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About this Edition

Dear Colleagues,

this edition will bring you a range of interesting contributions.

Following the 90th anniversary of Steiner Waldorf Schools last year, the questions surrounding the reality of every day teaching in the schools continue to be wide ranging and searching. As we know, the long term feasibility of anything lies in the practical realm: 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. What in the daily lessons is actually directly connected with Waldorf pedagogy? What has happened to the old archetypal pictures? Is it possible that elements have crept into the lessons which are alienated from the study of man? For example, the basic question of what might be the difference for pupils and teachers between lessons taught in the morning and those taught in the afternoon? And, related to this question, what is a morning person and what is an evening person? Christof Wiechert looks at these questions and beyond them in his article on the three-fold nature of the main lesson.

Should children start school earlier after all and should formal learning to include reading be started when they are much younger? This is a very relevant discussion taking place in the media and elsewhere. A new study from New Zealand provides some very interesting results and we are happy to include the article by Sebastian Suggate regarding this issue. This could shed a new light on discussions taking place in parents' evenings.

The series by Uta Stolz is continuing. This time her contribution in German is about the unfolding of learning in individual pupils and how the seed of motivation is planted. Everything is written from the practical point of view of a class teacher. The first article which was published in our last Journal has now been translated into English and can be read in this edition.

And finally we would like to point out a special event taking place within the kindergarten and school movement in 2012. We will hold two major international conferences at the Goetheanum, the international Kindergarten Conference and the international World Teachers Conference. Both will be looking at the relationship of our Ego to our physical body.

Best wishes for the spring / autumn season from the

Pedagogical Section

On the Question of the three-fold Structure of the Main Lesson

A Stimulus for Discussion

Preamble

An article for the ninetieth anniversary celebration of the Waldorf school movement, which appeared in 'The Goetheanum', issue no. 39 of 25th September 2009, concluded by pointing out three tasks. The first of these was to produce a new balance between the forces of form and impulse within the school and within the school movement.

The second one, according to the author, is meant to examine and investigate the habits of teaching that have developed. What we are doing – is it (still) the right thing?

The third task was mentioned as schooling and practising a new awareness for the meaning and content of Steiner's art of education; this represents a paradigm shift from all conventional educational approaches. We need this awareness in order to shape the future of this art of education.

The author also formulated these three tasks in his lecture at the Congress 'Waldorf Schools: 90 Years' of Future' in Stuttgart on 23rd October 2009.

The theme of this article is intended to tackle the second case where action is required, examining what habits have developed in the practice of teaching in Waldorf schools.

The example that will be worked on should serve as a stimulus for people to concern themselves with other themes in this sense. The theme chosen is the common practice of dividing the main lesson into three parts at the beginning of the day.

A Synopsis

This article is meant to portray how the classic division of the main lesson in classes 1-8 into a rhythmical part, a work part and a story-telling part affects the way the class is at this time of the morning. The influence is strong and is considered, without any discussion, to be a characteristic of the nature of Waldorf school education. The intention is to show that there are no grounds whatsoever to support this structure in the statements or recommendations of Steiner. Furthermore, the case will be made that this division is an obstacle for the essential rhythmical and artistic activities and that it can be a hindrance to the process of learning. It will also be demonstrated how this division of the morning contradicts the Study of Man in important aspects. Finally, it will be portrayed how the behaviour of pupils is judged on the basis of this three-part division.

Introduction

No teacher will fail to think up a meaningful way to start the day with their pupils. In the lower classes there may be a morning circle or else various children will talk of their experiences. Or else they will sing a song, practise tongue twisters or solve a riddle, which has been set the day before, or else the children show one another what they have done at home. In higher classes maybe a poem will be said and mental arithmetic practised. Or else they will clap a rhythm which will subsequently be varied. In short, getting in the right mood for the school day is a really special moment: it is a new day, a day full of promise. The air is full of potency. How am I to greet the children? How will the artistic process begin?

Everything is new, *this* day has never been before! Nobody knows yet what will happen, what this special day will bring. You sense it, you do not fix anything yet, you feel the mood and seek the way to start. Is this the moment for the morning verse or rather for the song first? Are the children 'there' yet? Not quite. Perhaps an 'echo exercise' will be done with the little ones so that they can feel the geography of their bodies. However, the ball exercises for the integration of the senses of sight, hearing and one's own movement will be done in the break in the school yard or, if it rains, in the corridor; now they will take too much time. In any case, getting in the right mood for the day must not take too long, for the morning will bring a lot. The attempt is made in fifteen minutes to be so far that the morning verse can be spoken. In short, getting in the right mood is a highly individual process between the teacher and the group of pupils. A lot depends on the mood. What is the mood of the morning throughout the seasons? How does one go from the tender beginning of the day to events of the day in the approach to spring? How does one do this in advent in winter, or else in summer?

What effect does an established, programmed, rhythmical part with definite components have? Saying a poem, playing the recorder, saying their report verses, singing a song, the morning verse, what effect do they have **in the morning**?

