

An Open Letter to Colleagues
Nancy Foster
Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten/Nursery
Silver Spring, MD

In the past quarter-century of working with parents, I seem to have noticed a significant change in the nature of their concerns about Waldorf early childhood education.

Years ago, one of the most frequently-expressed concerns of parents was this: “Everything in the Waldorf kindergarten is so beautiful, peaceful, and gentle, and the children have so much time to play. Won't this make it difficult for them to adjust to the 'real world' out there? How will they ever learn to cope with the hard knocks and not-so-pleasant tasks that they will encounter?” Our response was that these experiences in the early years strengthen and nourish the children's forces to meet whatever comes to them on their path through life (or words to that effect).

Now, however, the questions seem different: “What do you do about aggressive children? I don't want my child to be hit, or excluded from play...” “Isn't it dangerous to do ironing in the classroom?” “My child is afraid of the 'big kids' on the playground.” “In the public school they don't tolerate aggression or teasing. The children are separated or the aggressor is sent to 'time out.’” “My four year old (in a mixed-age group) says she doesn't play with anyone. Wouldn't it be better to keep the age groups separate?”

What I sense in this variety of concerns is - to generalize - a change from concern with helping children cope with inevitable hardships, to a wish to shelter children from any such challenges. (This wish can also possibly be seen in the difficulty many parents experience in setting limits for their children.) It doesn't seem to me that there has been much change in the school environment, but rather that the change is in the parents and may be, at least in part, a reflection of the amount of fear in our society today.

Without going any further here, I wanted to ask if others have noticed a similar trend. Or is this apparent change something particular to our school? I would greatly appreciate learning of other's perceptions and experiences. Replies could be made to the Newsletter if people think this topic would be of interest to others. Otherwise, you could call or write to Nancy at Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten and Nursery, 9504 Brunett Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20901; (301) 565-2282.