

After Care in our Waldorf Schools
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During the past year a questionnaire was sent to Kindergarten teachers in 120 Waldorf Schools and Pre-Schools on the North American continent. There were 37 responses; 30 of these were from Waldorf schools that represented a fairly equal spread from new initiatives to well-established schools; seven pre-schools and home play-groups also responded. The 30 schools comprise one-quarter of our school population and to many researchers this number is a large enough sampling to allow projections to be made to the whole of the school movement in North America. Once one begins to work with such a questionnaire there is the realization, bordering on frustration, that the instrument could have been designed differently. However, it is what it is, and the survey does give us at least a beginning picture of some of the facets of After Care for young children in our Waldorf Schools. I wish to thank all of the teachers who took the time to participate in this study.

It was just 15 years ago during a conversation with a Kindergarten teacher from one of our established schools, that the comment was made, "We don't provide After Care for our children because we feel it is better for them to be home after a full program in the morning." Ah! Those were the days, which, unfortunately, no longer exist. The reality of present day family life necessitates that the children are in some kind of after school program until parents finish their working day. We are faced with a choice: Either the children go elsewhere for afternoon care or we provide it. Increasingly the schools are providing it for the children, for we have experienced that both our children and our schools are strengthened by a program that supports the Waldorf approach to child development.

The results of this survey demonstrate that almost 50% of our Kindergarten children remain at school until at least 3:00 and that half of this number are at school until 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. With these results, we simply must admit that whatever we choose to call it, (one school, for instance feels a stigma attached to the term "after-care/day-care" and thus call their program the "Star Club") our Waldorf schools are, in fact, in the "daycare" business.

My sense is that this program has arisen out of need, yet has had to creep in through the back door of our schools as something that we have had to "put up with", as something which just keeps growing and is not going to go away. We are caught in an awkward situation of offering a program that we do not fully acknowledge or support. Even with the financial challenges within our schools, we strive to pay our teachers, including kindergarten teachers, a livable wage. Yet the people who are carrying the afternoon programs often are not offered a similar standard of recognition either financially or professionally.

There are many common challenges in the After Care programs that seem obvious, almost expected, when one observes some of the figures. At the same time there are also many positive aspects which point toward a real evolution and from many perspectives, an upgrading of the After Care programs.

On the positive side there are signs of real growth in the organizational aspect of After Care. It wasn't too many years ago that the Kindergarten teachers were responsible for offering After Care. This has changed. My belief is that the change arose not only out of sheer exhaustion and Kindergarten teacher burnout, but also out of the fact that schools began to seriously reckon with the pedagogical law in teaching offered by Rudolf Steiner, namely that in the four-fold picture of human development, the child lives in the next higher body of the teacher. This means that in the first 7 years the primary focus is on the development of the physical body, but the child is living in the etheric or life-force body of the teacher. To provide care for young children means that we are carrying them with our life force body and it is

extremely tiring physically to hold this energy for large groups of children for too many hours each day. That is why, I believe, we no longer have many Kindergarten teachers who are carrying responsibility for the After Care program. Although many Kindergarten teachers help with the initial settling of the children for nap, there are now only two teachers out of all of the schools responding (with the exception of home programs) who are responsible for caring for the children in the early afternoon. However, there are still one fifth of the morning Kindergarten assistants who, because of stated salary needs, work with the After Care in the early afternoon. Ninety percent of the care takes place in the Kindergartens (the other 10% have separate rooms for After Care) and in almost all cases, it is the Kindergarten teachers who have oversight of the program.

A surprising and welcome sign of growth is that 50% of the After Care teachers attend a portion of the Kindergarten or all-school faculty meetings or have some regularly scheduled mentoring meeting with the Kindergarten teachers. In these cases arrangements have been made for a substitute to care for the children. As might be expected, the teachers responding who did not have any regular meetings with the After Care teacher, expressed regret that such meetings were not taking place. Some schools have After Care Committees comprised of Kindergarten and Grades teachers and Administrative staff. As we know from experience in our schools and from life itself, communication is one of the prime factors necessary for a harmonious working. In most of the schools where there were no scheduled meetings, there were also problems and disgruntled feelings expressed about After Care. In all, about one-half of the teachers felt there were consistent boundaries and a satisfactory transition between the Kindergarten and After Care programs.

