

June 2002, Volume 7, #2: Educating the Will—Part II Developing Feeling Will in Contrast to Sense/Nerve Will

In the first part of this article, which appeared in the January 2002 issue of the *Research Bulletin*, we established the perspective that every outer and inner challenge is an opportunity to develop spirit will, which in turn, develops our true individuality. The development of authentic individuality is the pole star that can guide all aspects of culture, especially education. We may accept as given that education strives to develop children's bodily and soul potentials. In mastering their life/bodily and soul constitution children also can develop their spirit will. Spirit will is the charioteer; life will and soul will are the horses which the charioteer holds in rein.

We create opportunities for our children to master not only their thinking, but also their feeling and willing. Where their thinking, feeling or willing is underdeveloped or weak, we help them strengthen these capacities. We can also guide our children to tame tendencies that are too strong. Educational goals must include the mastering of the too-strong as much as the too-weak aspects of children's bodily and soul nature for it is in this way that they become strong and free individuals.

Let us now consider more concretely how spirit will is developed through the content and methods of educational activities. We saw in Part I that we develop our spirit will by transforming the inherently unfree dimensions of thinking and willing into ever more free activity. We saw that this is achieved through the complementary efforts of bringing will into thinking and thinking into will. These inner activities were introduced through two simple exercises that proved not so easy to accomplish. Simple or difficult, such thinking and will exercises are not usually included in the curriculum of a school. Or are they?

Waldorf schools, like all schools, include the three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Why do we teach our children to read and spell, to count and measure, add and subtract? Beyond preparing them to function in today's world, there is a deeper level of significance. In learning to master cognitive capacities such as reading, writing, and arithmetic we exercise will in thinking and thereby become more free in thinking. All cognitive activities develop willed thinking that is free thinking.

All healthy children think from waking to falling asleep as a natural God-given capacity. As such it requires no adult intervention. They will certainly learn to speak, even to read and write, simply through imitating the adults around them, assuming the adults do these things. A child's natural capacity to think in a stream-of-consciousness manner can be ordered and extended into disciplined or willed thinking through the most limited and informal exposure. The merits of formal education lie in the fact that the scope of disciplines is broader than would likely come from a child's natural environment. In that sense, the implicit intention of all formal education is to educate, if not the whole human being, at least a broader spectrum than would likely to be educated through informal circumstances.

Whatever our educational perspective, no one questions the importance of developing cognitive skills. There is less clarity and unanimity, however, when it comes to assessing the value of the arts and crafts. If pragmatic value were our sole criterion, then it must be admitted that knitting and woodcarving are no longer skills essential to the demands of adult life. If, however, we look deeper to the inner capacities developed through art and craft activity, we will see the vital role they play in developing our full humanity. In these activities we exercise our limbs; in that sense we are active in our life will. However, our limbs would fail about as mere scribbling or wild running and crashing about if the movements of our hands and feet are not ordered and directed through the intentionality of thinking. The arts and crafts allow us to learn to master our will through the power of thinking to become more free in willing. *All art and craft activities develop thinking will that is free willing.*

Developing Thinking Will

We will now look at specific activities in relation to developing the will, but more specifically, to developing thinking will. In this article I will not go into the development of willed thinking as exercised through cognitive activities. Although there is much to clarify and elaborate about how cognitive activities develop willed thinking, I leave this task for others more qualified than I. The development of the will, or thinking will, through the arts and crafts is the area of my experience. Furthermore, I submit, it is a realm that is less understood and cultivated in education today, including Waldorf education.

Lined vs. Unlined Paper

We will begin with a seemingly minor issue: whether to give our children lined or unlined paper on which to write. In most schools today it is common practice to give children lined paper without even considering the alternative of unlined paper. In Waldorf schools our custom is to give children unlined paper in the first grades, but why? As adults we mostly use lined paper, so why not give it to the children? Certainly their writing will be more uniform and legible if they have lined paper. If the results are what matter, there is every reason to give lined paper. However, in giving children lined paper a developmental opportunity is missed. In writing without lines, we must visualize and feel the straightness as we write; we must feel and create the parallel lines. In itself the capacity to write straight and parallel lines may not be so important. It becomes important if we are looking for every opportunity to exercise will permeated by thinking. To clarify this point we might ask ourselves: Why do we ask children to write their letters at all? Why not let them use stencils, typewriters or word processors for writing already in first grade?