What effect does it have on children or pupils, if this part is extended to over half an hour, often requiring three quarters of an hour? What do we perceive? Does their concentration increase or do we see fatigue and as they get older demotivation (which is interpreted as weakness of will)? Is the expectation of the day disappointed by the beginning, as it only brings something that has already been? Is not the *eager expectation* of what the day may bring deadened in advance, if the child enters school in the semi-conscious certainty that it will take a long time before learning starts, until something new will appear. How does *motivation nowadays* develop in view of habitual activities in the rhythmical part, which does not change through the years and which is continued in the very same sequence?

What about the question of time? If a 'storytelling part' has to follow on from the 'work part', is there enough time left to absorb and learn new things? Does the story part have to necessarily be at the end of the main lesson? How *intensive* is our lesson, how strong are the learning experiences that are necessary for the children to take them on as a matter of course and thus for their motivation?

Which rhythm is wholesome? Is this three-fold structure the cause of the possible slackness in the main lesson? Which habits can be justifiably formed, where are their limitations? What room for manoeuvring is taken away from the main lesson through this structure?

These are all significant questions; questions which impinge on the quality of the lesson.

The Thinking behind it

There are no grounds to be found for dividing the main lesson into three parts in Steiner's work, neither in the lectures nor in the books of the teachers' meetings. This does not necessarily need to be the case, if something meaningful were to be developed. But, whatever is new must then be in accordance with the understanding gained through the Study of Man. However, we do not find any kind of justification except platitudes such as 'all activities need rhythm' (Georg Kniebe). That is true; only the question is, does this three-fold structure mean rhythm or routine?

In the chapter 'Elemente des Waldorfunterrichtes' (p. 86) of the book 'Die Zukunft der Waldorfschule' the author of this chapter, Peter Loebell is careful. He names the most varied possibilities of shaping the main lesson but he avoids assigning them to a three-fold structure.¹ This is a correct approach in my view.

In 'Zur Unterrichtsgestaltung im 1. bis 8. Schuljahr an Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner-schulen' Thomas Stoeckli writes that Steiner did not use the term a three-fold structure and that teachers should feel free "to shape the lessons individually according to their own insight"(p. 25).²

All other references to further reading take the three-part division for granted as characteristic of the main lesson.³

1 Loebell, P. (2000) *Elemente des Waldorfschulunterrichts* in Kleinau-Metzler, D. (Ed.) *Die Zukunft der Waldorfschule. Perspektiven zwischen Tradition und neuen Wegen*, Hamburg: Rowolt Taschenbuch Verlag (p. 86).

2 Pedagogical Section of the Free High School for spiritual Science at the Goetheanum, Dornach, and the Pedagogical Research Centre for the Association of independent Waldorf Schools, Stuttgart. (Eds) (1997), *Zur Unterrichtsgestaltung im 1. Bis 8. Schuljahr an Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner-schulen*, Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.

3 Sandkuehler, b. (1999), *Lernen Kinder mit dem Kopf? Die bedeutung von Bewegung und praktischen Tun in der Waldorfpädagogik*, Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben (p. 42).

Kniebe, G. (1996), *Aus der Unterrichtspraxis an Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner-schulen*, Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum (p. 20).

Richter, T. (ed.) (2006), *Paedagogischer Auftrag und Unterrichtsziele – vom Lehrplan der Waldorfschule*, 2nd Edn., Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben.

Eller, H. (1998), *Der Klassenlehrer an der Waldorfschule*, Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben (p. 26).

Brater, M., Hemmer-Schanze, C., Schmelzer, A., (2009) *Interkulturelle Waldorfschule. Evaluation zur schulischen Integration von Migrantenkindern*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaft (p. 84).

Patzlaff, R., Sassmannshausen, et al. (2007) *Developmental Signatures. Core Values and Practices in Waldorf Education for Children Age 3-9*, Ghent, NY: AWSNA (p. 127).

Therefore, if the three-part structure cannot fall back on the instructions of the art of education, then, all at once, it appears to be without any other evidence to support it except that it helps the children to concentrate⁴ or wakens them up or lets them breathe⁵. However, these are qualities that, according to experience, do not come about through the rhythmical or other parts. Rhythm does not arise through structuring the main lesson and through poems and singing etc. Rhythm arises only through the way in which the teacher teaches. In order to reach an understanding of the processes, we will have to look first at the time of day and at the phenomenon of sleeping and waking.

Time of day, Time and the Forming of Habits

As a rule the main lesson is given in the first part of the morning. In a general instruction Steiner declares that the early morning should be used for learning, the late morning for all that is based on repetition and the afternoon for artistic activities⁶.

Every school must at least strive to make something possible in this direction, which will surely be easier for small schools than large ones.

They are the questions of hygiene in the timetable.