Also in the organizational realm, all but two of the schools handle finances directly through the office. The programs which do not go through the office have problems with collection of fees. The average cost for After Care is \$2.60 per hour. Sixty percent of the schools have drop-ins, (children coming on an "as needed" basis), but many of the schools now have a monthly or a yearly contract. Among those who do not have a drop-in policy there was a strong feeling that the need for consistency and continuity of the program was greatly enhanced. Also, 70% of the schools now provide some kind of snack rather than having children bring it from home. (This applies particularly to those programs which go beyond 3:00.) Some listed a weekly snack rhythm similar to the rhythm of food offered in the Kindergarten morning.

The average rest time for the children is 45 minutes. Except in one case, all of the schools now have sleeping mats of some kind for the children to rest on, including sheepskins, pillows, blankets or flannel sheets. One teacher even mentioned that she used hot water bottles on cold days. Many teachers spoke very positively about creating little "sleep-houses" on "sleep-nests" with play-stands, tables, chairs and cloths, stating that with this practice, the children are less distracted by each other and rest much better. A little more than two-thirds of the programs have the children rest immediately after they eat their lunch. This practice supports the recommendation which Dr. Christa van Tellingen made in a conference to Kindergarten teachers, in which she said that if the children engage in active physical play after eating, the blood goes to the muscles rather than to the digestive/metabolic organs.

Many teachers have questioned the practice of telling fairy tales in the After Care program. Because children do hear a fairy tale in the morning, there is concern that telling another one in the afternoon may contribute to, in the words of one teacher, "a kind of soul indigestion." Seventy-five percent of the programs have chosen not to tell fairy tales. One teacher pointed out that since she had stopped telling fairy tales the children were resting much better. Thus, the question arises, "What kind of stories do we tell?" High on the list were nursery rhymes, stories by Elsa Beskow and Beatrix Potter, *Old Mother West Wind*, nature stories and made-up stories. I feel this is an area for further research and that it would be greatly appreciated if there were a larger list of stories from which the After Care teachers could draw.

Another surprising outcome of this survey is that almost 40% of the After Care teachers have completed either a Waldorf teacher training or the Kindergarten Associate Program. This is wonderful news in light of the evolution of After Care in our schools! The majority of our schools, however, do not have the luxury of a trained teacher and this fact leads to another *extremely* challenging and yet vital question faced by the programs, which is salary and benefits for the After Care teacher. This area provides the greatest discrepancy in the survey. The range of pay varies from \$6.00 per hour to \$20.00 per hour; 20% receive some portion of benefits offered to the other teachers in the school.

The schools that state that they are taking the position of After Care as a priority are offering such salaries as 2/3 or 3/4 of the base pay with the same proportion of benefits and full tuition remission. One of the main complaints from the schools on the lower end of the salary scale is the frustration with a high turnover of teachers. This is comparable to the prevailing situation in American Day Care centers where most workers receive only minimum wage salaries. As a result day care has an enormously high turn-over of staff. The complaint or frustration coming from the After Care teachers is the lack of recognition both financially and professionally for the work they are doing for the children and the schools.

One of our After Care teachers spoke to the above problem with the following words: "I feel that there is an unspoken value given to the morning Kindergarten for the children's development, which is not given to the afternoon teacher; and that I am faced with some of the same attitudes in our Waldorf school that live in the mainstream, as to which aspects of a young child's day and development are considered more valuable." My personal feeling is that this used to be the feeling that many Kindergarten teachers held, but no longer do, for our role in the schools and in the lives of the children do now carry the respect from our colleagues that at one time was often missing. My great hope and optimism (and the reason for having the interest in undertaking such a survey in the first place) is that the After Care program in all of our schools will one day enjoy the same consciousness, respect and priority which the Kindergarten, Grades and High Schools now hold in our Waldorf movement. After all, from the time the children get out of the car at 8:30 a.m. and back in at 6:00 p.m., the whole day has been one experience.

Janet adds this note: I realize that many of you were hoping for an article about how to run an After Care program. The above picture, however, seemed important to bring forth at this time. One description of an After-Care program follows, but we would like to encourage others of you to send articles to the Kindergarten Newsletter describing your program. This would be a help to other teachers. Also, there are a number of summer courses that would be suitable for After Care teachers who do not yet have a Waldorf training.