Beyond the likelihood that a mechanical writing device may not always be available, there is another good reason for children to learn to form their own letters. In punching keys (as I am at this moment) I am exercising will directed by thinking, but it is mechanical will. My will conforms to the mechanical demands of the machine. My will and the will of all other users of such a machine conform to the same activity (I am not referring to the thinking activity that is the content of what I write but to the thinking

demanding by the form of communication I am using). By contrast, when each of us writes, even with the same pencil or pen, our handwriting is more individualized. Writing on unlined paper is only an extension of forming our own letters. To abandon the use of lined paper is a small step away from abandoning handwriting itself. Handwriting on unlined paper becomes less relevant if education is focused primarily on job-readiness issues. Handwriting on unlined paper takes on new significance, however, when seen as an important opportunity to develop individuality through I-directed-thinking in will.

Developing Feeling Will

The use of unlined paper for writing introduces another dimension vital to human development. I direct the reader's attention to the above sentence where we read: "we must visualize and feel the straightness as we write, we must feel and create the parallel lines." The use of the word feel must not be glossed over but must be understood more fully. Thus far we have only discussed thinking in willing and willing in thinking. Now we must consider the development of feeling in its own right and also in regard to the development of the will. We have seen that an activity such as writing exercises thinking will. Now we shall consider the development of "feeling will." Instead of discussing feeling will in a theoretical manner, I will try to characterize and demonstrate its development through the practical activity of carving a wooden spoon.

Two Ways to Carve a Spoon

There are different ways to carve a spoon. It is obvious to everyone that once we take away wood we cannot put it back. Because of this unsettling fact, most people assume that the shape of a spoon must first be drawn onto the wood and having done that, we can cut out the shape with a saw. Only then might we use gouges, rasps, and sand paper to finish the spoon.

If we are making wooden spoons for our livelihood, we have every reason to employ a mechanical process. If our purpose is educational, a more mechanical approach is one of our options but there are others we might consider. Our criterion for choosing one method over another should be based on what capacities we decide to develop in the students. To draw and cut out the form of a spoon exercises head and hand coordination. It engages the thinking will or what I shall now refer to as "sense/nerve will." If, however, our intent is to develop head, heart, and hand, or, thinking, feeling, and willing, then we need to consider methods that allow thinking and especially feeling to guide the will activity. I use the term "feeling will" because of the particular significance of exercising feeling in willing, but it should be understood that it includes a thinking element.

Ultimately, our educational task is to develop the "whole" human being, the "whole child," which means the healthy development of body, soul, and spirit. Within the soul itself we seek to develop and harmoniously integrate thinking, feeling, and willing. In the context of our discussion about the education of the will we have differentiated three forms of will: body or life will, soul will, and spirit will. Now it is necessary for us to make a further distinction within soul will that represents two different ways thinking and feeling can interact with the will. "Sense/nerve will" refers to willing that is dictated by analytical and abstract thinking, and thus tends to have a mechanistic character. The

“feeling will,” by contrast, refers to willing that is guided by feeling which perceives the actual and possible qualities, say of a spoon, at every step in the creative process. Thinking is active in feeling will but more as a conscious mediator of what is felt and willed rather than as a dictator of the will.

As educators we must be clear regarding when it seems appropriate or necessary to engage the feeling will, and when to engage the sense/nerve will. The way we guide an activity such as carving a spoon cannot be merely a matter of teacher preference but must be founded on developmental criterion: Do these children need to develop their sense/nerve will or their feeling will?