Yet what is the early morning? In the first part of the morning we (children and pupils too) are different beings than at other moments of the day. We can observe quite a bit looking at ourselves. The morning makes us more receptive, more open for what comes, but in an active way, whereas in the evening this receptivity is quieter, less active. We are not yet properly 'preoccupied' with the pictures of our day's experiences, in the afternoon the senses are already flooded with impressions. It is true that *the early bird catches the worm*. There is an American study which shows that with a half hour shift in the early morning the results of learning, the receptivity, of the pupils change. Too early is too early and too late is too late. The timing of learning in the morning must be kept to pretty exactly⁷.

Another thing is: how do we treat time ourselves? Do we make use of it as a constant with a linear course through the day or do we treat it as a quality? In the former case we (and the pupils too) will quickly become tired through it, in the second case time will become the pulse between concentration and relaxation. This can become rhythm, not through the routine of a structure, but through the teacher letting the pulse of time breathe through the activity, *tension, relaxation, focusing on a point, expanding it and differentiating, in short: breathing*. The

4 Keller, U.L. (2008) *Quereinsteiger: Wechsel von der Staatlichen Regelschule in die Waldorfschule*, Wiesbaden: GWV VS Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaft, P. 345.

5 Richter, A. (2009) *Schule mit Theaterprofil* in Schneider, W., (Ed.) *Theater und Schule: ein Handbuch zur Kulturellen Bildung*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, P. 169.

6 Steiner, R. *Education as a Force for Social Change* GA 296, Lecture 2, p. 50.

7 Bronson, P. and Merryman, A. (2009) *Nurture Shock* New York, Twelve Hachette Book Group, pp 38-44.

heart too gives a significant picture of this, that of the systole and the diastole. The teacher becomes an artist of time, if he or she uses time in this way. (In eurhythmy we speak of ‘contraction and expansion’).

In general, the striving is to teach the children or pupils ‘proper habits’, for these form a part of the ability to learn as it develops; an absolutely meaningful endeavour. How do you do this? To a large extent it is a question of the teacher finding equilibrium. We can compare it with a feeling for *music*, between tension and the easing of tension, between quiet and loud, between fast and slow, high and low. If this equilibrium is not present, then habits turn into *rituals*. Then the *justifiable* forming of habits runs the risk of becoming an end in itself. The quite unintentional result will be that the will to learn is frustrated as will be the ‘desire for learning’, for it is not being addressed or not sufficiently addressed.

If this is the case, the door is opened for *educationally undesirable power relationships* and the exerting of influence that impair a healthy relationship between the teacher and the pupils. That happens when the teacher subordinates him- or herself to the dictates of ritual. The freedom of being together has vanished. (See the section on Assessments and Reports).⁸

This leads to unrest in the children’s souls, for in the morning they have come in the mood for learning, not for going through some ritual or other.

The ‘rhythmical part’ takes on the character of a ritual, when, for instance, the pupils of class six have to recite their own report verse in front of the class on the day of the week on which they were born. (We are now leaving aside the question whether this habit is psychologically suited to this age). As such the habit is not bad. (Even if we must hope that the verse is no longer needed after half a year: the pupil will have developed and left the verse behind). However, if this process has not taken effect, then we see the ritual: a pupil who is as uninterested as possible recites his verse in front of a bored ‘mass’ of pupils. The procedure is of no value to anyone. It takes time, though, easily ten to fifteen minutes from a certain class size upwards. If you add in the remaining elements of this part of the morning, truly precious time is gone. Thus, I dare to question whether playing the recorder in the first part of the morning is the right activity. Just watch a group of children that plays the recorder in the early morning and a group of children who do this in the music lesson later in the morning. A great difference is to be noticed; (a difference which, strangely enough, is not to be noticed with singing). How about the much praised stamping, what does that achieve? You can see that it makes the children tired instead of awake. Stamping makes them tired, not awake.

The real rhythm, which we must always heed, is not between parts of the main lesson, but rather the rhythm which reveals itself with the children or

⁸ Steiner, R. (1986) *Soul Economy and Waldorf Education*, Anthroposophic Press, GA 303, Lecture 6. Steiner calls this inappropriate, harmful exercising of power by the teacher over the child or children the ‘vampirising’ of the relationship.

pupils. When do they get tired, when do they waken up? That is the essential consideration. Whoever teaches according to this principle, will dissolve half the discipline problems just through doing this.

Let us consider the process from the viewpoint of the understanding of man.

