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Waldorf
EDUCATION



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Editor's Introduction

Ilan Safit

It is a sign of progress, or at least of progressive-ness, when an educational movement more than a century old keeps exploring ways to adapt itself to the times, places, and circumstances into which it has grown. The fact that the foundation and wider worldview of Waldorf education have convinced those of us who practice within it that it is so solidly right in its view of the child, of human development, and of the roles of the teacher, could make progress and innovation challenging. Why would you change, how could you change when the foundations ring so true and the insights of the founder still inspire us over the decades, lands, and languages that they have transcended to reach us?

And yet, the times they are a-changin', the world is transforming, the earth is... well, you know, and our societies are diversifying. In view of all of that, Waldorf education, too, is seeking ways to adapt and transform while not losing the essential form that lies at its foundation.

If the previous issue of the *Research Bulletin* featured some broader views of Waldorf curricula and the explorations of change, we are offering more space in the current issue to specific classes and courses that aim at the rebirth of old impulses in new surroundings.

In this context, Brian Scannell, writing from the Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School in New York State, lays out an apt, detailed course plan and practice in his "Renaissance in Florence and Harlem." While the curricular instructions laid out at the foundation call for the focused study of the European Renaissance in grades 7 and 11, Scannell offers his innovation by teaching that period alongside the Harlem Renaissance of early 20th century America. Scannell's essay is especially helpful to class and subject teachers seeking ways to revive their teaching of renaissance as a carrier of the impulse of renewal and rebirth beyond the historical period originally indicated in Steiner's curriculum. The essay is also helpful in its insightful reflections on the reasons for teaching renaissance and on the tension between tradition and progress in the Waldorf movement, which are the focus of the current issue.

Alison Davis, of the Sacramento Waldorf School in California, pushes further the question of renewal and innovation by calling for extending such aims beyond the incorporation of new content and into the exploration of new teaching methodologies. To this end, Davis

offers a detailed description of her research, preparation, and enactment of a revised 12th grade main lesson in World Literature. Her methodological innovation goes beyond swapping a traditional, canonical text with a more current, marginalized one, by moving from *reading* literature to *listening* to it, and from *writing about* literature to the students' own *oral storytelling* – all in the service of the experience of deep, transformative listening. The details of this experiment and the concepts and goals that motivate it are laid out in Alison Davis' "Decolonizing a World Literature Course in the Service of Deep Listening." The "decolonization" in the title is defined by Davis as the "updating, auditing, or designing Waldorf curriculum—especially ... through the lens of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice," calling for a critical examination of the various impacts on culture and society that European occupation has had on its former colonies. Such work digs deep by unearthing what has been covered up by European influence and moves sideways in spreading recovered traditions to other cultures.

Harlan Gilbert, a seasoned teacher and writer at the Green Meadow Waldorf School, explores the diversification of a Humanities high school course that otherwise could have nestled itself comfortably at the heart of mainstream Western culture, science, and thought: Philosophy. Gilbert offers his 12th grade students, and our readers, an exploration in self-knowledge and moral awareness, which is guided by the Hellenistic philosophical tradition (namely, Aristotle) but expands to include and explore philosophical, reflective, and moral traditions from China and the Zulu People of southern Africa. Again, we encounter here an essay that offers both a course plan that could be adopted and adapted by other teachers alongside a contextualized reflection on the issue of why we are teaching what we teach.

We move from the upper grades to earlier childhood with the next two articles in this issue, both focused on the telling of fairy tales. Holly Koteen-Soulé, coming with decades of experience in teaching early childhood classes and training early childhood teachers, dives back into a core practice of Waldorf education in the early years and grades in order to answer the question: What is the role of fairy tales in our formative pedagogical endeavors?

Peter Lawton, a longtime class teacher at the City of Lakes Waldorf School in Minnesota, shares with us

here a generous portion of his forthcoming book, *The Pedagogy of Wonder: An Artistic and Critical Approach to Telling Fairy Tales to Young Children*. Lawton, who also holds a doctorate in education, takes the long view in analyzing and explaining the various aspects of “fairy tale pedagogy,” in the context of Waldorf education as well as in relation to mainstream theories of education and human development. A refreshing aspect of this methodical exploration appears in the author’s detailed description of his own inner work in both preparatory and performative elements of his pedagogy. Lawton seems to be joining the conversation set up earlier in this issue, the one exploring the relationship between content and methodology, by seeing the two intertwined into one, as suggested in his phrasing, “the pedagogy sometimes *is* the curriculum!”

We turn next to an exploration of curriculum innovation or “deviations” coming from Europe. Ruhi Tyson, an experienced Waldorf teacher and a scholar of teacher education based in Stockholm, Sweden, offers a specific take on deviations from “the standard Steiner/Waldorf curriculum” by focusing further on two case studies of experiments taking place in two German Waldorf schools. One, the veteran Hibernia School (established in the 1950s), in Germany’s North Rhine-Westphalia, has integrated vocational education into the “standard” Steiner curriculum, specifically guiding its students from the seventh grade onwards in crafts such as carpentry, tailoring, tool making, electrics, as well as childcare. The second case, taking place at the *Freie Waldorfschule Ulm, Römerstrasse*, describes how the original component of social service in the community extended to an ongoing project, initiated in 1992, wherein high school students participate in building construction and other services at a village in Romania. Through repeated visits to the village, the German Waldorf students practice both crafts and social engagement that has yielded, alongside the pedagogical benefits to the students, “an anthroposophical clinic, herbal garden for medicinal herbs, a small medicine making facility, a youth center, staff accommodation, a large clinic park with a swimming pool and chapel, as well as a renovation of a kindergarten and a retirement home.”

Tyson’s article is very thorough and academically dense, and some readers might want to jump ahead to the two case studies, described above, to learn more about their offering of deviations from standard curriculum. The article concludes with a helpful contribution to our general focus on pedagogical innovation: “Steiner education has the ongoing potential to be a significant source of curriculum innovation that can enrich society at large (to the extent that there is a shared interest in *Bildung*). However, unless there is more of a systematic cooperation between teacher training institutions,

researchers, and individual schools interested in actively enacting such innovations, the potential for this will remain largely untapped.”

Veteran Waldorf teacher and teacher of teachers, Michael Holdrege, has recently published a rich book on teaching human biology: *From Mechanism to Organism: Enlivening the Study of Human Biology* (Waldorf Publication, 2022). We include here a short excerpt from Holdrege’s book, in which he steps back to view the larger picture by contrasting the prevailing mechanistic, materialistic view of biology with one that sees the greater, living whole. In doing so, Holdrege calls on the reflections of Douglas Sloan, co-founder of the *Research Institute for Waldorf Education* and the first editor of the *Research Bulletin*.

You will be able to go straight to the source of Holdrege’s philosophical inspiration, as we are happy to pay tribute to Douglas Sloan, on the occasion of his 90th birthday, by reprinting some of his reflective writing on knowing the world truly through knowing ourselves. The conclusion to the second article included here, “Science and the Humanities,” should give you a taste of what this lifelong supporter of Waldorf education has to offer:

I can only come to know qualities in the world—the world of nature, the world of others, the world of the spiritual—to the extent that I can bring those qualities to birth in myself. For example, the non-sensory qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, and many others, can be truly known by me as realities in the world *only if* I can come to experience them as realities in myself. And, it also works in the other direction: Opening myself to the qualities in the world can nurture and enable them to take root within myself.

Sloan’s essays are introduced by a warm tribute, written by Patrice Maynard, offering a synoptic glance of Douglas’ storied life and career.

Tucked in between these sets of reflections you will find an informative opinion piece by Douglas Gerwin, responding to continuously grim reports on the numerical decline of the teaching professions in the United States. Gerwin’s analysis, guided by Steiner’s view of the threefold society, concludes that the failures of mainstream educational practices in the United States are a result of the dominance of economic values and objectives, inappropriately influencing the field of education.

We wish all our readers a restful summer and we continue to invite teachers of all grades and subjects to share with us their explorations and innovations of Waldorf education.

Renaissance in Florence and Harlem

Realizing Our Potential in the Age of Consciousness Soul

Brian Scannell

During the 2021-22 school year, I was asked to teach two 7th grade Renaissance blocks. It was suggested that I read Charles Kovacs' *The Age of Discovery* to prepare for the classes. For several weeks I was designing two very traditional Renaissance blocks that explore the European Renaissance with a heavy focus on the artists and ideas coming from Florence, Italy. Then, in a moment of synchronicity, I was handed a copy of the Spring/Summer 2021 *Research Bulletin*, featuring an article by middle school teacher Ryan Cameron, from the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City. In the article, Cameron discusses her idea of including the Harlem Renaissance in her 7th grade Renaissance block. With this inspiration, I headed down the rabbit hole.

