

What Wants to Emerge?

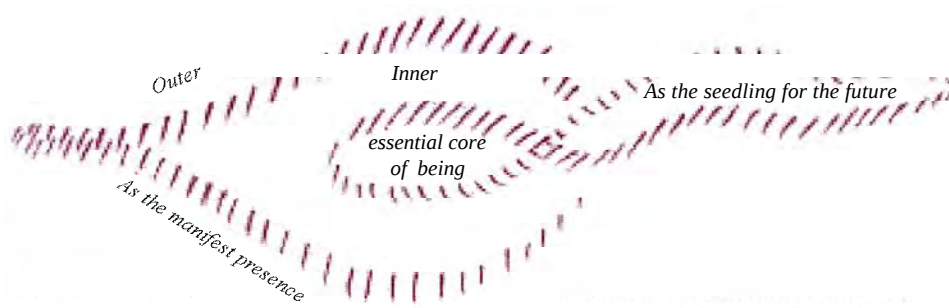
by

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Translated by Karen DiGiacomo

Every once in a while a young person speaks up with a special interest or a hard-won, individual contribution that has emerged from his or her inner core, transcending the outer circumstances and routines of the class. This is a moving moment in the educational everyday life of a teacher. Such a ‘pedagogic resonance’ between outer stimuli and inner engagement often immediately enlivens the subject matter and intensifies the interactive dialogue. Also, when a child or adolescent is going through times of developmental crisis, it is often very important that the attending parents and teachers firmly focus their consciousness on the image of that student’s inner, human personality core, in spite of all outer difficulties. If such an image is supported, all those involved can develop alternative perspectives in their search for a path that leads forward.

Rudolf Steiner describes the discrepancy between the outer appearance and the innermost core of a young person as follows: “No longer does the inner person fully express itself in the outer, and we can observe that first in a child. The child today often is something quite different from what it portrays to the outer world. We can even have extreme cases. To the world, children can look like the most impertinent urchins, and there is such a good core hidden in them that later they become most valuable human beings.”¹ These thoughts evoke the connection between the polarities Inside/Outside with the time coordinates Present/Future:



This connectedness of the poles brings up the question: Is it possible for me as an educator and teacher to become more and more aware of the inner essence of a child? This would allow me to tailor future instruction closer to the child's needs. Issues of karma and fate come up immediately: What does the young being bring into the manifest presence of his life, for example, in terms of physical constitution, tendencies or talents. Where does the direction, the innermost purpose of this individuality's development, really point? What wants to become, to emerge?

A first dawning of awareness in class

It began with a main lesson in the second grade: As usual the 'Friday children' lined up in front of the blackboard to assume a geometric formation for the recitations. Between recitations they moved on this pattern, the one in the middle reciting. Now it is the turn of the student Daniel.

All of a sudden I notice a different quality of silence: Daniel stands there in complete stillness and fixes his eyes on a point on the floor. He waits patiently until the class is ready to give him their attention, and the resulting pause is filled with reverent silence. Now Daniel starts to speak with finely phrased words. While I listen in amazement, I become aware how this student's personality has succeeded in spellbinding his classmates nearly without effort and at first even without words! At the same time it is as if a veil were lifted from my eyes and I am struck by the realization that I was just allowed to gain a deep insight into the essence of this young being: Between Daniel and the class some inner-soul dynamic is forming which is clearly and distinctly rising up above the normal educational routine.

In this moment of astonished awareness, I experience a simultaneity of different levels, which is difficult to describe: along with the class I am deeply moved and so awestruck that all side-impressions are tuned out. At the same time I try in vain to understand it all, a subterranean rumbling of thought, I lose the usual inner grip in a sort of 'landslide.' At the same time I am certain of never before having fully, comprehensively, recognized this student and that something in me should and will change. Afterwards we resume the class activities, but in the background the experience continues to sting me.

Aftereffects: The 'matrix' of the entire picture changes

As I later reviewed the class, the awareness of that moment immediately returned. I pictured that student again, and something came into motion: other, earlier experiences surfaced and wove into the impressions of the morning: There was the hike we did to the 'dwarf caves.' When the class was uncertain and in danger of splitting into separate groups during the excursion, David had stepped in and had thoughtfully and as a matter of course assumed responsibility for the few who had fallen behind. There was also the play celebrating the start of school for the next first grade. The participating students liked David playing the role of the guardian king of

the realm. There were his questions, for example, concerning the life forces of the sun. There were moments of discouragement and of despair when something seemed unjust to him or out of balance, and the classmates had responded to him with compassion and caring.