Everything that we do with our bodies, that we do through the will to be active, for example, moving about, dancing around in a circle, stamping with our feet, clapping, all these activities are of spiritual nature in their essence. All this is achieved by a thought, which changes 'magically' into a movement. Thus, Steiner characterises gymnastics as the most spiritual subject (!). The peculiarity of this spiritual activity, for example of a movement, is that one is not in it with one's wakeful consciousness. *We sleep in our wills*. This is why these activities make us tired. The idea is very widespread that you stamp around vigorously with a group of children in order to get them awake. In fact, it has the opposite effect. You can observe it with the practising of the times table when it is linked to movements. Then you will see the pupils carrying out the procedure 'as in a dream'. Spoken in chorus a kind of 'trance' ensues: it is carried out as in sleep. Teachers will do well to lose no time in breaking this link of this *movement in sleep* from *knowledge gained through wakefulness*.⁹

If the rhythmical part is now followed by a 'work part', in which the pupils have to take in what comes from the teacher, unrelated to the subject matter, then the intentions of the art of education have been prised out of their context and dislocated. For these presuppose that the rhythmical element enters the learning process just in the way described above. If what has been described above becomes living, it will make no difference how long a 'work part' lasts; it can take an hour, it can be shorter or longer; the pupils will cope with it, for the rhythmical intensity will satisfy their will to learn. It is significant that every pupil takes home the experience that he has learnt a lot. This is the most essential thing in the main lesson.

Story Telling

It can be a blessing in the life of a class community, if a story begun earlier on is continued in the final quarter of an hour of the main lesson. When is it a blessing?

When the pupils have the unconscious or semiconscious feeling they have worked so hard that there is just enough time for a story. If too little has been done before this, the pupils experience mainly unconsciously (though this unconscious element is expressed through restlessness): 'we have only just started to learn something and now it is all over'. Then the story has a disturbing effect. Here we have an example of a time rhythm. Every activity needs its own time.

What is the right time for storytelling? What is the 'kairos' or right moment for, for storytelling? Having the storytelling definitely at the end of the main les-

9 Steiner, R. (1992) *The Study of Man*, Stuttgart, GA 293, Lecture 11.

son is no considered point of view, rather it is something set in stone. The story-telling must fit into the course of the day. If the class teacher has a lesson, maybe, at the end of the school day with his own class, this is ideal for the story-telling. It is splendid to close the school day with a story.

Does the story-telling have to happen on the day of the religion lesson? How many tales and stories can people 'stand' in a day, in a week? The handwork teacher reads something as the children are so hard-working, on the same day there is a religion lesson and the stand-in teacher has brought a story from his 'emergency reserves' with him. Have the teachers in the college meeting concerned themselves with the issue of how many stories a certain class hears in the course of a day? In order to catch that we can ask in the college meeting how, for example, the day has looked for class 5b: which lessons did they have, in which lesson was a story told? Besides the rhythm of the lessons there is, therefore, also a rhythm of the course of the day, which must be considered. Conversations at the college meeting are helpful with regard to this.

What does a surfeit of tales and stories mean for the pupil? All intellectual activities mean that the pupil's ego connects with their body. The ego 'settles'. All pictorial aspects in the lesson mean that the ego loosens itself from the body.

That is a rhythm specific to Waldorf education, seeing to it that the processes of the ego, connecting with and loosening itself from the body, are in the right relation to one another. If the former activity is too strong, the ego becomes a prisoner of the body; then, the needs of the body dictate life. If the second activity is too strong, the body loses its bearings. Life is exhausted through unfulfilled wishes of ideals that are never realised.

The way to this rhythm is teaching out of the life rhythms portrayed here.¹⁰

Assessments and Reports

As described at the outset, the three-fold structuring of the main lesson is considered from the perspective of outsiders, by researchers, as a distinguishing feature of the Waldorf method, because it is to be found everywhere and in the literature, as portrayed, it is not examined critically anywhere at all. However, those who view Waldorf education critically from the outside and research it do have (justified) questions about this lesson structure.

We are now touching on a fundamental question.

Let us put it this way: if the Waldorf movement does not examine and take a critical look at its own educational practice, science will do it instead. And it is already doing it. It would certainly be better if this capacity for critical dialogue would be exercised in the school movement beforehand. If this is not the case, we will find accounts such as the following.

The problem of the rhythmical part of the lesson improperly featuring as a part of the report is described thus from the perspective of an outside person, "With the

10 Steiner, R. (1993) *Meditatively acquired Knowledge of Man*, GA 302a, Lecture 4.

daily routine running into the main lesson (the rhythmical part is meant) Max seems to fulfill the requirements in this initial ritual in a way that at least saves him from being interrupted or excluded. The subject matter in this sequence (of the report) is not an area with learning content such as competence in reading, writing, arithmetic etc., but rather behavioural requirements, i. e. supporting the ritual, fitting in with the class and loyalty towards the teacher. As there is no indication in the written recommendations on Waldorf school reports that the rhythmical part is meant to be an item in the class teacher's report and, therefore, this does not represent an aspect worth assessing, in Max's case the assumption must be made that what is being highlighted is the matter of course. What would be taken for granted with the other pupils would be a demanding task for Max. It could be supposed that his expressive and effusive personality is inclined to throw up behavioural problems in such strongly formed, ritualised, collective activities."