In full disclosure, at the time I knew very little about the Harlem Renaissance, but I felt, as many others do these days, that the curriculum I was being asked to teach could include voices outside of Europe, as well as the voices of women, people of color, etc. In the typical Waldorf curricular scope and sequence, students explore the Medieval and Renaissance periods of Europe twice: once in the 6th and 7th grades, and then again in the 11th grade. Truly, I didn't know whether introducing the Harlem piece made sense, but my teaching instinct said it was worth exploring if for no other reason than deepening the material by including more diverse perspectives. What I discovered as I conducted my research was that there were remarkable parallels between these two very distinct yet related periods of rebirth. Though I understood that teaching the European Renaissance was important because it ushered in a major shift in consciousness, what I came to understand was that far from being an immediate change, the artists and thinkers of Florence introduced a spark that was taken up and refined by movements like the one in early 20th century Harlem. This article will explore what I've learned and make a case for the importance of trying out similar projects within the Waldorf curriculum.

The Significance of Rebirth

It makes sense to start with the word "Renaissance" itself – French for *rebirth*. The archetype of rebirth might be one of the most important concepts we introduce students to in the course of their education. In similarity to the transition of historical epochs, we are all subjected to this process of death and rebirth

throughout our lives. In the words of Goethe: "Until you have experienced this—die and become—you are but a ghost-like visitor on the earth." By using history to teach this important concept to students, we are in effect preparing them for this inner spiritual transformation, which they begin experiencing intimations of in middle and high school. Like all archetypes, rebirth follows a pattern, and with some digging, I was able to identify points of connection shared by both the Harlem and the Italian (and later European) Renaissance.

As a way to organize the blocks, I focused on the archetypal patterns associated with rebirth as opposed to limiting myself to a specific time in history. Setting it up this way allowed me to move back and forth fairly seamlessly between Florence and Harlem, as the two epicenters of my focus. Each city was given equal time in the main lesson, and I typically went back and forth between the two. Though this might make it sound like a comparative history class, the need to compare never became a focus of the class. Instead, the pairing of Florence and Harlem created an atmosphere of anticipation, as, with each person or idea we explored in one period, students eagerly awaited learning of its counterpart in the other period. Teaching the blocks this way, as opposed to tacking on a few days of Harlem Renaissance at the end, emphasized the significance of the Harlem movement in a way that I would come to feel it deserved. Some of my colleagues did opine that this sets up a false equivalency, a point I will address later. In the beginning stages of research, my thought was simply, "What if students could come away from these blocks with the same reverence for artists and thinkers from Harlem as they would for those associated with Italy?" Even on this basic level, it made the curricular experiment seem worth trying. As Steiner noted, "Reverence is something that we plant in the soul as a seed; and the seed will bear fruit."

The first stage of rebirth involves a disruption of the status quo by a series of dark events. In the case of the Italian Renaissance, the Black Death swept through Europe, killing as much as ninety percent of the population of Florence. In addition, Europe began experiencing the Little Ice Age (roughly, 1300-1850) that devastated crops and led to mass starvation and a series of peasant uprisings. The darkness that preceded the Harlem Renaissance was 246 years of enslavement, followed by decades of racial discrimination. From

DOOR OF NO RETURN BY ORLAND BISHOP

I step through the door of no return
 To walk into the water,
 To be a cargo in the bowels of night
 Trailing through time and the undercurrents of grief
 Filled by a longing for return

I awake only to the stars that guide my faithful heart
 to the ancestral world.

Their patient voices sing to me, to rest, to remember.

I wait for the day beyond my lifetime

the which I will emerge

To plant in this new earth the seeds that I have carried in my broken grip
 As a sower of the ancestral promise.



a spiritual perspective, darkness pushes us inward, and as Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl so eloquently pointed out in *Man's Search for Meaning*, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." It is a difficult question to entertain whether suffering is in fact necessary for spiritual growth, nonetheless, the pattern holds.

In their main lesson books, students documented this stage of rebirth by writing a letter to a friend or relative from the perspective of a Florentine who was living through the Black Death. For Harlem, I had students read a chapter from the book *Barracoon* by Zora Neale Hurston, where she interviews one of the last living formerly enslaved people about his experience during the Middle Passage. Students also created a main lesson page using the following poem from Orland Bishop's book *The Seventh Shrine*:

*I step through the door of no return
to wade into the water,
to be a cargo in the bowels of night
traveling through time and the undercurrents of
grief
pulled by a longing for return.
I awake only to the stars that guide my faithful
heart
to the ancestral world.
Their patient voices sing to me, to rest, to remem-
ber.
I wait for the day beyond my lifetime,
beyond my children's lifetime
in which I will emerge
to plant in this new earth the seeds that I have
carried in my firm grip
as a sower of the ancestral promise.*

This poem introduces the idea of rebirth in the image of a future descendant emerging and planting seeds for the future. It is a beautiful picture of resilience and perseverance against all odds.

The second stage of rebirth involves a backwards look, to discover what has been lost. This seems to be a crucial question in the forming of identity in the age of the consciousness soul.

Some Shared Features

In both Harlem and Florence, rebirth was arguably instigated by a specific individual, though certainly a myriad of factors and people participated in advancing rebirth. I identified these two key figures as W.E.B. Du Bois, precipitating the Harlem Renaissance, and Petrarch ushering in the Italian one. Interestingly, both figures are missing from the more traditional or canonical Waldorf pedagogy. Though this isn't the place for an in-depth exploration of their biographies, I will mention that both men were committed to raising the consciousness of the individual. This becomes clear in key anecdotes from their lives.

Petrarch (1304-1374) found himself in a crisis, early in his life, as he tried in vain to discover his life's purpose. He embarked on a physical challenge to, no doubt, get his mind off things. He decided to hike to the top of Mount Ventoux, the highest mountain in southern France. The only thing he took with him was his favorite book, *Confessions*, by Saint Augustine. After much physical exertion he finally summited the mountain, and as he did, the book fell from his pocket and opened to the following passage:

"And men go about to wonder at the height of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not."

With this, his destiny—and the destiny of Florence—was revealed to him. Petrarch's whole life became a quest to explore his unique inner being, and in doing so, establishing a model for others. His search for identity is captured poignantly in his book *Secretum (The Secret)*, which began circulating after his death. It is often referred to as the first work of modern psychology.

The story of W.E.B. Du Bois' call is similarly miraculous. By all accounts, Du Bois (1868-1963) was brilliant. He carries the distinction of being the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard. After graduating, he moved to Atlanta and took a job as a professor at Atlanta University. There, he became a leading intellectual, and he made the pursuit of truth his focus. Following the lynching of a man named Sam Hose, in 1899, Du Bois was interviewed by a journalist about lynching in America. The interview took place while the two men walked through the city of Atlanta. As Du Bois was answering one of the reporter's questions, he glanced over at a storefront window and realized in horror that they were selling Sam Hose's burnt knuckles. In that moment Du Bois knew he could no longer be merely an academic but needed to take the additional step of acting on the truth. A few years later, in 1903,



Student main lesson book page: “Call to Adventure,” Petrarch and W. E. B. Du Bois.

he published his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he makes a claim similar to Petrarch’s revelation:

“In those sombre forests of his striving [the African American’s] own soul rose before him, and he saw himself—darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another.”

Both Du Bois’ and Petrarch’s lives revolve around bringing this individualizing impulse to the communities in which they live.

The second stage of rebirth involves a looking to the past to discover what has been lost. This seems to be a crucial question in the age of the consciousness soul. In the case of Florence, this looking backwards focused on the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. Works by Plato, Homer, Aristotle, and Cicero were brought to Europe in 1453, after the fall of Constantinople, and were translated for the first time (Petrarch was the first to translate *The Odyssey* from Greek to Latin). Cosimo de’ Medici set up a Platonic school in Florence where gifted students received their education, which was steeped in the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers.

In Harlem, this looking backwards mainly focused on the ancient cultures of Egypt/Nubia and Ethiopia. The focus was on people like the Queen of Sheba, the Egyptian queen Nefertiti, the Nubian King Piye, and others. In *The Soul of Black Folk*, Du Bois articulates this important lineage: “The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx. Throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars,

and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness.” This link to the past was further emphasized by Alaine Locke who served as an editor of two of the most influential texts published at the height of the Harlem Renaissance: *Survey Graphic: Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro* and later the anthology *The New Negro*. Poet Langston Hughes is featured prominently in both publications, and his poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1920), is a perfect summation of the importance of looking backward in order to understand your spiritual legacy:

*I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older
than the
flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were
young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to
sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids
above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe
Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its
muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*

Both Harlem and Florence harkened back to the rich spiritual and artistic legacies that had in some sense been forgotten, or, in the case of Harlem, that had



Renaissance in two blocks. Student main lesson book cover pages.

been violently separated from the people to whom it belonged. Fascinatingly, in both cases, major archeological discoveries were unearthed around the beginning of both Renaissance periods. The Belvedere Torso and Apollo were discovered in Rome, in the mid 15th century, while busts of the Egyptian queens Nefertiti and Tiye were discovered in Amarna, Egypt, in 1912. I named the first Renaissance block I taught, *Uncovering the Past: Rebirth in Florence and Harlem* (see main lesson book covers for both sections below). On the first day of class, we went outside and “dug up” busts of Nefertiti and of Apollo, statues that later graced the cover of students’ main lesson books. Unfortunately, I couldn’t quite remember where I buried them, and it ended up taking nearly the whole period to find the buried busts!

