

is a lovely social time. We revel in our camaraderie and friendship, in the community of children and adults sharing this festival together.

After the meal we go back outdoors. A fire is lit with great ceremony as we all gather around, and each child and adult offers a stick of wood to burn in the fire. From our own little flickering lantern light to the blazing, shared light of the bonfire, we experience the full circle from the solitary individual to the fullness of community.

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RESEARCH

Salutogenesis

Rainer Patzlaff & Wolfgang Sassmannshausen

The following is taken from the new publication, Developmental Signatures: Core Values and Practices in Waldorf Education for Children Ages 3 – 9. Jointly published by WECAN, AWSNA and the Research Institute for Waldorf Education, this volume is a translation of the first two parts of a three-part German study on the education of the young child. As Susan Howard says in her Foreword, “As we strive to adapt in insightful and meaning-filled ways to meet the changing cultural climate in which our Waldorf schools and kindergartens find themselves, and to articulate both to ourselves and to others what it is that we stand for, this study by our colleagues in Europe can serve as a helpful stimulus and support.”

Salutogenesis as a Foundation for the Educational Process

The interplay between the “I” and the threefold organization is not a routine occurrence in either children or adults. It is an extremely sensitive process prone to disruptions, requiring continual and renewed efforts to bring the whole organization into healthy balance. It is part of human freedom that these efforts can fail or be temporarily impaired. Herein lies the significant cause of illness.

Therefore, the goal of any true “art of education” must be to impart to the child the ability to meet the

challenges of this process and master the obstacles. When this is successful, we speak of “health.” By this we do not mean an absence of illness, but a possibility for the individual “I” to permeate the threefold organization in such a way that the full potential of the physical, mental and soul aspects can develop. Through this one gains the freedom to act according to one’s own “disposition and purpose.”

Health does not come about just by nature, so to speak. It requires certain conditions that need to be created and supported by education. In this, Waldorf education is in complete agreement with modern research. Investigations into salutogenesis (well-being and health) have resulted in the knowledge that health depends only in small measure upon biological factors and to an amazingly high degree upon certain mental/spiritual conditions that a person can or can learn to produce for him- or herself (Antonovsky 1993, 1997, Schueffel 1998, Grossarth-Maticek 1999). Specifically, this research into salutogenesis has identified three areas in which special conditions must be met for comprehensive good health.

The *physical-bodily organization* of the human being must gain the ability to deal with foreign substances coming from the outside so that they are either successfully transformed into bodily substances by the metabolic organs (as happens with food) or are successfully rejected by the immune system (as happens with a splinter or germs). This ability, as can be observed in infants and young children, can in no way be taken for granted. It has to be developed over time. Salutogenesis research has looked especially at the aspect of conflict and overcoming resistance, whereby the physical-bodily organization gains strength and the ability to assert its own form.

The *soul organization* is dependent on a strong experience of coherence, a secure feeling of connection with the world. This surely can come about only if the child has appropriate experiences that lead him or her to the absolute certainty that the world is a) principally transparent (understandable), b) manageable and pliant, and c) meaningful, so that also one’s own efforts have meaning, and it is rewarding to try and meet the challenges of life.

The *spiritual organization* is strengthened to

master problems through experiences of coherence. It is an unconditional requirement for developing courage and security in life. In wellness research this is usually referred to as “resilience” (Opp 1999). This means the individual can meet the hardships and adversities of life because he or she views them not as unchangeable facts, but as challenges that must be met. Resilience is rooted in the knowledge that one’s own forces will grow in strength through conflict and that challenges provide opportunities for self-development.

Self-assertion of the physical body, coherence, and resilience together form the foundation that makes it possible for the individual to put into action his or her own very personal impulses and plans in life, thereby becoming productive and creative. This autonomy does not come about through intellectual learning processes but from active interaction with the world through direct experiences of all kinds, from achieving mastery of the physical body, from free, imaginative play, and from meeting life’s challenges head-on. In short, self-education creates the foundation for health. Education that strives to provide the highest possible freedom for the individual to unfold his own strengths and abilities will therefore work in accord with the knowledge of salutogenesis down to every detail.

Developing a Healthy Physical Organization

Various measures can be taken to strengthen the physical organization. The responsibility for these measures lies mainly with parents, but should also be acknowledged in kindergarten and elementary school. These include body hygiene, nutrition and food, exercise and a healthy environment without pollutants and high noise emissions. There are other factors important to the healthy growth of children, one of the most important being, for example, the aesthetics of the environment, which are perceived entirely unconsciously by the child, but very strongly. The architectural design of the classrooms, colors and pictures on the walls, the materials used, the way they feel and smell, the acoustics, and so forth, all affect the child clear down into his finer metabolic processes. The effects can be either strengthening or weakening (Rittelmeyer 1994, 2002).