This is the description of the researcher who is following the pupil Max's biography. Then he quotes the next sentence from the class 2 pupil's report, "*However, he often needs – to the dismay of the teacher – this first quarter of an hour to quieten down and then be able to join in calmly with the work part.*"

You are not quite sure how to read this last sentence. Does it mean that Max needs the rhythmical part in order to quieten down or that after the rhythmical part he needs a quarter of an hour to come to himself so as to then join in with the work part?¹¹

Of course, not giving the teacher a chance to speak in such a piece of research is also scientifically questionable. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that it follows from this passage how both the outsider's view and the insider's view takes this structure of the main lesson as an essential characteristic of Waldorf education.

The attempt has been made to roughly portray the following: this three-fold structure does not belong to the essential characteristics of Waldorf education. On the contrary, it can be a hindrance to the development of a teacher-pupil relationship which breathes between teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This article was written as an example of the necessity after 90 years of Waldorf teaching to examine the way it has developed; not to damage it, but rather renew it and reinvigorate ourselves.

I have formed the conviction tried and tested through the years that the source, or spring, of renewal lies in the original intentions. If this spring begins to bubble up in us, we will become viable for the future. The possibility will then arise of not having to make a lot of unnecessary diversions. Something new

11 Idel. T-S (2007) *Waldorfschule und Schuelerbiographie*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaften, p 85.

does not need to be taken hold of because it is new, but which has to be dropped later on because it did not fulfill its promise after all. For instance, has the idea of 'moving classrooms' been evaluated? Does it achieve what people hoped from it? Has the idea developed further? Has this approach to teaching, which has now existed for years, been evaluated?

However, time marches on. If we do not undertake this renewal through the questioning of our teaching habits ourselves, others will do so or else they are already doing so. At this juncture, we can point to the publication of Professor Heiner Ullrich, 'Vom pädagogischen Bezug zum harmonischen Passungsverhältnisses'¹², to Gunther Grasshoff's 'Zwischen Familie und Klassenlehrer'¹³ and perhaps to Georg von Breitenstein and Fritz Schuetz's 'Paradoxien in der Reform der Schule'¹⁴.

With all these passages we may say what we please – one thing is and remains an omission, namely, that we did not write them ourselves. Consequently, it is necessary to face up to this research.

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Translated by John Weedon

12 Rupert, M/ Badawia, T / Luckas, H (Eds.) (2005) *Ethos-Sinn-Wissenschaft*, Remscheid, pp. 237-262.

13 Grasshoff, G (2008) *Zwischen Familie und Klassenlehrer*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaften.

14 Hoelbich, D. / Grasshoff, G. (2008) in *Paradoxien in der Reform der Schule*, Breitenstein/Schuetze (Ed.) pp. 217-229. This analysis of the activity of the class teacher is very well worth reading. It is important for us to be observed in this manner. We are offered the opportunity of judging what is the 'archetypal intention and what the practice of teaching makes possible (or not).

Early school entry and subsequent reading achievement: What can we learn from international studies?

The discussion about the ideal age for children to learn reading is centuries old [1]. Outside the Steiner Waldorf movement we find strongly voiced consensus, especially in the English speaking world: early reading instruction means better reading skills in later years. Especially for children with a high reading disturbance risk an early school entry is essential [2].

There are international studies that inform us on the effects of starting school at an early age. These kinds of studies have been conducted for 20 years and are particularly helpful with regard to this question because the age of school entry varies from country to country (between age four and seven, with formal reading instruction usually setting in between five and seven). What can we learn from these studies?

In reality, research in this field is difficult due to the many methodological problems of international comparisons. Firstly, education systems differ which means that children in one country might be offered a better education than their peers in other countries. Secondly, there are cultural differences such as literature playing a more central and important role in one culture or economy than in another. Educational resources also vary and some schools are poorer or richer than others [3]. The distribution of educational funds often means that the quality of the education depends on how well-off parents are. And last but not least there are the fundamental differences between the languages per se which possibly also affect the acquisition of reading skills. Orthographic regularity is one aspect that is relevant in this respect, the correlation between phonology and spelling another one. The English language is difficult on both accounts [4], and if a language is not based on an alphabetic script, such as Chinese, the effects are probably yet different again.

There are two current, regularly performed international reading studies, the IEA¹⁵ study and the PISA¹⁶ study. The IEA study has been carried out every five years since 2001 and follows on from earlier international IEA studies [e.g. 5]. PISA concentrates on older children of around 15 years of age, while the IEA study specialises in children aged 10. The PISA study did not only assess the children's reading skills, but also their performance in science and maths.

Unfortunately it appears that only few systematic analyses (especially quantitative analyses) were conducted in the context of these studies. Still, it is possible to assess the role played by an early school entry with regard to reading achievement if one compares the different countries. What is immediately obvious is

15 International Association for Educational Achievement

16 Programme for International Student Assessment

that the countries with the best reading skill score have no homogeneous school entry age. The Finnish are in the lead, with New Zealand currently holding the second place, although school entry in Finland is two years later than in New Zealand. The 2001 and 2006 IEA studies revealed that countries where children enter school at the age of 6 tend to have the highest reading achievement [6, 7]. It is, nevertheless, difficult to disprove on the basis of these observations that an early school entry has a definite effect on the acquisition of reading skills, as good and clear results are impaired by complications and confounding factors. The problem could be solved by using quantitative research methods which, despite some methodological and conceptual problems, are able to detect trends because confounding factors can be statistically controlled.