There are also key pieces of art from the early stages of both Renaissance periods that epitomize what each movement was trying to accomplish. In Florence, that piece was Donatello’s *David*, finished in 1440 and commissioned by Cosimo de’ Medici. In Harlem, it was Meta Fuller’s *Ethiopia Awakening*, commissioned by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1921. Placed side by side, the two sculptures have much in common, though I don’t believe Fuller’s sculpture is derivative of Donatello’s. Both communicate much through the gesture of the figures. *David*

was the first freestanding nude male sculpture since antiquity, and *Ethiopia Awakening* was considered the first Pan-African artwork. In the context of the *looking backwards* stage of rebirth, both emphasize the time towards which each movement turned its gaze. In addition, each statue carries autobiographical elements of its creator that celebrate the artist’s unique individual identity. Family legend had it that Fuller’s grandmother had been a princess in Ethiopia. Though the artwork’s title references Ethiopia, the image of a woman emerging from a sarcophagus is clearly an allusion to Egypt and its spiritual legacy. The emerging figure seems to suggest that that which has lain dormant is now ready to re-emerge, an idea that echoes Orland Bishop’s poem quoted above. Many art historians have noted the effeminate posture of Donatello’s *David*, some claiming the statue is a veiled celebration of the artist’s homosexuality. *David* was a key symbol for Florentines who related to his underdog status and his ability to triumph against great odds. Both statues foreshadow the challenges faced by individuals as they attempt to free themselves from all the forces that would keep them from self-actualization.

I ended this first block on a bit of a cliffhanger as the Ottoman army surrounded the walls of Constantinople, in 1453. Back in Harlem, art commissions came to a



David by Donatello (1440s)



Ethiopia Awakening by Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1921)

screaming halt as Black Tuesday ushered in the Great Depression, in 1929. In my thinking, these events marked an important point of transition into the next or higher phase of the Renaissance. Many historians mark the end of the Harlem Renaissance with the Great Depression. In my reading of history, the two decades after Black Tuesday are filled with important artistic experimentation that culminate in the Civil Rights Movement. The following passage from the website of the National Museum of African American History & Culture makes explicit this link between what began in Harlem and the Civil Rights Movement:

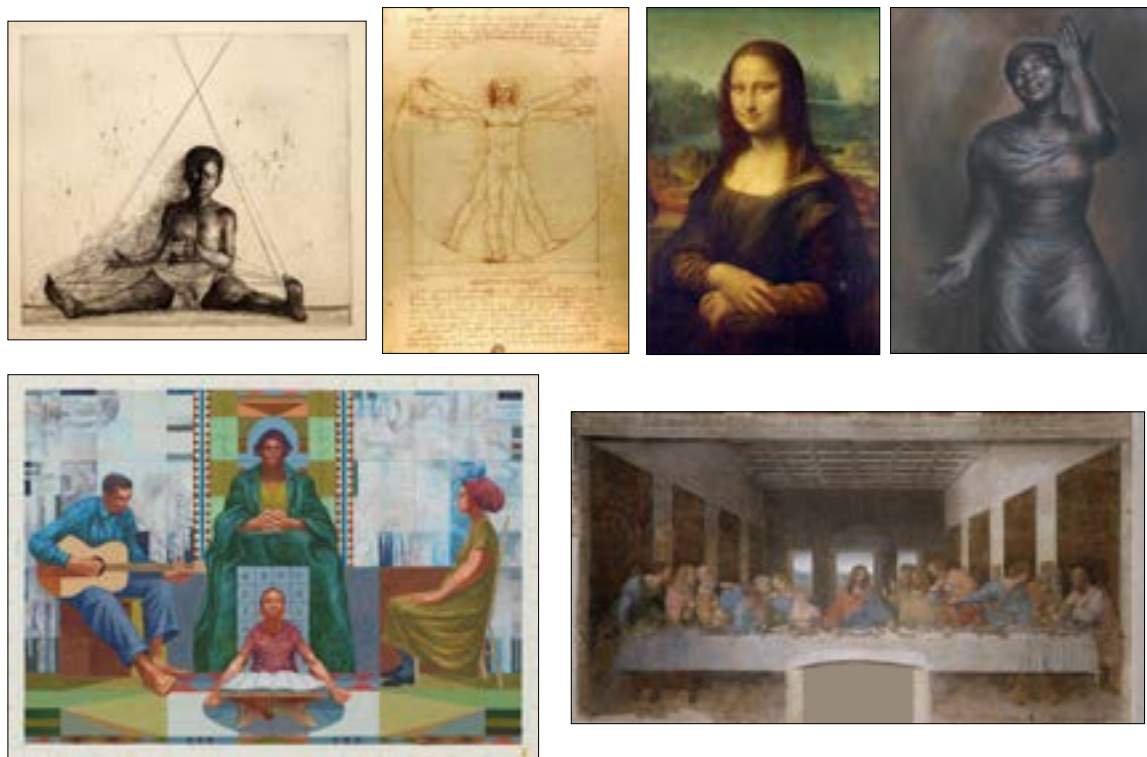
[T]he Harlem Renaissance instilled in African Americans across the country a new spirit of self-determination and pride, a new social consciousness, and a new commitment to political activism, all of which would provide a foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In doing so, it validated the beliefs of its founders and leaders like Alain Locke and Langston Hughes that art could be a vehicle to improve the lives of the African Americans.¹

¹ <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/new-african-american-identity-harlem-renaissance>

Artists and Other Reformers

I titled my second block, *Between Two Worlds: The High Renaissance* (see sample of main lesson book above). This block emphasized the role of artists as harbingers of change. Artists often lead the way as they are more sensitive to the spirit of the times in which they live and can creatively communicate their ideas to others through their art. What I discovered was that there were wonderful parallels in the lives of the artists I highlighted. These artists included Charles White, Richmond Barthé, Elizabeth Catlett, and Jacob Lawrence, from America, and Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael, from Italy. I could say a lot here, but will limit my comments to a few links between artists Charles White and Leonardo da Vinci.

I think it speaks to the heart of the issue that most Americans would not recognize many of the important American artists listed above. Until embarking on this journey, I, too, was not familiar with most of them. In doing my research for these blocks, I was surprised to find that few books existed about these American artists, and among the few that did, most were out of print. I did manage to get my hands on a great book about Charles White, entitled *Charles White: A Retrospective*.



Top: Charles White, “Cat’s Cradle” (1972); Leonardo da Vinci, “Vitruvian Man” (1490); “Mona Lisa” (1517); Charles White, “Mahalia” (1955).
Bottom: Charles White, “Mary McLeod Bethune” mural (1978); Leonardo da Vinci, “The Last Supper” mural (1498).

Like da Vinci, White grew up in a broken home and showed an early aptitude for art. He got a job painting signs during the Great Depression, when he was only 14. White was deeply moved as a teenager by reading Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*, which caused him to question his teachers about why African American history was not being taught at his high school. This frustration ultimately led to his not finishing school, another biographical fact he shares with da Vinci. Despite not graduating, White received a scholarship to take art classes at arguably the best art school in the country at the time, The Art Institute of Chicago, which again parallels da Vinci apprenticing at Verrocchio’s workshop. Da Vinci once wrote in his journal that, “the good painter has to paint two principal things, man and the intention of his mind.” White and da Vinci are both masters of using outward gestures to communicate something of the inner soul lives of their subjects. In fact, it is this quality that makes both artists into champions of the consciousness soul age. Their art is a signpost to our own inner depths. In discussing his art, White noted, “I deal with love, hope, courage, freedom, and dignity—the full gamut of human spirit.” All these qualities are at the heart of the spirit of our times.

It is helpful to see some of White and da Vinci’s most important work side by side to appreciate the remarkable similarities in their approach.

The final stage of rebirth—in which something new is actually born—requires a holding of tension of opposites. This is in line with the anthroposophical view that consciousness arises between polarities. The most productive times in human history happen when individuals and societies can hold opposing notions, and in doing so, allow something new to emerge. A classic example of this is given by the Golden Age of Greece, when the true seat of power, the Oracle of Delphi, was dedicated to both Apollo and Dionysus—demonstrating a dual respect of order as well as chaos. The Italian Renaissance was a time when people rediscovered the ideas of Greek and Roman philosophers and held them along with their Christian faith. In this way they were between two worlds. Renaissance artists also balanced scientific and artistic ways of knowing in their art. A perfect example of this is *Vitruvian Man*, by Leonardo da Vinci.