How might we carve a spoon if our intent is to develop the feeling will? We can cut a piece of wood to have a certain thickness, width, and length. The proportion we give to the wood becomes part of the spoon’s ultimate form. In a subtle but significant way it contributes to the feel of the spoon; for example, whether it will feel more stout or more delicate. We can decide the quality of proportion without having the final form of the spoon in our mind’s eye. If our intent is to exercise the feeling will then having a preconceived image of the form is not only unnecessary but it is to be discouraged. For this reason we will not draw any form on the wood. Instead, we can begin by asking ourselves: What aspects of the original block form do we want to keep, such as its proportion, and what aspects do we wish to change? For example, if the wood is flat and angular, our hands will feel uncomfortable holding it, so we round off the corners. Having eliminated the sharp corners, we realize that it may still feel too large in diameter. So we rasp down the diameter, checking it by eye, but more importantly, testing it in our hands to see how it feels. We can do the same with the bowl of the spoon. We can make a shallow hollow to begin with, gradually enlarging and deepening it according to what our feeling and thinking suggest is appropriate for the eventual use of the spoon. In this way the whole process from beginning to end is one in which we intuitively feel our way along. This is especially important when we are trying to find a harmonious connection between the handle and the bowl of the spoon.

Such an approach does not necessarily produce better results, since all manner of beautiful spoons and other objects can be produced in the more mechanical, or sense/nerve manner. It is quite conceivable that a woodcarving teacher would use the draw-and-cut process with one group or one student where it was felt that the sense/nerve will needed strengthening. In general, however, contemporary life and education already provide ample opportunities for children to develop the head and hand coordination of their sense/nerve will. Carving wood is especially suited to exercising the more intuitive, feeling will. As I see it, this is the only reason a contemporary education can give for including in the curriculum crafts that otherwise have little practical value in today’s world. To create something with one’s own hands, if only once in one’s life, is surely a healthy antidote to becoming passive consumers. The more primary reason for including woodcarving and the other arts and crafts in education, not as an elective but as core activities, is to develop feeling will which is underdeveloped and therefore weak in most people. The feeling will should be developed for its own sake as a part of our human potential. In addition, there are quite practical reasons, new reasons, why human beings

today need to develop their feeling will more fully.

Developing the Creative Will to be Social Sculptors

Forming a spoon or bowl through the activity of our feeling will, as with handwriting on unlined paper, has significance far beyond the making of beautiful hand-made objects. Every human being is a social sculptor, who shapes and is shaped by social forms—political, economic, educational, and cultural. For the most part social forms are created and implemented through abstract, analytical thinking; that is, they are implemented and executed through the activity of sense/nerve will. The role of the sense/nerve will in all spheres of life, including social life, must not be underestimated. However, the value of sense/nerve will is presently overestimated; it is, in effect, the exclusive form in which will is developed and exercised. Without the activity of feeling will to balance and complement it, the sense/nerve will by itself becomes the source of powerful negative effects. Both feeling will and sense/nerve will must complement each other if we hope to create a healthy social life.

Today, the feeling will is underdeveloped compared to the overdeveloped sense/nerve will. We must seek every opportunity to develop the feeling will because the capacity to feel the clumsiness of our spoon and to intuitively feel, step by step, how to make it harmonious is not limited to spoon making. As our feeling will awakens through activities such as the arts and crafts, it will become active in other domains such as social life. We will feel more intensely the rigidity and clumsiness of social forms. Our feeling will awakens our creative will to be social sculptors who transform dead and chaotic social forms into more living and harmonious ones. The full social implications for developing feeling will is the focus of *Educating the Will-Part III*. Before going into this more fully, there are still some other areas in the arts and crafts that we should examine in relation to the development of feeling will.

Beeswax and Clay

When and why do we model with beeswax? When and why do we model with clay? The prevailing view in Waldorf schools is that only beeswax should be used from pre-school up through the third grade. It is often repeated that the cold, wet clay should not be used because it robs the children's forces. If this is true, are we equally concerned that puddles, streams, wet sand, mud, snow, and the cold water from the sink have an adverse effect on our children? In spite of the fact that they may create a mess, playing with such materials is a natural and healthy inclination. If anything, we have reason to be concerned for the children who are not naturally drawn to play with sand and snow. Anyone who has seen a group of children mucking out in a natural clay pit will recognize the same delight and creative play found in a sand box.

