

CHAPTER TWO

Head, Heart, and Hands

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

—William Butler Yeats

Ain't Misbehavin'

Some students fidget. Their hands look for something to manipulate—a pencil, an eraser, a piece of paper, anything. Elaborate events can take place on a desktop with minimal equipment. I have seen students entertain themselves with only their fingers; they check their double-jointedness, bend every finger and crack every knuckle. Still others are more exuberant. If a lesson continues without some sanctioned activity, they will not be still. Their legs begin to move and their knees begin to rock the desk. Feet and elbows begin to explore boundaries, encounter neighbors, make incursions, and defend territories. But all of these behaviors (or as they are often termed, misbehaviors) have one common message for the teacher. These children are longing to be actively engaged in their lessons.

Maybe you were this kind of student. Or perhaps you were more inwardly active, a quiet student who sat still, and then turned away slowly and inconspicuously. And while you stared out into the distance, your imagination got the better of you and you were gone—off to another land, a land more colorful and

adventurous than what your teacher was offering. You traveled to a place brimming with emotion, full of peril, intrigue, and romance. Whether you entered this world of imagination by gazing out of the window or by drawing on your loose-leaf paper or on your desk, you were expressing a strong urge—a desire to be engaged through the richness of your feelings.

There is another type of student, the one who furtively opens a book inside the desk. While the teacher is reviewing a subject of little interest, the child reads. This student is expressing a fervent desire to learn something new each day and is committed to doing so, even if it means “tuning out” the teacher. If an uninspired lesson does not engage this student’s capacity to think and learn, an irrepressible urge takes over and the child will teach him or herself.

Rudolf Steiner designed Waldorf Education around the simple idea that children have within them three fundamental forces impelling them toward physical, emotional, and mental activity. As a teacher I have always appreciated that these three capacities were called *forces*. This reminded me continually that if I did not recognize my students’ need to be engaged in these three ways, these three significant tendencies would *force* themselves on my attention in less appropriate ways.

Understanding that children need to be engaged in these three distinct ways, through head, heart, and hands, forms the primary educational paradigm at a Waldorf school. Rather than focus the educational work solely around the objective of acquiring knowledge, creating a meaningful learning process itself becomes the focus. Through multi-faceted, multi-sensory learning experiences, teachers and students use a variety of intelligences to develop three distinct capacities—for thinking, for feeling, and for intentional, purposeful activity.

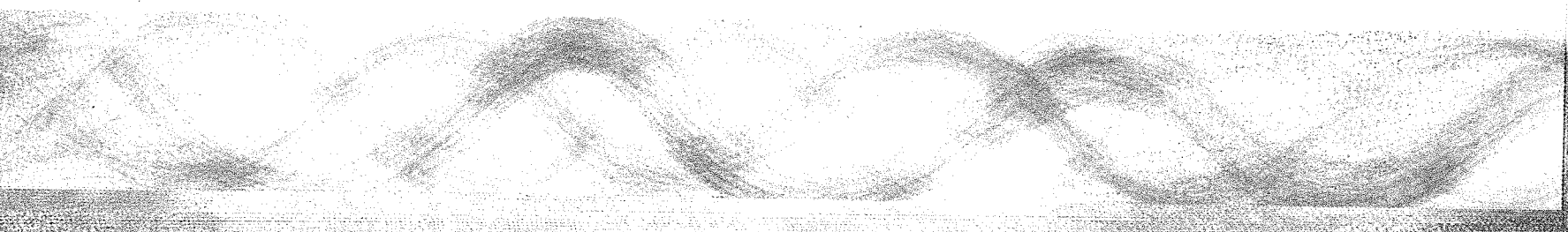
Capacities for the Future

It is impossible to predict what the world will be like in 20 years or to foresee how best to prepare children for that time. Likely, the world that today's children will inherit will be even more complex and problematic. If intelligence alone could solve these problems, then well-meaning government officials already would have been able to effect positive change. If having more information were the answer, then we who live in the information age would have found a solution.

To be properly prepared, students are going to need more than an education designed to promote cognitive ability and the acquisition of information. Today's children will need three distinct capacities to meet the challenges of tomorrow's world. They will need to develop *imaginative thinking*, a thinking that enables them to perceive events with clarity, comprehend situations fully, and then to envision new solutions for seemingly unsolvable problems. They will also need a capacity for *emotional involvement* that is both sensitive and resilient so they will be strong enough to weather the inevitable emotional storms that will arise and yet sensitive enough to look beyond the obvious and to hear what is not spoken. Furthermore, children will need the capacity for *resolute determination* so that they can take their hopes and dreams and turn them into reality. These three capacities for *thinking, feeling, and for focused, intentional activity*, which I will call *willing*, are the best tools for an uncertain future.

Developing Thinking

When I was a child, I received the *Weekly Reader* in school regularly. I remember sitting at my desk and looking at a photograph of a firefighter dressed in a cumbersome white suit. The title of the article stated something about "The Miracle Fiber of the Future" and then went on to instruct young readers about the benefits of asbestos. Forty years ago,



Americans were so enthusiastic about asbestos that we put it in our floor tiles, our ceiling tiles, and our house shingles. We wrapped this friable carcinogen around our heating pipes in the basement and placed it in other strategic places in our homes, schools, and businesses. Today we are spending millions of dollars for its removal.

This is the obvious flaw in fact-based instruction. Whether we were taught about the solar system, the Soviet Union, or computers, much of what we had to learn in school is now outdated. Given the fact that the world is changing even more rapidly today, what can we focus on in education that will prepare our students for the unpredictable world they will inherit?