The first quantitative analysis with regard to school entry age and reading achievement was conducted in 1992 on IEA data [5]. Elley compared the 10 best and worst countries (out of 32) of that IEA study and found that the best countries had a later school starting age. In order to control for confounding variables, he set up an index of economic and social development factors and compared again. Now he detected an advantage for children who had entered school at an earlier age.

Elley's analysis unfortunately has two major flaws: firstly, he only used data from 20 countries which is not enough for reliable statistical analyses. Secondly, and very problematically, he only examined the connection between school entry age and performance with 9-year-old pupils. The IEA study had included 14-year-old students also, but Elley simply ignored them for this question and therefore only found a (very) minor advantage for the children who had had reading instruction for four instead of three or two years.

A re-analysis of the 2006 PISA data was recently published [8]. It had three major advantages as it included (i) reading skill acquisition data of the 54 countries, (ii) 15 year old students and (iii) a good evaluation of social and economic factors. No positive effects of an early school entry age on the subsequent reading achievement were found. Interestingly, a small link was discovered between the variance in individual countries and the school entry age, which meant that there were students with lower as well as higher reading achievements in countries with early school entry.

So, what do we learn from international studies on reading achievement and reading skill acquisition? As usual, the answer cannot be extracted from international comparisons. But one can say with certainty that these studies do not supply convincing evidence that an early school entry age is advantageous. It needs, above all, longitudinal studies as they can better deal with confounding factors. Such research was recently conducted with Steiner Schools and state schools in New Zealand [9, 10] and we can already reveal that the results correspond to those of the international studies.

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Creating a Healthy Community

The first Waldorf school was a revolutionary undertaking because Rudolf Steiner, supported by Emil Molt and the teaching staff, turned around all the standard customs of teaching by about 180 degrees. He did this so that young people would become capable and healthy during their lifetime.

In this way, not only were children of the working and upper classes taught together, but also boys and girls. The girls learned woodworking, the boys knitting. Reading and writing in the form of intellectual drills were not to be taught too soon. The children's own notes were to replace textbooks. And to top it off, not academic results, but rather the children's health was the highest goal. In contrast to hardening the children, who had to fulfill duties and society's expectations within a set framework of rules, Waldorf education should have a healing effect through the lessons which are based on the needs of the human being.

When looking at the recently published photo of the first Waldorf class at the Umlandshöhe School, published in the German Association of Waldorf Schools' anniversary booklet, it is clear: One sees a physically homogeneous and charming group which doesn't reflect its society's situation, but expresses its society's view: The child was a small adult.

And the teachers in those days? They were to come straight out of life, not out of the usual teacher training programs. They should teach in a lively way, not out of books, but out of their own responsibility, and they should construct their lessons creatively, artistically and based on what they see in the child. In the end, each pupil should be released out of the group's spirit into a life of being responsible for oneself.

80 years later, many self-confident individuals, who haven't yet formed a group, look at us from the photo. Through their body language, several children express the fact that they need rules, boundaries and clearly formulated expectations, not because these represent a corset imposed on them by society, but rather because in many places these strongly represent a demanded, but rare commodity. Thus, it is our pupils' obstinacy which causes us trouble. This obstinacy doesn't yet want to connect itself with rules and duties which are imposed on it from outside. In my opinion, children are only prepared to accept the form demanded of them if the process contains what they themselves have created. In other words, not only a creative teacher determines the ingredients of a lesson, but also 30 creative children.

As Waldorf teachers we don't just take a critical look at the individual children, the methodological-didactic innovations or the changing demands of society, but also the tradition of our own school movement, which we all question at dif-

ferent points in time, namely when we can clearly no longer reach the child's individual core in the usual way.

Here and in the following article, I'd like to illustrate examples of how, for years, in my everyday work as a class teacher, I have applied Rudolf Steiner's ideas for lessons based on where the child is in its development.

Community and Dividing Up the Room

“The healthy social life is found when in the mirror of each human soul the whole community finds its reflection, and when in the community the virtue of each one is living.”

On the first day of school, without any particular instructions, each child took a pillow and within a space surrounded by five desks they formed a circle together. Calmly, the children chose their spots, talked with their friends and nevertheless settled down. A child seldom walked through the open space in the middle of our group because this space was to be filled together.

During the first week of school, Florian told us: “I was at the zoo and it was the hippopotamus's birthday. The keeper shoved a cake into its mouth.”

I already knew who would provide me with a great pedagogical challenge and break the unwritten rules of our developing community time and time again. After enquiring, I knew that his story wasn't the same as what he had experienced.

