

Extended Day in the Schools

Sharing Challenges, Raising Questions

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Twenty-four teachers from ten schools and Sunbridge College gathered at the Kimberton Waldorf School for a day-long meeting on April 14, 2007. Schools represented were: Sheltering Arms Family Center, Acorn Hill, Baltimore Waldorf, Green Meadow Waldorf, Kimberton Waldorf, Susquehanna Waldorf, Richmond Waldorf, Shining Mountain Waldorf, Rudolf Steiner School/NYC, Garden City Waldorf, and Sunbridge College. Many of the teachers were working in the extended-day programs in the schools.

After introductions, participants divided into four topic groups: *Sleep and rest time*, *Programs in schools*, *Teacher and care provider*, and *Facets of care*. Following lunch and a meeting of the full-member schools, a final large group conversation offered reports from the topic groups. Presenters were teachers in the schools and programs: Lisa Gromicko, Lisa Miccio, Monika Gallardo, and Nancy Brown.

The main issues identified are the design of the programs, who are the care providers, and the financial issues of total cost of care.

The picture arose within the group plenum that many schools are designing programs using a fragmented concept, with different components morning and afternoon that are unrelated to each other. This fragmented approach has generated many issues that perpetuate social and program challenges between the lead teachers in the mornings and the care providers. It is evident there are relationship issues of collegueship, mutual respect, and acknowledgement. Some programs are designed by lead teachers but carried out by others, with restrictions on the nature of parent interactions with the care provider. There is a call to build the imagination for the whole day of the child, with some children only attending in the morning.

There was interest expressed in a training program focused on the young child's extended-day needs. Many schools rely on individuals who are untrained in Waldorf education or child development or care, and yet bring good intuitions and demonstrate interest in learning more in order

to serve the child in the whole of her day. Among the meeting group there is an interest in continuing this topic and including study of Steiner's indications for the young child in light of these extended-day programs.

Lisa Gromicko of Shining Mountain Waldorf School gave a topic presentation on sleep, drawing from Steiner and other research that offers practical indications for program design. Nancy Brown (Sheltering Arms) presented a wonderful history of childcare in America, putting these programs and attitudes into a context that also offered indications for program design. These kinds of research presentations, and *Gateways* articles such as Susan Howard's "The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education," are recognized as giving substantial guidance for schools as they form programs that will serve their communities. Indications for how to serve the young child will lead to how best prepare the adult for this work.

The finance design of the program is a big issue that concerns who the care providers are and how the program is formed. Most care providers are paid hourly and are part-time. Many schools create family groups including children older than seven out of financial need, rather than out of thought-filled intention. There is often an evident lack of commitment by the school for this program in the way finances are allocated, lack of support for staff, and the lack of a general attitude of regard.

In another vein are schools actively taking up the question and committing to all-day rhythms, with lead teachers taking on innovative ways to either extend their time with the children or create a rhythm that cooperates and smoothly transitions the children from morning to afternoon care. In the Mid-Atlantic region, Mountain Laurel School and Green Meadow Waldorf School are two examples. There are also some schools that have full-time, dedicated staff to direct and provide care that grounds the program and offers much-needed continuity. The author hopes these and other schools will send reports to *Gateways* of their successes and challenges as they try to work with a

healthy day for the child.

The schools with teachers present represent many Waldorf schools in acknowledging the need families have for care of their children after 12:00 or 3:00. There is still some wrestling in faculty groups around the appropriateness of providing care in the schools and encouraging families to keep children at home in the afternoons. For many schools it is an existential question, with enrollment declining when only a morning is offered. Other questions schools are asking are whether a full-day care program belongs in the schools; should these be free-standing programs as the requests for taking younger and younger children arise; how can a faculty and board hold and carry the health of an N-12 school

and build at the foundation for more care for the youngest children; and how can a program build health rather than contribute to exhaustion in the children?

For each school, the questions and concerns raised are somewhat individual to each circumstance. Yet, they all point to the future of Waldorf education, its continued relevance in a complex culture, and how to see with open eyes what the children are asking of us in this new century.

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