Wide-awake, perceptive observation is what our students need for the future. The ability to observe individuals, events, and the natural world more completely will promote both lively intelligence and interest. Children who know the world in this more intimate way, a type of knowing that reveals tendencies and patterns, that gives rise to questions rather than answers, and that embraces complexity, view knowledge as a by-product of an ongoing process, rather than an end-product of a finished deed.

For instance, all alphabets contain elements of straight and curved lines, and yet these elements have come together in extraordinary ways over the centuries to produce distinctly beautiful lettering styles. When middle school students investigate these different alphabets they can see so many ways that an alphabet reflects the culture and the times out of which it arose. In the medieval gothic capital letters (see example on the next page), students find evidence of pageantry and courtly excess. In the closely placed small letters, they see similarities with the tightly formed medieval cities and the tightly bound medieval mind. In the way that the letters are shaped, they can

see hints of the portcullis gate that barred the way to a castle's entrance. And when the students write these letters they can feel how the endless repetition of small strokes was similar to the building of the great cathedrals stone by stone over long periods of time.

Gothic Calligraphy

This type of awareness is the starting point. It is a wakeful and patient presence of mind, a prerequisite for problem solving, a habit of mind that enables students to see much in a little and to read more than just books, a subtle ability they will definitely need. Tomorrow's problems will not be solved by choosing either *a*, *b*, *c*, or *d* on a multiple choice test, unless, of course, *d* simply notes—*none of the above* or *all of the above ...and more*.

To be prepared for the future, thinking will need to be imaginative and participatory. It will require that students not only discover the unknown answer to a problem, but also the question that is still waiting to be asked. Eventually, imaginative thinking will help them to envision many different solutions to the problems they encounter. And then they will need to reflect and consider the solution that will be best for everyone.

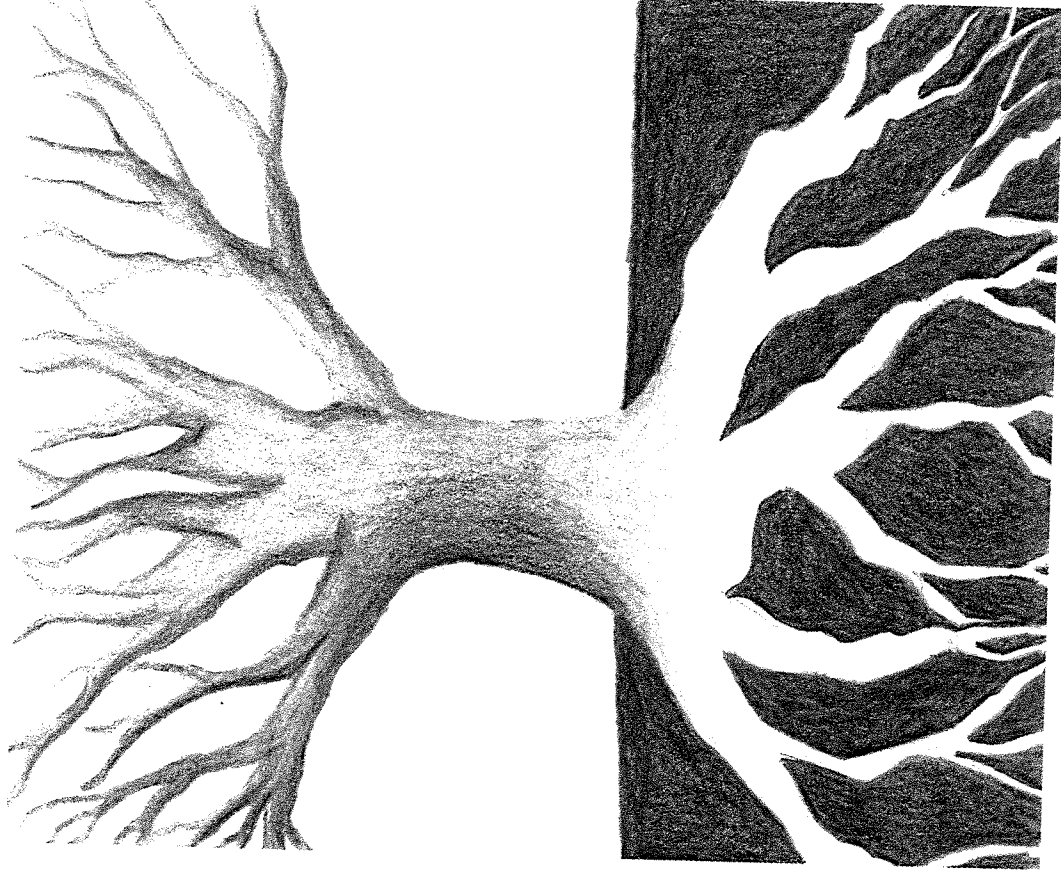
Developing Feeling

Educating students to be emotionally responsive and responsible requires the education of feelings. Schools need to teach these lessons as well, and this means recognizing the importance of a child's inner world. Educator James Higgins stated this aptly in his book, *Beyond Words*.

If one could ask a tree which of its two worlds was the more real—the world above ground, of leaves, blossoms, and sunlight; or that below the ground, where the taproot

reaches for who-knows-what—what would it tell us? For those who understand the tree's message, it clearly states that there is no reality for one "world" without the other. What is a tree without a taproot? What is a taproot without a tree?

Communication between the two "worlds" of the tree, so necessary for mutual growth and development, is a private inner process. Dirt cannot be sprinkled on a leaf to nourish it; direct sunlight will not benefit a root. Only the tree itself, through its own mysteries, can convey the nourishment of one distant "world" to the farthest reaches of the other (Higgins, 1970, p. 87).*



*Reprinted by permission of the publisher from James E. Higgins, *Beyond Words: Mystical Fancy in Children's Literature*, (New York: Teachers College Press, copyright 1970 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.) p. 87.