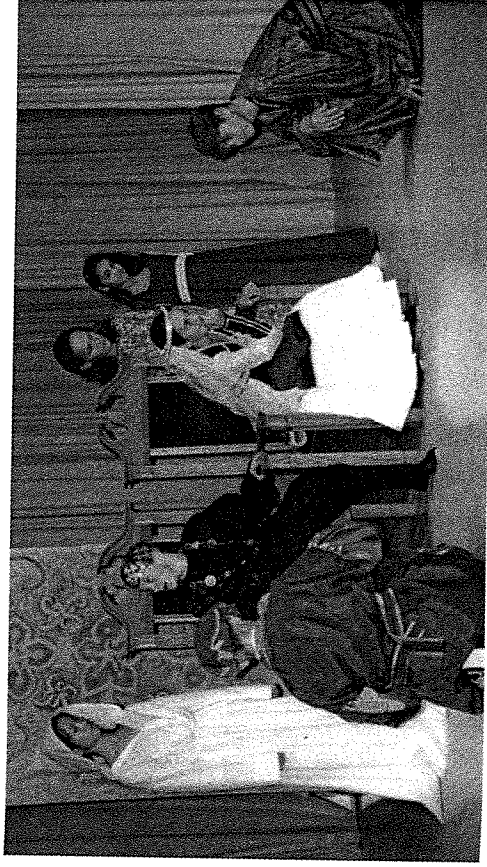
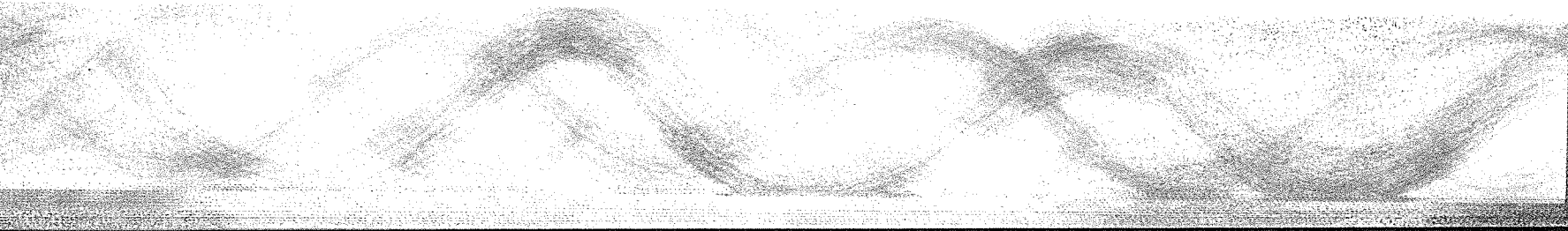


While a child's emotional life may be mysterious and hidden, it still falls within the province of education. For years teachers have educated students' feeling life tacitly and unconsciously, through intonation, facial expressions, and through the books that they chose. This is no longer sufficient. It is imperative that education directly touch the hearts of children, to help them care about their fellow human beings and reassure them that there is beauty and goodness in this world and that they play a role in preserving that beauty and goodness. As Vaclav Havel, democratic leader of the Czech Republic, stated so poignantly in his address to the United Nations shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991: "The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness, and in human responsibility."

To develop the capacity for emotional involvement, Waldorf schools enhance their educational program by integrating the arts throughout the curriculum. Artistic activities such as painting, drawing, drama, and music infuse every child's school experience. For example, when students are asked to produce a play out of their study of history, their feeling for a time period deepens. While making sets, gathering costumes, and learning lines, the students are transported into a particular era and become invested in the learning process. By fostering a heartfelt connection between the student and the subject, education becomes more meaningful, and also more memorable.