Such observations alone are reason to pause and doubt the validity of what is, in effect, a prejudice against clay. If the view espoused in Waldorf circles that clay is inappropriate or harmful in the first grades is not actually founded on any true pedagogical insight, then we might ask ourselves: Are we slipping into Waldorf dogma that is nothing more than personal sympathies and antipathies cloaked in pedagogical-sounding principles? If this is happening in one area of Waldorf education, is it also happening in other spheres?

If we do not trust our own experience about the healthy nature of clay modeling, then we may want to turn to Rudolf Steiner for the definitive opinion. Research by colleagues both in Europe and America has thus far not found a single statement from Rudolf Steiner that hints at harmful effects of clay at any age. On the contrary, Steiner has said, “We continue this [fundamental artistic work in grades 1-4] by moving on to three-dimensional plastic forms, using plasticine if it is available and whatever else you can get if it isn’t—even if it’s the mud from the street, it doesn’t matter. The point is to develop the ability to see and sense forms.” (“Second Curriculum Lecture” in *Discussions with Teachers*, p. 198.)

If as educators we set aside all preconceptions and prejudices, we can begin to ask the real questions: When and why shall we use beeswax? When and why shall we use clay, sand, mud or any other material? Availability and other practical considerations are inevitable factors, but prejudices about one material over another should have no place in our pedagogical considerations. Instead, we might ask ourselves a more interesting and pedagogically-relevant question such as: Do the children need to develop their sense/nerve will or their feeling will? If we determine that we need to exercise their sense/nerve will, or what is commonly called head/hand coordination, then beeswax is well suited. The inclination to make recognizable objects— bowls, birds etc.-but especially, the fine fingertip manner of forming small shapes in wax engages the sense/nerve will. If, on the other hand, we wish the children to exercise their feeling will, clay is particularly suitable. Clay can naturally be used in larger quantities that invite whole hand movements. This in turn allows the students to focus more on feeling the quality of the forms rather than on conceptual associations.

Typically, the beeswax used in our schools is brightly colored. Children and teachers alike may find these colors cheerful and fun, especially when different colors are combined to make, for example, a gnome with a red shirt, blue pants, and a green hat with a yellow feather. What are the pedagogical issues a teacher might consider regarding the color of beeswax? If we want the children to have a color experience, we have them paint. When painting they do not sculpt, they do not give three-dimensional form to the pigment. If we want them to have a form experience, we should help them focus on forming the clay or beeswax. When we give them colored beeswax we are distracting them from a full form experience; we are asking them to paint while they are sculpting. Put another way, using brightly colored beeswax stimulates the sense/nerve will. If our pedagogical intent is to support the feeling will through sculptural forming, then clay or beeswax that has a simple earth color is best.

A Sense/Nerve vs. a Feeling Will Rhythm of the Day

Waldorf education can pride itself on having the clear intention to develop the feeling will through art and craft activities. But the extent to which our schools actually develop the feeling will depends on two factors. It is not enough simply to schedule art and craft activities. The first requirement is that they are done in a manner that actually engages the feeling will. As we have seen, the sense/nerve will and not the feeling will may be exercised depending on the way these arts and crafts are guided. The second factor, that

we will now consider, is the length of the art and craft sessions and the rhythm of the daily schedule into which they are placed. The art and craft activities themselves may be presented in order to engage the feeling will of the children, while the length of the sessions and especially the daily schedule as a whole may have a powerful sense/nerve quality that counters whatever nurturing of the feeling will is achieved through the arts and crafts.

Beyond the longer morning main lesson block, Waldorf schools are relatively conventional in having forty-five minute periods. Two main factors that determine a daily schedule of several short periods: first, most cognitive and performing art subjects work well within such a time frame, and second, this seems to be the only way to arrange all the required subjects. What is not usually given much, if any, consideration is that this typical daily rhythm originates from and supports the sense/nerve human being and not the feeling will human being. If exercising the sense/nerve nature is our legitimate goal—as in cognitive courses—then a staccato, sanguine tempo of classes may be appropriate. When our intent is to develop the feeling will, the conventional rhythm of classes is inadequate and counter-productive. What would a watery, phlegmatic tempo look like in the daily rhythm?