In the Class six we still ended the “pillow circle” holding hands, standing and speaking Rudolf Steiner's morning verse, usually following a period of concentration on important content or a social topic. Each individual soul is able to first find him or herself in his own strength and then form this community from within. This is before the pupils take on a solid form together, for example, when reciting Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Latin in the block lessons on Roman culture.

During the first week of school the children gathered new experiences with the straight line and the curved line. The desks and chairs stood along the outer walls representing different stations. In kindergarten they were used to different corners having different emphases, but now these corners were filled with concrete tasks. Just as children move in free play in their first seven year cycle, enabling a common game to finally grow among the older ones, the process of learning at stations isolates. It begins with the actions of the individual child.

Marie first balanced with the ropes on the ground, while Paula lovingly drew the rest of the missing forms. Levin could hardly break away from the creative cor-

ner, in which the task was to think of one's own form by using the straight line and the curved line. In the days following, we laid the resulting products in the middle of our "morning circle" again and again, so that the pupils could arrange them according to their own criteria. Michael said: "Mrs. Stolz, when we collect the pictures for a museum, this picture has to be included!" And he pointed to a rather incomplete form. "Because there's only one example of this type!"

This is how children learn to express their feelings verbally and when categorizing things individually, reflecting on what has been created. The soul circle containing our three elements, the will, feeling and thinking, closes harmonically because I connect such a classical Waldorf subject like form drawing to an up-to-date approach such as learning at stations. And more importantly, the drawings made by each individual child are seen and acknowledged by the class community. Through this, the children not only develop self-confidence, resulting from the recognition of their work, but they actively experience a process every day which takes place in this "free space", in the middle of the circle: the healing formation of a community into which each individual contributes his strength.

The Group: A Small Community

As small communities (nuclei), families prepare children to lead a responsible life in society. All too often, children can't assert themselves in large groups. An unhealthy relationship can quickly develop among pupils, for example, through those who withdraw or those who claim too much space within the class community. That is why, from the start, my pupils sit at tables in relatively stable groups of six. Often these groups get tasks to fulfill. These can be mathematical research, artistic tasks or poems to be written together.

"Mrs. Stolz, may we draw a Rialto bridge on the blackboard?" I hesitate. My fifth graders had just finished drawing six posters of the San Marco Basilica for our Venetian carnival. When I turned around, I saw the backs of eight children at the blackboard. When I ended the unit after ten minutes, they stepped back to reveal a successful, communal piece of art.

Community and Working with Parents

Waldorf schools are parent initiatives. This often leads to the fact that, especially in the first school years, parents want to take an intensive part in what's happening in and around the class or they seek close contact with the teacher, often leading to private relationships. Parents want to know that their children are protected at our schools. Time and time again, in their well-meaning way, they try to fill the free space which actually belongs to the children, be it with a strong will to decorate (the season table), a clear wish directed towards the class teacher ("When will you do watercolour painting again?"), or simply through

their presence in the schoolyard. In the first seven year cycle a child needs a life environment which can also be its learning environment. As of the second seven year cycle we offer a learning environment which becomes their life environment through their own learning process. During these years parental care can disturb the community-building process in school in two ways.

The learning child detaches itself from its hereditary stream, and the primary socio-cultural moulding of the environment it lives in is enriched through its learning environment. In order for this to take place, it needs a free, that is, an empty space which it can fill itself and whose contents it can remember. Traditionally, our notebooks are unlined and offer this space page by page. Sensitively, the class teacher sees this process as the basis of his pedagogical intentions. Before the first grade began, I visited all the children in kindergarten. Apart from the usual home visits, this was in order to avoid mixing up these spaces myself. Young children are gladly prepared to build up a community together with the teacher. For me as a teacher, it is important that after parents have cared for their children's life forces, they trust in their ability to learn. Thus, I decided to encourage as few experiences as possible *with* the parents, but rather ensure that the children perform the results of their learning process *for* the parents again and again.

It is often the case that parental groups which have been immersed in our rich school life break apart. For example, factions for and against the class teacher are created. The active parents withdraw in frustration, others feel they've been put under pressure. Another situation which can arise is that after the first harmonic school years, these parents are the ones who fall victim to the breaking up of relations during the early adolescent years. In my opinion, these developmental processes belong to the children. Among the parental, as well as the entire school community, they nevertheless require a supportive counterpoint.

As of Class five I cultivate excursions undertaken with the parents more intensively. In Class six, the last possible point in time for such a class trip, we'll all stay overnight in a youth hostel and the pupils will present their oral reports, as well as a play about Rome. Now the moment has come, namely, in which I need a strong, unspent parental community for the beginning of puberty, a phase which demands so much of teachers and educators that is new and difficult. What is needed is interest, mutual understanding, commitment to the class play and, time and again, parents with professional competence who can build a bridge between us and our surroundings. From now on, they stand for life in a large community, namely the society which the pupils will grow into in the course of their adolescence. Step by step, we teachers already release them into this in the Middle School. From now on, I must be able to build on the parents' cooperation as, together with me, they prepare practical training and other extra-curricular areas for the young people.

