesthetic ones in order to emphasize that aesthetic qualities are important, that they have cognitive ramifications, and that even when they do not fulfill a cognitive function, other concerns make them important.[30]

Aesthetic conditions refer to three aspects of the educational process: (1) the physical arrangement of the classroom, in which teachers try to provide an enriched and inspiring environment, (2) events and activities in which teachers encourage students to form things well, and (3) activities in which students have the opportunity to enjoy sensory pleasures.[31] Each aspect has important implications.

Waldorf teachers pay close attention to aesthetic qualities. They think carefully about the kinds and qualities of materials used in the classroom as well as the physical arrangement of those materials. Mr. Stevensen, like most Waldorf teachers, puts a great deal of effort into providing an orderly yet inviting environment for his students; desks are arranged in slight arcs rather than straight lines; synthetic materials (plastics, nylons) are eschewed for natural ones (wood, cloth napkins, straw lunch baskets); fresh flowers decorate the room; colorful chalk drawings adorn the blackboards; the carpet and curtains blend with the colorful walls.

Although Steiner did not provide specific guidelines regarding aesthetic qualities in the classroom, his advice to the first Waldorf schools is still followed by many Waldorf educators today.[32] Colors on classroom walls, for example, often range from reds for the younger grades to blues for the upper ones. Using a method called “lazure,” teachers, often with the help of parents, paint the walls in several coats. First one person applies the paint near the ceiling and allows it to drip downward. Then a second person brushes the dripping paint horizontally. When this process is

applied several times (often with a splash of a second color) the eye does not stop flat when it hits the wall. Gentle swirls of color take the eye full circle around the room. The aesthetic texture of Waldorf education combines a mysterious 19th-century homeyness with a sense of ethereality.

Just as Waldorf educators have their own theory regarding color, they also pay attention to the kind and quality of materials used in Waldorf schools. They prefer “natural” (e.g., wood, cotton) to human-made materials. Although reasonable people may argue over Steiner's aesthetic theories and the benefits of natural materials (and ask, “Just what is natural anyway?”), the point is that Waldorf educators have a conception of aesthetics that they employ in the classroom. In this way, Waldorf educators reinforce their belief that aesthetic conditions are important for quality of life. Waldorf educators also remind the rest of us that what we consider “normal” may be just as odd to them as their theories are to us. Speaking to this point, a parent once told me,

> [In a meeting] I remember this one man got up and [said] he wanted to know why in a Waldorf kindergarten there was all these pine cones and pieces of wood and shells and rocks and things like that. Why weren't there regular kindergarten kind of equipment. And I just thought that was such an amazing question.

She wondered why he would look at all these “natural objects” as some kind of “abnormality.”

> And why didn't we have the formica, and the plastic and the Legos, you know, and things like this that [are] completely artificial. That [question] really spoke to the kind of condition of our society where these natural objects are now considered abnormal objects.

In addition to physical aesthetic qualities, Waldorf educators are concerned that students learn to form things well. This second aspect of aesthetic conditions refers to the events and activities in which students pay attention to or create the aesthetic qualities of the material at hand. For example, students' main lesson books should look attractive. At one school, students kept their crayons in felt pouches they had made; flutes were kept in personally made, colorful canisters. In some classrooms students took turns bringing flowers. Waldorf teachers provided the conditions for their students to recognize that images and objects make a difference in people's lives.

Aesthetic qualities affect the way one feels, and the way one feels affects the way one thinks. Paying attention to aesthetic conditions is not subservient to other aspects of education, and it is not a frill. Rather, attention to aesthetics represents an important way of knowing and relating to the world.[33] In each of the classes I observed, teachers emphasized aesthetic as well as technical conditions when students worked on their main lesson books. At one point, for instance, one teacher realized she had inadvertently neglected the aesthetic side of the main lesson books in her effort to teach students math, and she reminded students that they needed to work harder on making the books appealing.

These aesthetic conditions have numerous ramifications. First, Waldorf teachers try to teach students that they can make aesthetic objects themselves. Students learn to create their own materials rather than buy them. Kindergarten students watch their teachers bake bread or other food items almost every day. Second-graders make their own friendship bands. Chanukah candles and Advent calendars are made rather than bought. In these ways, teachers try to keep their students from becoming deskilled.[34] Additionally, because teachers do not rely on commercial textbooks, conditions do not encourage students to assume that knowledge stems primarily from textbooks.

Finally, children also have the opportunity to learn that aesthetic qualities can enrich and enhance one's quality of life. I believe that our general quest for knowledge has neglected the form or style in which knowledge is expressed. Yet aesthetic form embeds knowledge in a *weltanschauung*. The printed word can express a sense of spirituality, corporate mentality, or modernity.[35] As suggested earlier in regard to the importance of stories, students come to understand and relate to the world in and through aesthetic forms. Given this argument and the lack of consideration given to aesthetic form in many schools and homes, perhaps it is no wonder that many students have an “I don't care” attitude. Waldorf education attempts to provide a strong sense of a caring community.