The structure of time also has an effect on the

child. Having a healthy rhythm to the days, weeks, months and years has an extraordinarily strong positive effect on a child’s mental constitution and physical organization. The younger the child, the stronger the effect. (There is more on this theme later on.)

Developing a Sense of Coherence through Direct Experience

First and foremost, the young child’s task is to form and permeate his physical organization. The child dedicates himself, though unconsciously, to this task out of his own impulse with the greatest intensity and from the first moments of life. Nevertheless, the child would not accomplish this goal without caring adults because standing, walking, and speaking are not genetically programmed. Rather these abilities are gained through interactivity, through example and attention provided by adults. Accompanied and encouraged by caring adults, the child builds up his sensory faculties through practice, gradually gains mastery over his muscles used for movement, and thereby gains freedom to move around and get to know his environment. All of these efforts result in the building of differentiated neural networks in the brain, and these in turn form the basis for what later appears as imagination and cognitive thinking (Eliot 2001).

Of significance for self-development is having a lot of direct experiences when interacting with the world, that is, experiences gained with and through one’s own body. The child must first be able to stand before he can understand the world. He must first grasp things physically before he can grasp them mentally. A child must smell things, taste, touch and handle them before he can experience the world as a manageable and transparent place. A feeling of coherence does not come about through intellectual comprehension but through hands-on activities. These experiences in turn affect the structure of the brain and the development of motor and sensory skills, all contributing to the child’s being able to make an increasingly stronger connection to his physical organization and his environment.

The lower senses (touch, movement, balance, well-being) play a special role which is not directed to the world outside, but to the inside, to one’s own body. They signal one’s position and movement in space (senses of movement and balance), coming

into contact with things and conditions (sense of touch), and perception of the internal organs as a whole (inner sense of well-being). Through movement in space, contacts through the skin, and the effect of gravity, the child experiences 1) his own body and 2) the spatial-material outside world in which the body exists. Here experience of the self and the world flow together.

Engendering a sense of coherence requires as many such dual experiences of self and the world as possible through the lower senses. And that is just what many children today are missing. Trust in one's own strength and the manageability of the world will not come about by talking to or cajoling the children. It happens by way of concrete, physical experiences through the senses. Cultivating the lower senses and movement are among the most urgent requirements in preschool, kindergarten and elementary education today. Complete development of sensory-motor skills is required to create the space for healthy soul and spiritual development. In this early phase, electronic media do nothing to promote development. They merely give the child the illusion of encountering the world and at the same time prevent any real encounters (Patzlaff 2004, Spitzer 2005).

Development of Resilience

What the child most urgently needs is a network into the immediate world, a social network of caring adults who set examples by their own behavior of what it means to stand in the world in such a way that one is not overwhelmed by the challenges of life. Through them the child learns to put events in perspective, master situations, be accepting and able to find meaning in events. Such experiences give the child a certainty that even those events that at first appear problematic can be put to rights. A positive attitude and joy in life are given their foundation, and these in turn give rise to the strength to meet today's challenges and grow from them.

A sense of coherence that is built upon resilience in this way promotes the motivation and ability for lifelong learning and development. A person who is accustomed to working through hindrances and opposition with courage, composure, a positive attitude and interest has the potential to realize his or her aims in life which he brought into this life from the world before birth. The basis for personal

autonomy is not intellectual learning and conscious reflection but rather the feeling and willing forces that have been strengthened by coherence and resilience. Early childhood is the crucial phase for fostering these qualities. The unconscious immersion into a supportive and nurturing social and physical environment gives rise to the development of the personality and the emergence in freedom of the unique individual.

Dr. Rainer Patzlaff and Dr. Wolfgang Sassmannshausen are the principal authors of the first part of the study commissioned by the German Association of Waldorf Schools and the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens.

For full citations of the works referred to in the text, please see the bibliography of Developmental Signatures.

The Sistine Madonna Thoughts and Experiences

Stephen Spitalny

In this short article, I describe my personal experiences and ideas in relation to kindergarten work and the *Sistine Madonna*, painted by Raphael Sanzio in 1513/14. For context, know that I had the *Sistine Madonna* hanging on the wall in my kindergartens for many years and now I do not.

My first experience of the *Sistine Madonna* in a Waldorf kindergarten was when I arrived for an interview with my stepson's soon-to-be kindergarten teacher. I was still some years away from taking up kindergarten teaching. The *Sistine Madonna* hung on the wall above her as she asked many thought-provoking questions about his life. I was impressed by her interest and wisdom, and yet was put off by the image on the wall. It smacked of Christianity to me, and I was into spiritual pursuit, but not religion. I was willing to take a chance though, and he was enrolled.

It was still six years before I started a home kindergarten. As preparation, I went to various workshops and at one a participant asked one of the presenters why the *Sistine Madonna* was hanging on her kindergarten wall. The answer: "Because it's in all the Waldorf kindergartens."