I noticed the displeasure in the voice of a mother belonging to a second grader: "Mrs. Stolz, we'd like a class teacher who is less distanced, and whom we can reach out and touch." I thought to myself: "Let this valuable community grow slowly." Then I asked her: "Does your child enjoy going to school?" "Yes, she seems very happy." At the beginning of Class six one father remarked: "Now I understand the process. Compared to parents in some other classes, our parents don't have any problems." And the mother of the former second grade girl reported: When the dentist asked whether she like school, the girl remained silent. At home, her mother asked worriedly why she had been silent. The girl burst out: "One can't admit that school is so much fun!"

Thus, the circle of a healthy community closes; from the individual to the group to the class, together with the teacher, a whole organism is formed, strengthened through a parental community that, as a mirror of the world in which we live, accompanies this process.

After this beginning, I will discuss more of what happens in the lessons in the next three articles.

Lively Learning

Art Results from Ability

The Final Spurt and Success

*Uta Stolz
Translated by Angela Wesser*

Pre-Announcement

Thoughts on the World Kindergarten Conference, April 1 – 5, 2012
Thoughts on the World Teachers Conference, April 9 – 14, 2012
at the Goetheanum in Dornach/Switzerland

Out of collaboration between the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) and the International Forum of Waldorf/Steiner Schools within the Pedagogical Section (Hague Circle), we would like to make kindergartens and schools aware of two conferences that will take place shortly before and shortly after Easter 2012.

The conference before Easter is for the world kindergarten and early childhood movement, and the conference after Easter is for the world school movement. Both conferences will invite participants to take up the same theme, which is described briefly below as a stimulus to begin working with this thematic area.

We are striving to have a similar schedule and approach for both conferences. Further details will be published in the next issue of the *Section Journal*.

Outline of the Theme

For the kindergarten and early childhood realm as well as for the entire period of schooling from class one to the entrance into adulthood, one theme is carried through that must be recognized, considered and transformed into meaningful practice. This has to do with *the incorporation of the “I” into the body. Expressed in other words: what dynamic relationship between the true I (self) and the body is created through education?*

In the first lecture of the *Study of Man* (GA 293) this relationship is spoken of as the task of education itself: *“The task of education, conceived in the spiritual sense, is the harmonizing of the soul spirit with the life body. must come into harmony with one another; they must be attuned to one another, for when a child is first born into the physical world, they do not as yet fit one another. The task of the educator, and of the teacher, is the mutual attunement of these two .”*

The mighty process is described through which the “soul spirit” comes to inhabit, step by step, the bodily sheaths. In the whole early childhood and kindergarten phase, this relates to questions of nourishment, care for and education of the senses, and the dramatic sequence of deeds characterized so simply as standing – walking – speaking – and thinking. These are mighty steps on the path to individualization.

Then, in school, when learning begins through the freed etheric body, thinking, feeling and willing continue to unfold up to the development of the capacity for judgment, which means the self-confident use of one's intellectuality. In the upper classes, this intellectual capacity for judgment develops through aesthetic to idealistic and finally to individual judgments.

At each stage, there is a relationship to balance. How deeply will the "I" penetrate the body – will it perhaps be held by the body as a prisoner? Or how loose is the connection to corporeality? It is actually the task of education as an art to produce this dynamic relationship – not through art but through instruction based on artistic laws.

In short: here we are touching upon the essential aspects of educating and teaching. The horizons of this theme are broad, and the responsibility is great. For it is through the educational and instructional processes in all three seven-year periods that the instrument of the individuality is prepared and tuned (or not). This task is at the same time a universal one, for all human beings in the most diverse cultural realms around the world.

As study preparation we recommend the following:

- *The Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science*
- *The Study of Man* (also published as *The Foundations of Human Experience*), Lecture 1, August 21, 1919 (GA 293)
- *Balance in Teaching* (GA 302a), Lecture IV, September 22, 1920
- *Education for Adolescents* (previously published as *The Supplementary Course*), Lecture V, June 16, 1921 (GA 302)

We hope for inspired preparation!

*Christof Wiechert
Susan Howard*

Agenda

Coming Pedagogical Section Conferences and Events at the Goetheanum, 2010

28. – 30. Mai 2010	Trinitatistagung / Religionslehrertagung
30. Mai – 3. Juni 2010	Ausbildungsseminar für Religionslehrer
24. – 26. September 2010	Allgemeine Menschenkunde, 8. Vortrag
15. – 17. Oktober 2010	Tagung zum Thema Klassenspiel
22. – 24. Oktober 2010	Tagung zur Willensfrage in der Erziehung
31. Oktober – 4. November	Förderlehrertagung
05. – 07. November 2010	Oberstufenkolloquium

2011

Mystery Drama for teachers (is planned for German speaking people)

2012

April, 1 – 5, 2012	World Kindergarten Conference
April, 9 – 14, 2012	World Teachers Conference