As long as both teacher and students remain conscious of time, if they cannot stop thinking and chattering about all manner of other things, they are unable to shift from their sense/nerve nature into their feeling will. The feeling will reveals itself as focused and timeless absorption in the work at hand. Students who complain about how long a period is lasting do so because they are stuck in their sense/nerve nature. By contrast, the students who complain about how quickly the time has flown experience disappointment as they are expected to leave the feeling will world they were enjoying and to fall back into the sense/nerve world.

As citizens of our time, most Waldorf educators and Waldorf students are by nature more at home in their sense/nerve nature. Along with the rest of humankind, we face the uncomfortable fact that humankind is becoming pathologically sense/nerve. I believe pathological is not too strong a term if we understand it to mean “compulsively” sense/nerve. In fact, the greater danger is to underestimate the sense/nerve effects of our growing technological culture. We and our children must be able to function in this sense/nerve world, but to be fully and truly human, we must develop the inner freedom to exercise other aspects of ourselves, such as our feeling will.

Although Waldorf schools claim to educate the whole human being, we must be honest with ourselves in assessing where we fall short of realizing our ideals and intentions in practice. Because of our own education and the pressures of society, we tend to educate in a manner that emphasizes the sense/nerve intellect and sense/nerve will. As Waldorf educators we are only marginally ahead of other educators when it comes to educating the feeling will.

To truly educate the will, we must develop the feeling will as much as the sense/nerve will. Having formal and informal art and craft activities in a Waldorf school is not

enough; we must be conscious of exercising the feeling will in the manner they are offered. Even more fundamental and therefore more difficult to change is the developmental influence of the daily rhythm of activities. At the end of his life, Rudolf Steiner is said to have indicated that he saw the need to turn the rudder of Waldorf education 180 degrees. It is generally understood that he meant the arts and crafts were to become even more central. Given the reputation and self-image of Waldorf education as already strongly artistic, many may wonder what Steiner could have imagined. Is it possible that he felt profound concern for the one-sided development of the sense/nerve human being compared with the relatively weak and undeveloped feeling will human being? Did he see an urgent human need to develop the feeling will human being to balance the overdeveloped sense/nerve human being? Who, if not Waldorf educators, will lead the way in learning how to educate the feeling will?

Rudolf Steiner was radical enough to suggest that class teachers stay with their students through the eight years of the lower school. Might he have favored a rhythm of only three long periods each day, adding to the existing main lesson period a comparable late morning period for languages and performing arts and a whole afternoon for arts and crafts? The sense/nerve human being in teachers and students will find all manner of reasons why such a schedule cannot and should not be attempted. But if we dared to try it, the feeling will in us would blossom. We might then begin to discover the full reality of the whole human being. We might also discover what it means to develop the whole teacher and the whole school.

The Whole Teacher in a Whole School

If we aspire as Waldorf educators to educate the whole child, the whole human being, then we must concern ourselves equally with the development of the whole teacher and the whole school. When we speak about the whole child we mean body, soul, and spirit. We mean head, heart, and hand, or the thinking, feeling, and willing individuality. How do these criteria of wholeness apply to the development of the whole teacher and the whole school?

To become whole human beings our children must not only engage in a full spectrum of activities that engage all of their potential faculties, they must also meet living models of human wholeness in real people. They need to meet the whole teacher in a whole school. Some may think this is an ideal beyond our reach. Rather than making excuses for ourselves or burning out trying to do the impossible, there is a middle ground for us to explore.

Our children don't need teachers who are whole, they need models of striving towards wholeness. They don't need a school that is whole; it is quite enough that they experience a school community seeking to become more whole than it is. It is enough that we seriously aspire to become more whole both as individual teachers and as a school community. Secondly, our children need not encounter the whole teacher in each individual teacher but in the community of teachers. In this sense, the whole teacher is synonymous with the whole school. Each individual teacher is inevitably one-sided, but with sufficient attention and care, the faculty can be guided by the ideal of wholeness as

they form and reform the constellation of human qualities and capacities in their midst. This is already the case, insofar as a school community has a spectrum of different outer and inner capacities among its faculty, but there is more we can do.