Harlem artists turned their gaze to the ancient cultures of Egypt and Ethiopia and found themselves between the worlds of their African past and their American future. They also held the tension of being black in a white dominated world, epitomized in the nonviolent approach of Martin Luther King, Jr. King once noted, “We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it

out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with.” A great example of this tension reflected in art is *The Great Migration Panel 49*, by Jacob Lawrence. It bears repeating that it is only through holding the tension of opposites that a new higher consciousness can be born. Historical periods of rebirth demonstrate the impact such a period has on society when individuals join together and collectively hold the tensions that define their age. When this happens, we, in essence, become midwives to the spiritual development of our fellow man.

The final main lesson page I asked students to complete was entitled *A Tale of Two Martins*. In another fascinating similarity between these Renaissances, both movements culminate (if you accept my thesis that the Harlem Renaissance ends in the Civil Rights Movement) in the work of men named Martin Luther (Martin Luther King Jr. was named after the 16th century German Reformation priest). Both men led movements to combat the evils of their time, one taking on the corruption of the all-powerful Church, the other in combating pervasive racism and inequality. Luther’s ideas that sparked the reformation were a clarion call to the individual to become master of one’s own spiritual development. King took this a step further, insisting that individuals put their spiritual gifts in service of others in the form of nonviolent activism. In an interesting difference, Luther’s ideas fractured the Church, a fracturing one could argue that the Church never recovered from. King’s work, by contrast, aimed at bringing people back together.

Some Differences

Though I discovered many interesting similarities between Harlem and Florence, there were also some key differences. One notable example was how each movement was funded. In Florence, the Medici bankrolled the artists and intellectuals who stimulated so much new thinking. It is estimated they spent approximately 500 million dollars in today’s money supporting artists. A part of this generosity may stem from guilt, as usury—or interest charged on loans—was still considered a sin at the time, and the Medici’s banking empire committed this sin on a massive scale. By stark contrast, the Harlem Renaissance had no major funding apart from a small group of mostly white benefactors, perhaps also operating from some sense

of guilt. Artists like the sculptor Augusta Savage had to work as a teacher to make ends meet. Though her talent was recognized, she couldn’t afford to cast her work in metal and instead painted her plaster to look like bronze. Arguably her most famous piece, entitled *Gamin*, is a wonderful example of this practice of painting plaster. Another important piece of hers, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, commissioned for the 1939 World’s Fair in New York, was later destroyed as the World’s Fair did not have the funds available to create a permanent cast, even though Savage’s sculpture was considered a highlight of the fair. Contrast these stories with the knowledge we have of artists such as Donatello and Michelangelo, who were never want for the best materials to work with. At risk of stating the obvious, another benefit of teaching the Harlem Renaissance is

that women had central roles in that movement, unlike in its male dominated Florentine counterpart.

A stark difference emerging from setting the two movements side by side is that while the Florentine artists were somewhat free to celebrate—albeit through Christian iconography—their emerging sense of individuality, Harlem artists had the extra step of first having to restore their

people’s dignity. As Alain Locke, one of the architects of the Harlem Renaissance, noted, “art must discover and reveal the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid.” This was not something people like da Vinci and Michelangelo had to overcome, though one could make a case that da Vinci was aiming to challenge prejudice against women with a painting like the *Mona Lisa*. This restoration of dignity is particularly clear in the work of an artist like Winold Reiss, whose images of African Americans are a major part of the highly influential *Survey Graphic* magazine mentioned earlier. I aimed to demonstrate the ways dignity was restored through artistic representation in a lesson, where I showed racist caricatures of African Americans juxtaposed with important art that presented a different image of its African American subjects. This lesson was inspired by a book by David Pilgrim called *Understanding Jim Crow: Using Racist Memorabilia to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice*.

Conclusions

Both the Harlem and Florentine movements had the same goal—to raise the consciousness of the individual

Where the fruit of Florence was the birth of the individual, the Harlem experiment could be understood as offering an important correction to counteract the growing egotism that is a direct result of humanities’ shift into the consciousness soul age.



“Aunt Jemima” advertisement, The Saturday Evening Post (1919).



“Elise Johnson McDougald” by Winold Reiss (1925).

through art and ideas. In my experience teaching this material it was clear that some students found it easier to relate to the more pragmatic and gritty Harlem artists while others were drawn more to the idealism of the Florentine artists. What was interesting was how they seemed to lift each other up. In *The Soul of Black Folk*, Du Bois expresses the hope that “some day on American soil two world races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack.” I assume that, in the past, the idealism of the Italian Renaissance met most students at a time when their dreamy idealism was very much alive in them. Unfortunately, that is not how I would characterize the current consciousness of the seven-grader. They are more awake, more conscious, and more pessimistic than perhaps they have been in the past. The Harlem piece seemed to really speak to those more awakened students.

According to Steiner, the world entered the consciousness soul age in 1413. This very specific date is an approximation that references a radical shift in the spiritual path of humanity. It seems clear from a historical perspective that the epicenter of this shifting consciousness was located in Europe. Though this impulse starts in Europe, the consciousness soul age is a long process that will refine itself over many centuries. As Waldorf educators, it serves us well to note the various ways people and societies in our global community

meet the consciousness soul. Our curriculum has traditionally done a great job following the thread of this emerging consciousness as it flows out of Italy and is later refined by movements like the English Romantics and American Transcendentalists. What is sadly missing from our curricular arch is the important legacy of the African spiritual journey, one that offers many keys to unlocking the potential of our age. Every individual or collective anecdote in how we meet the challenges of the consciousness soul age provide clues on how we as educators can recapitulate this process in our classrooms.

One piece of critical feedback I received that has stuck with me is the idea that offering these two Renaissance periods side by side essentially sets up a false equivalency. The argument is that while the Italian and broader European Renaissance usher in the consciousness soul age—and with it the Age of Exploration, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, etc.—the Harlem movement simply raised the awareness of a relatively small group of people over a much shorter time span. At first this felt like a fair criticism, as the Harlem Renaissance was shorter and more localized. However, upon deeper reflection, it occurred to me that the Harlem Renaissance did not really end in 1929, as most historians suggest; its seeds reached their fullest flowering in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s

and only truly ended with the assassination of King in 1968. Where the fruit of Florence was the birth of the individual, the Harlem experiment could be understood as offering an important correction to counteract the growing egotism that is a direct result of humanities' shift into the consciousness soul age. In *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, Steiner says, "Everything that the 'I' can develop within itself must turn into love... The greater the power of the love that comes into being, the more we will be able to accomplish creatively on behalf of the future." To put our spiritual development in the service of others as the civil rights movement demanded is a beautiful example of how our highly individualized consciousness can in fact—in the words of Steiner—"turn into love." Nonviolent civil rights activists combated hate and ignorance with patience, understanding, and love, and by doing so they planted important seeds for our future spiritual development. They teach us a critical lesson about realizing our potential in the consciousness soul age, a lesson with no equivalent in the Italian Renaissance.

In his book *The Archetype of Initiation*, psychologist Robert Moore articulates the spiritual significance of MLK's nonviolent approach: "Through the power of his personality and ritual genius, King was able to turn the streets of racist cities into sacred geography, containing powerful emotions, allowing the social shadow to become manifest, and facilitating deep structural changes in the psyches of both his supporters and his opponents." The history of nonviolent activism goes all the way back to Jesus and was taken up by heretics like the Manicheans and the Cathars, among others. The idea of nonviolence went mostly underground after the last Cathars were eradicated in the 13th century. Its reintroduction in the consciousness soul age by people like Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., is critical, if the consciousness soul age is to reach its fullest potential. What non-violent activism demands is self-knowledge and deep inner strength put in service to others. Without this service component, the one-sided egotism of the conscious soul age becomes the epidemic of selfishness and isolation so prevalent in our world today. Nonviolent activism is the great spiritual gift the Harlem Renaissance offered to the world.

As Waldorf educators, it seems imperative that we look for places in our curriculum where marginalized voices can be showcased. Not only do I feel the impulse

to teach the Harlem Renaissance is spiritually sound, I also believe it helps balance what at times can be a myopically Eurocentric curriculum. My decision wasn't a reactionary impulse to throw out the old in favor of the new. In my estimation, this is not how we meet the moment. I acknowledge that the educators who came before me and created this curriculum were thoughtful, visionary and well-intentioned. My choice to experiment with the curriculum is also not meant to imply that all diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives being implemented in Waldorf schools are healthy, spiritually sound, and developmentally appropriate. In my three years in the movement, I can attest that holding the tension of opposites between tradition and progress is a delicate balance that many schools are still trying to get right. If we are to truly have courage for the truth, we need to be honest with ourselves when we find ourselves losing this critical tension and straying too far into either the traditionalist or the progressive camps.