Photograph by Pauline D. Clark



Developing Willing

When students come to know the world through thoughtful attentiveness and to know themselves through their emotional and creative responses, they have a more complete sense of what they want to do with their lives. The ability to implement intentions and do what you put your mind to requires resolve, discipline, and a sense of purpose. It creates an attitude that engenders confidence and fosters self-esteem. In a Waldorf school this is called *will*, and it is the third capacity that the schools seek to develop. It is related to self-directed activity and harnessed energy—action with purpose, focus, and intention. It is a key ingredient in self-determination and a vital component of strong character, and certainly a capacity that children will need to chart their own course in a complex and confusing world.

If our children are going to help change this world, they will need a reservoir of strength that is not stymied by obstacles. Children must believe that one person can still make a difference, and the power to make a difference is in the will. This term has many names—vitality, volition, vigor, vivacity. It is determination and perseverance that is unwavering. It is, as radio personality Garrison Keillor says, “the strength to get up and do what needs to be done.” And it is exactly what our children need for the future. Without strength of will, our children’s hopes and dreams will not translate into action.

Children develop will over time through conscious repetition and a gentle insistence on good habits. When the simplest tasks, such as pushing in a chair, playing musical scales, or sharpening a pencil become a conscious discipline, children are able to perform the mundane tasks that are at the foundation of success, whether it be academic, artistic, or athletic.

Three Stages of Childhood

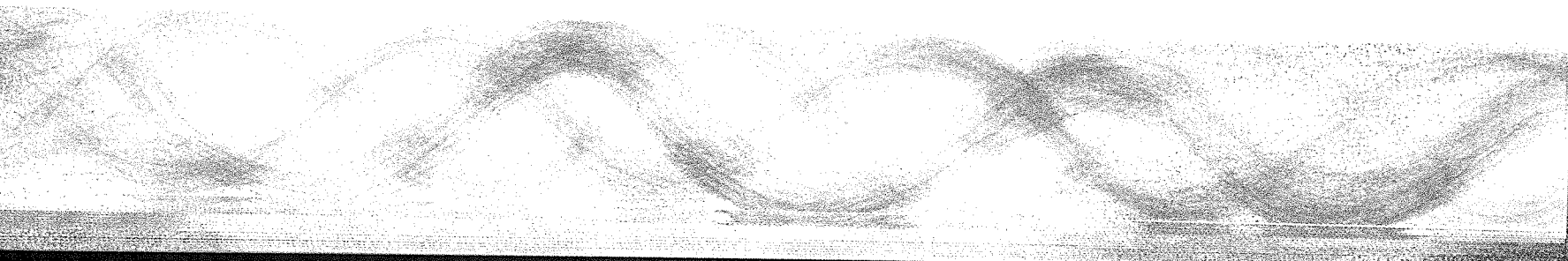
Although the capacities for thoughtfulness, emotional involvement, and intentional activity are inextricably connected, they do not develop uniformly. Rather, they develop in pronounced ways during three distinct seven-year stages of childhood, and therefore, are worked with differently in preschool, grade school (grades 1-8), and high school.

Preschool

In early childhood, from birth until around the age of seven, the young child is primarily *active*. This is evident in the kicking legs of a crying infant and in the curling toes of a nursing newborn, and it is definitely experienced by any parent or childcare provider who tries to keep pace with a toddler. This urge for activity is also observed in the exuberant and purposeful play of the kindergarten child. It is through activity that the young child is most easily engaged and most easily taught.

Grade School

Needless to say, the urge to be active does not disappear when a child enters first grade; neither is the young child unemotional before this point. Rather, activity recedes in importance over time and is gradually supplanted by a growing inwardness during the grade school years. Over the course of the second phase of childhood, from the age of 6 or 7 until around the age of 14, feelings become paramount. This change occurs gradually, the way one season changes to another. A growing emotional capacity begins to show itself the way that the warm days of summer precede the solstice. And these changes come in waves, just like the stretches of crisp autumn weather that can arrive in late August, become more common by September, and then commonplace by Halloween.



High School

The third seven-year phase of childhood is the one in which thinking prevails. Teenagers are certainly emotional and active (when they want to be), but their capacity for critical thinking shows itself in a pronounced way with the onset of adolescence and particularly at the beginning of high school.