Beyond these considerations, some Waldorf teachers also provide conditions for students simply to enjoy the activity at hand. There are aesthetic properties inherent in playing games such as “Heads-up Seven-up,” singing songs at various times throughout the day, and playing in general. This aspect of aesthetic conditions does not require a focus on the instrumental utility of such events. They are activities (as I once heard Maxine Greene distinguish) “for being” rather than activities “for having.” Of course, this raises the question of whether schools ought to be a place where activities “for being” are conducted. The answer depends upon one's conception of education. Educators who emphasize the “basics” might say no. Educators who feel that schools should be places where one has the opportunity to experience the multitudinous nature of life and who worry about the quality of present experience ought to say yes.

Conclusion

I have emphasized two kinds of educational conditions that Waldorf educators provide for their students. Although I separated the aesthetic from the technical for analytic purposes, clearly the two are intertwined. In regard to the technical, I pointed out that the Waldorf teachers I observed do teach students the basics, using styles of teaching that I consider worthwhile, yet that are often overlooked or neglected by the general educational community. Image, rhythm, movement, and stories are powerful pedagogical tools. Moreover, when implemented thoughtfully, they provide curriculum threads that may provide students with an allusionary base for learning. I also pointed out that paying attention to aesthetic qualities plays an important role in Waldorf education. We do not need to color school walls in lifeless pale greens and off-whites. Furthermore, the neglect of aesthetic conditions sends a powerful message to students—one that may not be conducive to education. Rollo May once wrote that “art is an antidote to violence.” Could it be that the lack of art in many schools induces violence? I end my discussion with the words of Schiller:

> Beauty is indeed the sphere of unfettered contemplation and reflection; beauty conducts us into the world of ideas, without however taking us from the world of sense.[36]

Endnotes

[1] Eurythmy is an artistic activity in which students make movements to the letters of the alphabet, words, or music. Form drawing is an exercise in which students draw geometric forms. Handwork usually entails sewing and knitting.

[2] Henry Barnes, “An Introduction to Waldorf Education,” *Teachers College Record* 81 (Spring 1980): 323–336; Frans Carlgren, *Education Towards Freedom*, 3d ed., trans. Joan and Siegfried Rudel (England: Lanthorn Press, 1981); L. F. Edmunds, *Rudolf Steiner Education*, 2d ed. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1982); Sarah W. Foster, “The Waldorf Schools: An Exploration of an Enduring Alternative School Movement” (doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, 1981); Hope Jensen Leichter, “A Note on Time and Education,” *Teachers College Record* 81 (Spring 1980): 360–370; E. Piening and N. Lyons, eds., *Educating as an Art* (New York City: The Rudolf Steiner Press, 1979); Mary C. Richards, *Toward Wholeness: Rudolf Steiner Education in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1980); Marjorie Spock, *Teaching as a Lively Art* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1985).

[3] John Davy, ed., *Work Arising: From the Life of Rudolf Steiner* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1975); S.C. Easton, *Rudolf Steiner: Herald of a New Epoch* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1980); A. C. Harwood, *The Recovery of Man in Childhood: A Study in the Educational Work of Rudolf Steiner* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1958); A. C. Harwood, ed., *The Faithful Thinker: Centenary Essays on the Work and Thought of Rudolf Steiner* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961); J. Hemleben, *Rudolf Steiner: A Documentary Biography*, trans. Leo Twyman (Grinstead, Sussex, U.K.: Henry Goulden, 1975); R. A. McDermott, ed., *The Essential Steiner* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984). A. P. Shepherd, *Scientist of the Invisible: Rudolf Steiner* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1954).

[4] Rudolf Steiner, *The Course of My Life*, trans. Olin D. Wannamaker (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1951) was originally published in installments from December 9, 1923, to April 5, 1925. Rudolf Steiner, *A Modern Art of Education*, 3d ed. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1954) comprises lectures given August 5–17, 1923, in Yorkshire. Rudolf Steiner, *An Introduction to Waldorf Education* (1919; reprint, Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1985). Rudolf Steiner, *Soul Economy and Waldorf Education*, trans. Roland Everett (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., 1986) comprises

lectures given from December 23, 1921, to January 7, 1922, in Dornach. Rudolf Steiner, *The Kingdom of Childhood*, 2d ed., trans. Helen Fox (1924; reprint, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1988).

[5] Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985); Elliot Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991).