In his book *The Occult Significance of Forgiveness*, the anthroposophic author Sergei Prokofieff writes, "The process of 'moral breathing' begins through the powers of understanding and tolerance towards the thoughts and views of other people being gradually brought to a focus in the capacity to 'inhale' the materialistic thoughts of modern civilization and 'exhale' spiritual thoughts. This is one of the most important tasks of anthroposophists in our time." Prokofieff goes

on to say that Rudolf Steiner in his own life presented an archetypal example of this process, having 'inhaled' Haeckel's theory of evolution and then 'exhaled' it in the form of Anthroposophy. It feels critical to the future success of Waldorf education that in the true spirit of Renaissance, we hold the tension of our values and traditions alongside more pro-

gressive ideas and impulses and become practitioners of this moral breathing.

History teaches us that the moment we lose our points of tension, our society returns to a spiritual wasteland. This happened in Europe when Descartes famously proclaimed, "I think, therefore I am" and abandoned faith for reason. When Martin Luther King was assassinated, the world lost an initiate who attempted to bridge the Black and White worlds through nonviolence. In my mind, the Renaissance curriculum I have highlighted here is my attempt to marry our traditions with what this moment is calling for in a way that offers students a more diverse curriculum without sacrificing

Harlem artists turned their gaze to the ancient cultures of Egypt and Ethiopia and found themselves between the worlds of their African past and their American future. They also held the tension of being black in a white dominated world.

the spiritual core of why the curriculum was taught in the first place. It is an outbreath, full of life, vitality, and hope for the future.

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Decolonizing a World Literature Course in the Service of Deep Listening

Alison Davis

A Tale of Two Tenth Grades

It's the first day of a tenth grade Humanities main lesson, and the students file into the classroom. They chat with each other, scroll on their phones, drink tea or coffee, sit with their heads down, or mill about the room. Rows of desks or tables face the chalkboard, and as the bell rings, the students head to their assigned seats. The teacher takes attendance, leads the group in morning verse, perhaps does some stretching or speech work, and then begins class by handing out the syllabus, which they then read aloud together. Students see that they will be reading *The Odyssey* by Homer and that their grade will be determined according to weighted categories, which include reading quizzes, homework assignments, an analytic essay, and class participation. They also see the course learning goals, late work policies, academic integrity policies, classroom rules, and other contractual addenda. They are asked to take the syllabus home and have a parent or guardian sign it and then return it the next day. The lesson then unfolds as might be expected, with various reading and writing activities, with some class discussion, and/or with some sort of artistic work. That night, the students are expected to read ten pages of the text and be prepared to discuss it the next day.

With this scene in mind, I invite you to jot down your reactions to it. In particular, consider how you imagine students would feel about it. Who might be bored, excited, enthusiastic, apathetic? Who might be enthralled, checked out, curious, or overwhelmed? And, perhaps more importantly, do you know *why* you think those things? Is it based on your own experience as a student, with students, with a group of so-called challenging students, or with a group of so-called high-achieving students? Are your imaginations laced with cynicism, idealism, realism, or any other -ism that you can identify? Do they feel fixed or definitive? Would you be open to reconsidering them?

Now, let's revisit the scene with just one change. Instead of reading *The Odyssey* by Homer, which has traditionally been a staple text of the tenth grade curriculum (Mitchell, 2004), the students will read the *Sundiata*, a medieval epic from the Malinke people in Mali. The rest of the class proceeds in the same way: attendance, verse, perhaps some movement, same syllabus, and activities that culminate in a reading assignment. Would

any of your answers to the questions above shift? Does this class seem more fitting, more relevant, more modern to you? On what grounds? How do you think it would be received by students? On what grounds?

These thought experiments are meant to promote the reader's inner participation in some of the questions that this paper will seek to address, namely in terms of bringing fresh impulses to curriculum development. When we talk about updating, auditing, or designing Waldorf curriculum—especially if we are doing so through the lens of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, a process often referred to as “decolonizing” (Charles, 2019)—this is typically what we are debating: the choice of content (Militzer-Kopperl, 2022; Rawson, 2020). It is a tale of two main lessons, like the ones described above, and people tend to take sides based on which one they think is better from an ideological point of view. But, of course, the heart of the matter is much bigger than which book is or isn't being replaced. If we want to make earnest strides in decolonizing education, there is a serious need to look beyond content to methodology.

In this paper, I will describe the theoretical and action-based research that led to the creation of a decolonized twelfth grade World Literature course within a high school Humanities Department. Although the text selection for this established class has varied from year to year, according to the proclivities and background of the teacher and the students, the course has continued to maintain its original purpose: to expose students to postcolonial literature, which centers voices, experiences, and stories that colonization and empire sought to oppress, suppress, or eliminate (Bartels et al., 2019). From that perspective, the course content was already decolonized when I took over teaching it, but I felt called to take it a step further and examine the ways in which a re-envisioned methodology could more effectively support and deepen the content.

High school Humanities classes provide a unique opportunity to think through decolonization, both of content, which has become quite common practice, and of methodology, which, at present, is much less explored. There are many reasons for this, primarily developmental ones. First, adolescent students are more awake to

and aware of the situatedness of characters and narratives they are being asked to study. Similarly, they are able to engage in more rigorous self-reflection on the learning process itself and how it impacts them. Finally, many young people today are coming to expect diverse representation in the types of stories they are asked to study (Fischer & Harris, 2022), and teachers need to be ready to address this expectation. While these considerations are pressing in developing literature- and history-based curricula, they are also applicable across disciplines (Matuk et al., 2021) and for a wider age range. Even teacher training and credentialing programs are seeing an increased demand that issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice be incorporated into the way curriculum is designed and delivered (Yemini et al., 2019), so we can only anticipate that these conversations will grow in the coming years.

Course Research and Design

In many Waldorf high schools, what we refer to as “the curriculum” designates the courses that students take, which are normally organized around a specific kind of content. There are some classes that have remained relatively universal across the continent, like the Revolutions main lesson in ninth grade or the Optics main lesson in twelfth grade. There are also many classes that have been the site of years of varied kinds of innovations. Sometimes the innovation stays close to the original intention, such as a ninth grade class called “The Novel,” which may change content but has maintained similar learning goals, such as introducing students to literary analysis and the general features of plot and character development. Other classes have changed tremendously, both in content and in learning goals, such as the shift from a Chicano Studies class to one focusing on environmental literature and climate change.

The World Literature course I developed is situated at the intersection of all of these different kinds of continuation and change. While I maintained the postcolonial literature identity of the class, which was part of the school’s shared curriculum agreement, I selected new content and developed new ways of organizing and curating the learning space in order to support that content. The choice of the word ‘content’ here,

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as opposed to ‘text,’ is essential: for this new literature course, there would be no reading. None at all.

As I surveyed the school’s Humanities Department courses and met with teachers about the type of work they were doing with their students, I found a common (and unsurprising) theme: most of the classes focused on reading and writing. Literacy was conceived of in this conventional way, and the convention is highly informed by a Western, colonial, objectivist worldview. It emphasizes individual understanding, individual achievement, and the individual mind, even if supported by some social constructions of meaning through discussion and/or other collaborative work (Bhattacharya, 2011). In addition, it relies almost exclusively on the written word over other forms of narrative, especially oral history, which has traditionally been the way historical, cultural, and other forms of knowledge have been passed on in societies that we now call postcolonial (Ritchie, 2014).

With this in mind, a decolonized World Literature class that simply swaps out one book for another has done only a small portion of the work. Of course, updating content for more representation of non-White and non-Western worldviews is a fine place to start, and that is exactly what I did when I first began teaching this twelfth grade course. At my previous school, the assigned text for World Literature was the nineteenth century German classic, *Faust*, by Goethe, which I swapped for the Senegalese masterpiece, *The Ambiguous Adventure*, by Cheikh Hamidou Kane, originally published in French, in 1961. Although we did other artistic activities, the heart of the class consisted of reading, discussing, and writing, all with an emphasis on analysis. Over time, I began to question the effectiveness of this change and the degree to which it actually served the perspectives and life experiences of the people and characters we were seeking to encounter.

For this reason, and for many others, including an eroded belief in the utility of letter grades (Davis, 2020; Kohn & Staffel, 2020) and in assigning reading as homework (Kohn, 2007; Bryan & Nelson, 1994), especially in a classroom with a very diverse range of learning needs, accommodations, and IEPs, I decided that I would no longer ask students to read books and write papers about oral cultures and oral histories. Instead, I would structure our class content, activities, assignments,

and assessment methods to participate in and foster a deeper connection to oral storytelling.