The Balanced Development of All Three Key Capacities

In Waldorf schools no single capacity is viewed as more important than another. To foster a child's healthy development, we need to encourage a balanced growth of all three aspects so that in the end, clear, insightful thinking will rest upon a strong foundation of purposeful activity as well as a framework of emotional development. This natural and healthy progression from active experience and emotional response to conceptual understanding is a basic tenet of Waldorf education. Author John Gardner pointed this out in his book, *Education in Search of the Spirit*. "The thoughts that have started in early childhood as active absorption into the environment, and gone on during the elementary years to become articulated feelings with and about things, flower at last as living ideas. These are the content of real intelligence" (Gardner, 1996, p. 73).

This view of child development is embraced as well by the Alliance for Childhood, an organization comprised of educators and physicians who are concerned about the plight of children across the world.

Young children make the most dramatic strides, in terms of nearing their full adult potential, in their sensory and motor skills, and the neural regions most related to them. During the grade school years and beyond children continue to progress incrementally in motor and perceptual skills. But now the most dramatic gains are in their social and emotional skills. The brain regions most involved in emotion

near maturation as children refine their social skills and their capacity to regulate their own moods and behavior. Finally, after puberty, the developmental focus within the brain shifts to the regions of the brain that enable the most advanced thinking, relying upon abstractions and critical judgment. Also, a rich network of neural connections develops between these areas and brain regions most directly involved in emotion and movement (Cordes and Miller, 2000, p. 7).

The balanced development of these three capacities produces well-rounded individuals. Americans have long admired individuals who have displayed such diverse talents: The blending of thoughtfulness and practicality (or “handy-ness”) in Thomas Edison; the merging of artistic sensitivity and keen scientific observation in George Washington Carver; or the physical resilience and intelligence of adventurous scholars such as Jane Goodall and scholar-athletes such as Bill Bradley. These exemplary individuals are models of overcoming one-sidedness, yet balance does not seem to be an important educational goal in our schools. Because Waldorf schools are committed to promoting this well-rounded three-dimensional view of child development, this idea exerts significant influence over the entire education.

Dimensions of the Day

This three-dimensional paradigm influences the structure of the day in a Waldorf school. For grade school and high school students, the day begins with an extended lesson lasting up to two hours. This is called “the main lesson”—the time when the students are called upon to be most attentive and thoughtful. During these intensive study times, students are asked to use their thinking in a concentrated manner. Students and teachers study main lesson subjects intensively for three weeks to four weeks, and then new subjects are taken up. These longer, more concentrated periods of study—often called block teaching—are

growing in popularity in other schools as well. This approach that uses block teaching is "part of a quiet revolution taking place, school by school, in districts all over the country" (DeBrosse, 1997).

In contrast, the afternoon is viewed as a time when lessons requiring more activity, such as woodwork, crafts, art, and physical education, are scheduled. These classes enable the students to balance and replenish the stillness and focus of the early morning with busy hands and energetic movement. In the middle portion of the day, classes that engage the feelings—painting, singing, foreign language, eurhythm, and form drawing—join the more traditional skills classes and take place from mid-morning to lunch.

Although the three-dimensional paradigm influences the work of the entire school, it is applied differently by the preschool, grade school, and high school teachers. These are more than differences in degree. In each separate phase the child's developmental needs require a singular approach and a unique program. In each area, the teachers work with their children in different developmentally appropriate ways. Their approach has been acquired through separate teacher training programs and refined through classroom experience. We will begin to explore these distinctions by looking at Waldorf preschools in the next chapter.

References

- Cordes, C. & E. Miller. (2000, September 12). *Fool's gold: A critical look at computers in the classroom*. College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood.
- DeBrosse, J. (1997, August 4). Schools try longer classes, faster pace. *Chicago Sun Times*, 1B, 4B.
- Gardner, J. F. (1996). *Education in search of the spirit*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.
- Higgins, J. (1970). *Beyond words: Mystical fancy in children's literature*. New York: Teachers College Press.