These memories and others surfaced during my review and wove together with today's experiences into a new, still unfinished tapestry: a student personality entered our experience, greatly impacting his classmates in a very individual way. With deep appreciation and respect, the community responded to this force of a thoughtful, wide-ranging perspective of its social being, even though they had come together as a class only a year ago when they started school.

In the class session following it became apparent that the other students, too, had grasped the import of that moment of stillness before David's recitation. But when someone else purposely remained silent and waited, 'fixing' his gaze outwardly on the floor, the class immediately responded, "What are you waiting for? Get going!"

Interest and awareness

I recognized that no one can quickly acquire this individual ability of spellbinding the entire group and touching them so deeply; obviously such a talent has been brought along into this life as the soul's gift in the innermost core of the young person. I noticed that I had a new interest in David and his classmates. Still moved by gratitude for this experience, I noticed a renewed attitude in me of expectation and joyful anticipation before the class session. Knowing that such an intense experience would probably not be repeated I became eager for exploration and felt as if I were discovering a new, still unknown, country. My attention to the dialogue within the class changed. While listening, I became less focused on the content and the thoughts but more attentive to observing the inner attitude, the inner impulse from which the students spoke, to hearing the inner resonance that the dialogue evoked in the other students.

Since that first discovery started in the space between two recitations, I started to focus on the short spaces between other activities: How do the students get ready to begin writing or drawing? How do they shape the transitions and pauses between activities? On what is their inner process focussing? How does each individual deal with unexpected situations? By and by these 'small' things surfaced more distinctly in the daily reviews during the afternoon: facial expression, tone of voice, choice of language, the way they move. When I succeeded to bring my attention to these 'small things,' a new closeness emerged, full of dignity and fondness for the young beings. This in turn had an impact on my choice of learning topics and on how I prepared for recitations and scenes. This awareness actually shaped the way the morning classes went.

Tendency to focus on the extraordinary as an obstacle

Just like a picture in memory fades over time, so also this first quest for a direct continuation of that experience quieted down after a while. Fundamental questions now came to the foreground: Did I correctly interpret and integrate the encounter with that inborn talent? Were there other realizations and conclusions to be drawn from this experience? Could a conversation with a trusted person perhaps yield more insights? In a later conversation of this sort I once gave in to a speculation who this personality, which so greatly impacted the class, may have been in a previous incarnation; this tentative curiosity immediately resulted in a distinctive alienation from the essence of the process: the daily encounters became more distanced, the ‘correspondence’ between the experiences in class and the inner review during the next lesson planning abated and changed. It appeared as if this tendency towards the mysterious-sensational in form of ‘wanting to know just the past’ showed characteristics of something dying, decaying. As a result of this experience, I tried to be even more mindful of speaking about these matters with even greater respect for the dignity of the personality and adhering strictly to the experience itself. There is a surge of energy and dynamic force in an approach that is based on the interested, dignified human encounter and aims at further development.

As a teacher I am challenged into an inner re-orientation when I recognize that encounters and processes occur among the students that are often only recognized after they have started or already happened. When I want to get an understanding of the Essential, I must be first the listener, the learner. That connects me more deeply to the stream of development and I realize from a new perspective that I have my own part to play in this development: The pedagogic challenges, which I encounter, obviously have something to do with me. In my experience, the path to this re-orientation was not a linear one, but consisted of shuttling between insecurity, powerlessness and new heartening. I was deeply moved when I then realized that the search for the individual essence of each student’s personality really requires a completely different approach each time. In one case it was the way a student painted, another time it was revealed in the individual-poignant writing style of an essay; in a third case the clue was the unshakable honesty of a student in each and every thought, essay or conversation. My inner inquisitiveness and awareness and my openness to being deeply touched determine whether I – to stay with the image – am allowed to join the students in the ‘boat’ of their development, whether I will find a place in there to steer the boat towards the future or whether I will only observe the journey from the shore.

Endnote:

1. Rudolf Steiner: *The Spiritual Underpinnings of the Outer World*, GA 177, Dornach: 1999, lecture given on October 8, 1917, page 107.

About the author:

Claus-Peter Röh, born in 1955, has worked since 1983 as a class teacher also teaching religion and music, at the Free Waldorf School in Flensburg. He is married and has two children.