[6] Thomas E. Barone, "On Equality, Visibility, and the Fine Arts Program in a Black Elementary School," *Curriculum Inquiry* 17 (No. 4, 1987): 421–446; Terri Epstein, "An Aesthetic Approach to the Teaching and Learning of the Social Studies" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1989); David J. Flinders, *Voices from the Classroom: Educational Practice Can Inform Policy* (University of Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1989); Stephen Thornton, "Different Evidence for Different Audiences?" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington DC, April 1987).

[7] I have used pseudonyms for names of schools and teachers.

[8] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1938).

[9] Technical and aesthetic conditions are described earlier in this article. Social conditions refer to those times when teachers try to establish student-student or teacher-student relationships for the purpose of enhancing personal interactions. Sensive conditions refer to those times when teachers try to enhance students' perceptive abilities and/or their "feeling lives." Symbolic conditions consist of activities (stories, pictures, rituals, and ceremonies) that Waldorf educators hope will affect students' unconscious in productive ways. Focal activities are those that establish contact between teacher and students, such as shaking hands with students each morning (see P. Bruce Uhrmacher, "Making Contact: An Exploration of Focused Attention Between Teacher and Students," *Curriculum Inquiry* [in press]. For a full discussion of all of these conditions, see P. Bruce Uhrmacher, "Waldorf Schools Marching Quietly Unheard" (doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1991).

[10] John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1902).

[11] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

[12] I use *Miss* rather than *Ms.* because Miss Bronte and numerous other Waldorf teachers that I observed have students refer to them this way.

[13] Harry S. Broudy, *The Uses of Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[14] John Dewey, *The Early Works*, 1882–1898, vol. 5 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972): p. 92.

[15] Rudolf Arnheim, *Thoughts on Art Education* (J. Paul Getty Center for Education in the Arts, mimeo, 1989). Elliot W. Eisner, *Cognition and Curriculum* (New York: Longman Inc., 1982).

[16] John R. Anderson, *Cognitive Psychology and Its Implications* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1985), pp. 73–101.

[17] Ralph Tyler noted that concepts and skills could serve as "organizing threads." He wrote, "In planning the curriculum for any school or any field, it is necessary to decide on the types of elements which most effectively serve as threads to use in the organization." Ralph W. Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 86–87. Tyler's notion of a curriculum thread consists of a larger unit of analysis than the one presented here.

[18] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 17.

[19] For another analysis of rhythm, see Hope J. Leichter, "A Note on Time and Education," *Teachers College Record* 81 (Spring 1980): 360–370.

[20] Behaviorists such as Siegfried Engelmann believe that with proper education children can learn ideas Piaget thought impossible. For example, he tried to teach kindergarten children why some objects can float in water. Duckworth summarizes the exchange between Engelmann and Piagetians Constance Kamii and Louise Derman and concludes that the children learned a "verbal overlay." "An object floats because it is lighter than a piece of water the same size; an object sinks because it is heavier than a piece of water the same size. . . . but their deep-seated notions had not evolved." Eleanor Duckworth, *"The Having of Wonderful Ideas" and Other Essays on Teaching and Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1987): pp. 33–34.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Madeleine Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

[23] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1938); Nel Noddings, “Excellence as a Guide to Educational Thought” (paper presented at the 48th Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, Denver, 1992).

[24] Kieran Egan, “Metaphors in Collision: Objectives, Assembly Lines, and Stories,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 18 (No. 1, 1988): 63–86.

[25] Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art*? trans. Almyer Maude (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1960): p. 49.

[26] Ibid., pp. 52–53.

[27] Debby Kerdeman, “Educating Ethical Behavior: Aristotle's Views on Akrasia” (paper presented at the 48th Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, Denver, 1992): p. 10.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Carl D. Glickman, “Unlocking School Reform: Uncertainty as a Condition of Professionalism,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 69 (No. 2, 1987): 120–122.

[30] “Aesthetics” is often used philosophically to refer to a theory of the beautiful or of the fine arts; however, I use the term much more loosely to refer to qualities pertaining to the beautiful or the sensuous. When I say that Waldorf educators provide aesthetic conditions, I do not mean that they are teaching a philosophical theory.

[31] Elliot Eisner, ed., *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing; Eighty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985): pp. 23–36.

[32] E. A. Karl Stockmeyer, *Rudolf Steiner's Curriculum for Waldorf Schools*, trans. R. Everett-Zade (Bournemouth, England: Clunies-Ross Press, 1965).

[33] Elliot Eisner, ed., *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing; Eighty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985): pp. 23–36.

[34] Michael Apple, *Education and Power*. (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

[35] Elliot Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 31–32.

[36] Rollo May and Schiller quotations are in Rollo May, *My Quest for Beauty* (New York: Saybrook, 1985), pp. 17, 215.

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