If we recognize the need to give greater emphasis to the development of feeling will in our schools, one significant step would be to seek more faculty who actively cultivate the feeling will within their discipline.

For example, more artists and crafts people could be invited to join the school community, not merely to teach courses, but to be artists-in-residence with working studios on campus. To have a working studio in their daily environment would, in itself, give the children an experience of their feeling will nature which a classroom or teaching studio does not. To visit an artist's studio as an occasional class trip may be special but it implies that creative will activity is a novelty rather than a way of being. A working studio would enhance the spiritual and cultural life of the school community, even if it does not involve the students directly. If only better to serve our children's development, we might come to see that a school is more than classrooms for teaching children. Perhaps in the near future schools will become true cultural centers, where a rich diversity of cultural life is so integrated that it serves the adults as much as the children in the community. Instead of artists having to adapt the feeling will nature of their work to the demands of a sense/nerve organization and scheduling rhythm, there is every reason for Waldorf schools to lead the way in adapting their organizational form to accommodate the feeling will human being as much as the sense/nerve.

Of course this can only happen if teachers and parents see, with some urgency, that the welfare of their children in particular and humankind in general depend on our creating cultural communities for all ages that develop the whole human being. But here we touch a sensitive nerve. To the extent that we ourselves are at home in the full spectrum of our human nature, we will naturally try to form our school community in ways that support both the feeling will and sense/nerve human being. Any resistance to shifting the balance more in favor of the feeling will has only one source: our own habits and dependence on the existing sense/nerve bias of education.

As teachers and parents we face the conventional pressures of our time to prepare our children for the "real world." But what is the real world? The global technological corporate world is certainly not going to disappear overnight. But we must be clear about our goals: to develop our children's potential to be whole and free creative individuals so that they may be successful, not at conforming to the existing reality, but in transforming the present reality into a new reality that is more true to their aspiring individuality and humanity. Waldorf education is an alternative education whose ideals we have hardly begun to understand. To develop the capacities needed to realize the ideals of Waldorf education fully in practice will take some centuries. Implicit and central to Waldorf education is the challenge to serve the needs of the children before us in a way that also serves the long-term evolution of education and culture. As we must learn to perceive the realities of child development more fully, we must also learn to work with the full reality of human evolution, especially the evolution of human consciousness. Only in this context will we neither underestimate nor overestimate our actual capacity to realize the

ideals of Waldorf education in practice.

Inevitably, there will be more and more schools that will sincerely aspire to be Waldorf schools but where the deeper currents and vision of Waldorf education will manifest in diluted or distorted forms. This cannot be entirely avoided. It is not possible to keep the Waldorf movement pure. Trying to protect the name Waldorf and Steiner may in fact be a distraction for those who have the will to deepen Waldorf education so that it can continue to meet the evolving needs of the children incarnating now and in the future. There is an increasing tension between the quantitative and qualitative growth of Waldorf education. Some teachers are prepared to accept compromises believing that even an imperfect manifestation of Waldorf education must reach as many children as possible. Others believe that we may need to sacrifice quantitative growth for the sake of nurturing a qualitative deepening of Waldorf education in the light of the long term spiritual task of Waldorf education. Some may be able to do both, but if not, there is honor in both directions. Each individual must decide for him or herself.

In either case, concerning ourselves with the larger and long-term issues of human evolution which are central to the vision of Waldorf education helps us serve the needs of the children of the present. The children before us need to experience adults who consciously expand themselves beyond present reality, who actively devote themselves to creating the future through striving to develop in themselves new human capacities. In *Educating the Will—Part III* we will consider the broader and long-term social and cultural mission of the Waldorf movement. We shall see that this larger perspective challenges us as teachers and parents to develop our spirit will and our authentic individuality so that we can cultivate the capacities to build authentic community.

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