Although I still designed a syllabus with a course description, learning goals, and assessment criteria, a requirement of the school where I teach, I did not distribute it to students. Creating it was nevertheless beneficial for me because it helped me clarify not just what I was aiming to create with the class, but also *how* and *why* I was making pedagogical choices. I used the “Understanding by Design” template (Bowen, 2017), which echoes Paul Zachos’s research on what he calls “worthy accomplishment” (2014) to guide the process of identifying the desired learning outcomes for the class, how I would observe their level of attainment, and how I would interact with the students’ learning.

The most important learning goal that I identified for the class was to cultivate deep listening skills. According to the late, famed Buddhist teacher, scholar, and activist, Thich Nhat Hanh, “deep listening” is a way of listening to another person that has the potential to lessen their suffering (2013). Hanh emphasizes the importance of cultivating this skill, which is relevant in all manners of everyday conversations, all the way up to the highest levels of conflict and misunderstanding, including talks between Israel and Palestine. The underlying idea is that, through listening, we can become available to another person’s story, to their lived experience, and to their truth, even if it seems to be in tension with our own. This kind of listening is essential to many of the aims of decolonization, which ask historically privileged people to open themselves to really hearing the stories of the oppressed and marginalized, without judgment and without preconceptions, so that a new foundation for healing can be laid (Menakem, 2017).

Therefore, teaching the students to engage in deep listening presented itself as a fitting methodology for meeting the other in a decolonized space because it respects the epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies of oral cultures without forcing them into the constraints of the written words. Deep listening also maintains the social aspect of the encounter space and brings students in relationship to the speaker and to each other in ways that are all too often neglected when the emphasis remains almost exclusively on written texts and on writing texts. Suddenly, the tone of voice of the speaker, their facial expressions, volume, pauses, pronunciation, body language, and so much more enter the encounter space in a completely new way; they become central vehicles of embodied meaning-making.

If we want to make earnest strides in decolonizing education, there is a serious need to look beyond content to methodology.

With these considerations in mind, I selected the story we would study, *Of Water and the Spirit* (1994), by Malidoma Patrice Somé, one of the best-known African healers of the twentieth century. I was seeking an author that I considered to be writing and creating out of the consciousness-soul to offer an alternative to the almost bottomless cynicism of much contemporary writing, but not one that practiced any kind of spiritual bypassing or false positivity. Somé brilliantly faces deep personal and historical suffering without losing sight of the possibility of transformation, and his courageous truth-telling is so needed in our world today.

Of Water and the Spirit is published as a book, but it was also released as an audiobook, and the form that the audiobook takes is different from the written version. Audiobooks are typically recordings of the written words as they appear on the page, but in this case, Somé simply recounts the stories himself. He follows approximately the same progression of events as in the written book, but he tells them spontaneously and allows them to unfold as he speaks. He takes the listener through the various stages of his education and upbringing, from being kidnapped by a French Jesuit at the age of four and sent to religious schools and seminaries, to an initiation experience in his village, and finally through the highest echelons of academic formation in France and the United States.

Somé’s own experiences at the intersection of education and healing are profound. His stories invite us to reflect on how different cultures understand the nature of knowledge, where it comes from, and what its purpose is. Fifteen years in colonial schools expose how Western models of education have been complicit in the oppression and destruction of tribal and indigenous peoples, and his contested initiation in his village offers a path to health and restoration that includes the spiritual world. For these and for so many other reasons,

Of Water and the Spirit is of direct import to many of the cultural, political, and pedagogical issues Waldorf education is grappling with today.

One of the central conflicts of Somé’s story is learning to be a person of two worlds, one in which reading-and writing-based literacy reigns supreme, and another in

which ancestral and tribal knowledge forms the basis of wisdom, transmitted orally from generation to generation. Students have plenty of opportunities throughout their schooling to encounter the former, but how often do they get to dig into the latter? This was the underlying goal of my newly designed class: what can become

possible when we displace Western models of literacy and allow students a chance to honor and participate in an oral culture?

Student Experiences of Deep Listening

On the first day of the World Literature course, the seniors filed into the classroom, much in the way described in the thought experiments above. Many of them were on their phones and milling about, while others sat quietly with their heads down on their desks. I started class by having everyone recite a poem from the book *flowers of a moment*, by the Korean poet Ko Un (2006), and as soon as we finished, one senior raised their hand and asked, “Are we gonna have to write a paper for this class?” I couldn’t have set it up better myself.

“No,” I replied simply, and many in the group breathed a collective sigh of relief. “What book are we reading?” another asked. When I responded that we wouldn’t be reading anything, six or seven of them started high-fiving each other and shouting. Many hands shot up with burning follow-up questions. I explained that we would not be reading or writing anything, and the proverbial “back row,” full of rowdy and restless students, typically boys, literally started cheering and hollering. I described that we were going to try to learn to listen, to really listen, and to listen in a way that acknowledges and honors as fully as possible the story of another person; I could feel that their interest was piqued. There was even a hush that began spreading over the room, an organic transition into a space of deep listening, and many students physically leaned forward in their seats to hear what I would say next. I also explained that we would tell stories, interview our elders (and, for the ones who were open to it, even our ancestors who had crossed the threshold); we would dream together about what an education centered around healing and transformation might look like.

The initial enthusiasm demonstrated by the students on that first day quickly gave way to the real work that lay ahead. I tested the waters during the first week of class to see where the students’ listening skills were, as we listened to Somé’s recorded recitation. What I observed in this pilot group was just a few inches shy of chaos. The amount of noise generated from moving chairs, fidgeting, stimming, eating, cross-talking, and rummaging through bags made it difficult to listen to the story. Some students, whose native language is not English,

found Somé’s accent a bit challenging. Others didn’t seem to be invested in either the story or the listening space. Two even fell asleep just five minutes into listening to the audiobook. They were used to being compelled into having to pay attention in order to answer questions on quizzes or tests or to write papers. In the absence of those extrinsic “carrot and stick” motivators, they had to decide for themselves if they were willing to bring themselves to the task. Based on what I was seeing, I realized that I would need to design a very specific series of listening experiments to help students

The underlying idea is that, through listening, we can become available to another person’s story, to their lived experience and to their truth, even if it seems to be in tension with our own.

become conscious of the moments in which they were able to listen to the story and those in which they were not available to listen, for whatever reason. I attempted to stay in the phenomenology of listening and action-based research, rather than fall into making judgments about what was occurring.

The first experiment I devised was sitting-themed. When students were given a chance to sit anywhere in the classroom, in whatever position they wanted, how did

that change their listening? After the first experiment, we did a review circle, which led to even bolder experimentation with a variety of listening options during the next session: students sitting in cubbies, sitting on each other’s laps, sitting with their heads down, and sitting at the piano, faintly tinkering with the piano keys. I asked them if they would change anything if Somé were not speaking to us from a recorded audiobook but were present in the room with us, and if so, *why* would they change their listening postures. One student remarked how they felt embarrassed by the others and how they were “misbehaving” and not listening. One of the students at whom the comment was aimed, who was sitting in a rather unusual way in a cubby, proceeded to recount the part of the story we had just listened to with exacting detail. A fascinating discussion about what we assume listening looks like (sitting still, being quiet, looking forward) and what is actual listening (could look like pretty much anything) ensued. We then repeated the experiment in an outdoor classroom and in the woods. After each session, we enacted a review circle to explore what happened.

For the second experiment, students were asked to use color to reflect their listening. My wording was deliberately open-ended, perhaps even ambiguous, so that students could reflect either how they were listening (process) or what they were listening to (content). Most ended up drawing the scenes that were being described

in the oral narration, but others made abstract patterns or doodled. We worked with different media and sometimes worked collectively. In the following week, we experimented with making lines on paper, another deliberately open-ended instruction that students would have to interpret. One asked, “Can I make a tally mark every time I hear something interesting?” Others started to form their own ideas. On the second day into that experiment, a “Waldorf lifer” explained that they chose to write and take notes in a fairly conventional way, because letters are just leaning and curved lines. Some classmates balked at that, stating that they weren’t allowed to write anything for the class. I corrected them saying that they weren’t *required* to write anything. That opened up an extremely vibrant and dynamic discussion about the nature of the written word, what it does and what it doesn’t do, where it comes from and what it signifies, in the larger sense. At the end of the week, one student confessed that they couldn’t help but want to write down the words they were hearing and that, for the first time, they were curious about where that urge came from.

We pushed the boundaries a little more in the fourth experiment, in which we incorporated movement into our listening. We tried working with beeswax, building stone cairns, and using balance boards in the school’s movement room while listening to the audiobook. Although I wasn’t expecting this to be the case, the space was most conducive to listening when the students were sculpting with beeswax. In the review, one student shared how they had to work just hard enough to keep them occupied by warming the beeswax and shaping without having to think too much about the wax, and they found they listened really well in that mode. The movement room experiment did not work at all for listening; the students simply couldn’t prevent themselves from running around, throwing balls, jumping, and wrestling. I wouldn’t consider the experiment a failure, though, as they later shared profound realizations about the kind of space they needed in order to be able to listen. The students also expressed their realization that even though they all believed they could multitask, they actually couldn’t. Only one student said they were able to listen the best in that setting, but they were still distracted by all the visual movement around them. Another aptly remarked that if they could have thirty minutes of free play in the movement room and then go back to the classroom to sit and listen, it would have been great. We decided to try a version of that scenario by going

outside to first play on fallen trees in the nearby woods and only then turn to listening, and they were right. It worked.

The last big experiment involved listening while eating and drinking, and it culminated in sharing a huge potluck featuring all kinds of West African cuisine. We sang blessings, tasted each other’s food, talked about cultural appropriation, wondered why there were so many Asian grocery stores but no African ones, and talked about the class so far.

In the final two weeks of the course, the emphasis shifted. With what the students learned about themselves through the various experiments, we moved from thinking about *how* we do or don’t listen to *why*. In other words, we asked, What makes someone want to listen, and what are we listening for? We stayed in the classroom, but I did not give any specifications about what they could or could not do while listening to the audiobook; I simply asked them to try to connect with our intentions, especially as they related to deep listening as a vehicle for compassion. Initially, there were some choices that I considered disrespectful, including one student sneaking up to the podium and increasing the narration speed so it sounded like Alvin the Chipmunk after thirty cups of coffee. However, like the day in the movement room, I did not consider these moments as failures. Instead, we ended up in a class discussion exploring the questions why we act in certain ways, whether we know what authentic choices feel like in our bodies, and, whether given the chance to drop the artifice or the act and do something “real,” could we? The silence in the room after I asked that last question was profound. We cleared something away and an even deeper listening became possible in the wake of the preceding chaos.

The choice of the word ‘content’ here, as opposed to ‘text,’ is essential: for this new literature course, there would be no reading. None at all.

Despite the impact of those moments in which something went astray, overall, the students’ deep listening capacities seemed to have really grown, as did their ability to respond from a deep place. We shifted our circle reviews to directly commenting on, relating to, and processing Somé’s experiences. My impression is that the students were able to share more measured

responses *because* they had several weeks’ time to listen to and slowly make space for Somé’s story and consider both the everyday and the seemingly impossible parts of his telling. And because the sharing happened in the context of the class, rather than individually and in writing, everyone’s voice was heard by everyone

else, and the students began to reference and respond to each other in organic ways.

In addition to the learning activities and experiments completed during class, I developed a very limited number of homework assignments that were carefully chosen according to a few criteria. First, the assignments had to be in the service of the decolonizing methodology of deep listening. Second, they had to be in a format that would have not been possible to complete during class (if it was, I would allot class time for doing the work, rather than assign it to be completed at home). Third, they needed to take less than twenty minutes to complete.

I alternated between story-gathering assignments and storytelling assignments. For the former, the students would interview people over the age of 65 about certain life experiences that related to Somé's story. The latter involved either bringing from home objects that connected them to Somé's life and telling stories about them or submitting audio files of a more curated story that they would then share in class if they wanted to. Finally, they would complete a final in-class oral storytelling project, in which they would each tell a story from their own life on one of the topics we had discussed.

The assignments proved to be incredibly powerful. Students who interviewed grandparents got to hear about one-room schoolhouses, hitchhiking, near-death experiences, and miraculous healings. They got to ask questions about war protests, farm equipment, losing one's religion, and immigration. Their interviews represented seven different languages and nine different countries. One student, whose family is from rural China, stopped referring to his grandparents as illiterate. Another casually remarked, "I feel like I was meeting my grandpa for the first time." Somé himself says that healing the connection between the very young and the very old and building this intergenerational bridge is one of the most important healing pathways in the world today. We didn't just talk *about* this healing potential; we experienced it.

The final storytelling circle, which lasted a week, was also full of poignant surprises. Some students deliberately chose anodyne stories because they didn't feel comfortable "getting too real," and they didn't know if such a choice was okay. Of course it was! Others talked about corrupt educational systems in their countries of origin, family conflicts, and navigating the complexities of their identities. Many talked about spiritual

experiences. One student in particular talked about seeing a fairy in the form of a light outside her window a couple of years ago, and a few of the other students began to snicker. She calmly said, "Please don't laugh; this is very important to me." A student who might be described as "academically challenged" told an incredibly compelling story of questioning his faith in God at the same time that his mother was being ordained as a priest. His voice was quiet but resolute when he explained that his family supported his questions, but they still expected him to come back to the church at the end of the day; he was trying to be okay with not knowing where his questions will lead. Some acted out their stories, requested the lights be turned off, or asked for audience participation.

I am confident that deep listening took place during the storytelling circles that took place throughout the class and that the big and little

suffering that living in this world entails was indeed lessened. One student shared how she had bought a sword on the internet at a time when she had intended to hurt herself, but due to many shipping delays, it took a very long time to arrive. By the time the sword was delivered, she no longer wanted to hurt herself. An object that used to signify her despair now gave her hope, reminded her that feelings change, that life gets better. Another student who rarely speaks in class simply said, "Wow, that's really powerful," and everyone nodded in collective agreement. It's difficult to describe the power of moments like these, how deeply they are permeated with love and compassion, how the atmosphere is completely transformed through the mutual act of speaking and listening from the heart. These encounters through embodied, ensouled, and even spiritually inspired language (though the students don't often think of it in these terms) restore relationships, both with others and with ourselves. The near-ineffability is part of the reason why I pursued this particular way of decolonizing the course methodology around oral storytelling. I felt that it was important to bring the stories out of a narrowly-defined, written-literacy-based academic context and into one that more actively tends to body, soul, and spirit.

We were going to try to learn to listen, to really listen, and to listen in a way that acknowledges and honors as fully as possible the story of another person.

Future Explorations

Although I consider this class to have been a clear success with the students, it was not necessarily universally welcomed by my colleagues. The biggest stumbling block was the fact that I taught an English class with no reading or writing, and that did not sit well with

some people. Our imaginations of what a literature class can be, should be, or must be are limited by a variety of factors, including the baggage we carry from our own education. From high school through college and into graduate school, we read books and wrote papers about them, and this conditioning makes it difficult to conceive of other ways of accessing and responding to stories. I have been challenging these norms for many years, going back to my time as a graduate student at Stanford University, where I made my first attempt of creating a literature course called “Living Voices in Francophone Literature.” I envisioned writing letters to the authors of the books we read, all of whom were alive, responding to short stories not with essays but with short stories of our own and designing alternative book covers. After much debate, my university department decided it would not approve the course unless it involved an MLA-formatted research paper as its final project.

These often unexamined academic norms privilege what Steiner might have called a “one-sided intellectual” way of thinking that relies on abstract knowledge and other people’s conclusions. Nevertheless, these norms still dominate much of our discourse on teaching and learning, and they made the decolonized class I designed at my Waldorf school seem not academic enough or rigorous enough. Even though I could cite abundant evidence of learning and growth in the students, that learning nevertheless diverged from the kind we are used to expecting, the kind we have been trained to value over all others. I was challenged by my colleagues to justify my course design and was asked to conform more to a standard scope and sequence and the previously approved UC articulations¹. In other words, decolonization of content was expected, even promoted, but decolonization of methodology and outcomes was not. Even explaining my class design through the lens of developing the twelve senses (Aeppli & Freilich, 2013) was not enough to pry it away from the “college prep” style expectations that we place on so much of our high school coursework.

It is my belief that Waldorf schools, particularly those in North America, but certainly elsewhere as well (see

Rawson, 2020), are in a profound moment of potential transformation. How can we reconnect with the care for and development of human growth and learning, as opposed to just “doing school”? I would like to clarify that I am in no way categorically opposed to writing essays, critical analysis, close reading, or any of the myriad skills that students are currently expected to learn before graduating high school. After all, I am relying on all of those skills in order to write this article and invite readers into conversation. They, too, have the potential of being transformative if we can figure out how to cultivate them through deep encounter and participation, rather than as rote intellectual exercises prematurely imposed on developing adolescents. I do believe that is the intention of most educators; we just need methodologies that are more aligned with our intentions, and it takes a great deal of courage and imagination in order to collectively invent them.

The alignment between our intentions in a Waldorf school—which I assume in the broadest sense is to attend to the development of the human being in body, soul, and spirit—and the standard practices of many high school classrooms, which involve tasks more aimed at performance than learning or growth, need constant tending and reassessment. The movement to decolonize our curriculum has served to highlight the fact that many people’s stories and lives, their epistemologies and ontologies, have been systematically excluded from our worldview. As a result, we end up perpetuating structures of oppression and miss our calling of creating an education that is a force for social change (Steiner 1919/1997). Because

social change is a living process, not an ideology or a body of content, decolonizing our methodologies is absolutely essential to our mission as an educational movement toward freedom and love. It means you can decolonize Dante and cell biology and German alike. It means you can decolonize watercolor and US history, because it’s about designing processes and encounter spaces where participation, not one-sided intellectual (or artistic or any other one-sided) performance is the goal. Our coursework, syllabi, policies, assignments, and assessment methods need to address these very real decolonizing axiologies that invite students to participate in and from their inherent wholeness.

As we continue to grapple with how to free ourselves from the influences of Eurocentricity, neoliberalism, and colonization that are necessarily entailed in “doing school” in this day and age, it is essential to turn our

Decolonizing our methodologies is absolutely essential to our mission as an educational movement toward freedom and love.

1 In order for a student to be admitted to a UC (University of California) college, California high schools have to submit course descriptions to be approved by the state. They expect rigorous reading lists, formal writing assignments, and globalized content. There are many creative ways to work with this bureaucratic requirement to maintain freedom in pedagogy and integrity with how we represent the Waldorf curriculum to the wider world.

attention not just to what we teach, but how we teach it. Even the fact of having departments in the high school is a vestige of an old positivist paradigm that separates types of knowledge and that ultimately separates knowledge from knower. Decolonizing beyond just content could take so many faces, from solutionary learning (Weil, 2015) to transdisciplinary inquiry (Montuori, 2012) to culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017), if only we would allow ourselves to imagine it. And surely we must make that effort, to imbue ourselves with the power of imagination, to have courage for the truth, and to sharpen our feeling for responsibility of soul.

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“The Good Life”

Ethical Philosophy at the Transition to Adulthood

Harlan Gilbert



A course in philosophy offers the chance for high school students to encounter and explore fundamental questions that have occupied humanity for thousands of years:

Who am I? What is reality? What is truth? What is the purpose of life?

At Green Meadow Waldorf School, an ethical philosophy block is intentionally placed at the end of the twelfth-grade year, when the pupils are at a critical moment in their lives. In a short time, their lives will no longer be largely under the direction of parents, teachers, and other guardians. All aspects of how they will live will then be under their own control. (In the terminology of Immanuel Kant, they are about to transition from a primarily *heterogeneous* to a primarily *autonomous* existence.)

I ask the students, in view of this impending change, to think about what kind of life they would wish to live. After journaling on this theme silently for a few minutes, they share their priorities with the rest of the class. Their responses are invariably diverse, but frequently heard themes include making a contribution to society, close relationships with friends and family, a successful career, financial stability, and personal happiness.

After all students have shared, I ask them whether any goals they heard from others resonated with them. Everyone always affirms that this was the case. I then ask if any goals were mentioned that were not part of their own image of a good life. The students have always indicated that the factors others gave voice to were also important to themselves, even if they did not list these among their main priorities. Those who stated that they want to serve others recognize that financial stability will be necessary to accomplish this; those who want to achieve a successful career recognize the importance of friends and family; and so on. From this, a sense arises that people largely share the same fundamental goals, even if we prioritize these differently.

An Overview of Philosophy

At this point, before diving into the course content, I situate our work within the field of philosophy. I start by examining what the world was like before philosophy, at a time when cultures relied on traditional wisdom. Those of us attending this school find it natural

to employ and to encounter self-driven rational inquiry. This has not always been the case.

Beginning around the sixth century BCE, many literate cultures went through a quite sudden and quite remarkable development. Perhaps you have heard of Laozi and Confucius in China, the Buddha in India, or Thales and Pythagoras in Greece. They all lived roughly around the sixth century BCE, and they all began philosophical traditions, traditions of individualistic thought, within their respective cultures. We know no names of any similar thinkers who preceded these figures. Through these pathbreakers, the way in which people looked for answers to the fundamental questions of life shifted from received wisdom, the traditions of myth and religion, to reasoned thinking and dialogue.

Karl Jaspers described this radical turn from the certainty of convention and tradition to the uncertainty of the questioning mind as “the axial age,” and it was he who pointed out that this happened in many cultures roughly contemporaneously.¹ There is a great mystery here: was this simultaneity the result of these particular cultures fructifying one another (we know there were extensive trade and communication routes even in antiquity)? Or was this flowering of philosophic discourse happening truly worldwide, even in cultures for which we have no records from this period, such as the Zapotec culture in Mesoamerica and the Kingdom of Kush in Northeast Africa? We may never be able to answer this question.

In any case, over the following centuries, cultures throughout Eastern and Southern Asia, North Africa, and Southeastern Europe saw an incredible bloom in thinking and writing, in attempts to use reason to understand the world. Thousands of works recording people’s reflective thoughts suddenly began to appear. A revolution had been achieved, a revolution that we take for granted today, but which must have been truly remarkable to live through.

This revolution represents the birth of philosophy, a word which literally means *love of wisdom* (“philo”=

1 Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London: Routledge, 2021; originally published in 1949). Jaspers’ picture is slightly oversimplified: there was arguably a rich tradition of religious philosophy in India from Vedic times, for example, but truly secular philosophy does seem to originate in the period Jaspers described.

love, “sophia”= wisdom). A philosopher is thus a person who loves wisdom and seeks to live wisely.

I describe philosophy as addressing three fundamental kinds of questions:

- Questions about the nature of the world and reality. Such questions are the realm of *ontology* and *metaphysics*.²
- Questions about how knowledge is attained and whether it can be trusted. These themes are the realm of *epistemology*.
- Questions about the value and aims of human existence, about how best to live. This is the realm of *ethics* or *moral philosophy*.³

This is the most ancient⁴ and enduring⁵ thematic division of philosophy, and for me its elegance and quintessential⁶ character are convincing, especially for the purpose of presenting students with an easily comprehensible set of basic questions. Some alternative divisions are in use today, however.

Though some explorations into the other areas are woven into the course, our primarily focus will be the central question of ethics with which we began: “What is a good life?”

Course Expectations

The course expectations are as follows:

- Students will read excerpts from philosophical works and discuss these in class.
- Each student keeps a *Philosophical Journal*, into which they enter each day reflections on the readings, class discussions, or any other philosophical theme, as well as quotations from their readings that touched them.
- Students research and write an essay on a philosophical theme of their choice. The possibilities

here are nearly infinite, as every aspect of human experience can be (and has been) approached philosophically!

There is no conventional main lesson book.

After gaining an initial overview of the field and reviewing the course expectations, we turn to the question: What light have philosophers over the ages shed on the question, “How should I live?”? I will describe here a few exemplary themes treated in the course.

Theme One: The Way (of Life)

Diverse ancient Greek philosophical schools all described the central goal of human existence as *eudaimonia*. This word is etymologically derived from *living in harmony* (“eu”) with *one’s guiding spirit* (“daimon”), but is most commonly rendered into English as *flourishing, fulfillment, or happiness*.

I ask the students whether living in flourishing, fulfillment, happiness, and harmony with the higher self seem like valuable goals to them. Are these aims related to the goals they described at the opening of the course, and if so, how?

As the students are considering the path they want their lives to take, the following quote, which opens one of the most significant spiritual texts of all time, gives pause:

“The path (<i>Tao</i>) that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging path.” ⁷	“The <i>Tao</i> (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal <i>Tao</i> .” ⁸
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What is Laozi suggesting about how we should live our lives? What is “the enduring and unchanging path”? What is similar and what is the difference between living in accordance with *eudaimonia* and following the *Tao*?⁹ How can we achieve either? As this passage is notoriously difficult to translate, I provide several alternative translations, enabling students to compare the nuances of each.

However they express the ultimate goals of life—whether *eudaimonia*, the *Tao*, or other formulations—philosophers from most classical cultures agreed that these goals are best achieved by following the path

2 Both metaphysics and ontology explore the nature of reality, but they ask somewhat different questions.
3 One important branch of ethical thought, *political philosophy*, asks these questions at a societal level.
4 By the 3rd century BCE, Zeno of Citium had already divided philosophy into questions about the world (*physics*), questions of knowledge (*logic*), and questions of how to live (*ethics*) (Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge (London, UK: Bell, 1895), 274.). I am not aware of any earlier meta-philosophical overview from any philosophical tradition.
5 For more than two thousand years, this division was widely accepted by Western philosophers. It is still sometimes deployed in treatments of both Western and Buddhist philosophy (e.g. Jon Nuttall, *An Introduction to Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002); Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).
6 For example, while aesthetics is sometimes considered to be a separate branch of philosophy, questions about how to *recognize* beauty are essentially epistemological in nature, while questions about what *constitutes* beauty are metaphysical and ontological. (The ethics of beauty has also been explored.)

7 Laozi, *The Tao Te Ching*, trans. James Legge (Waiheke Island: Floating Press, 2008), 8.
8 Laozi, “Tao-Te Ching,” in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, by Wing-tsit Chan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 139.
9 The word 道 can be transliterated as either *Tao* or *Dao*.

of virtue. Though being “virtuous” can sound priggish to modern ears, many philosophers meant something closer to living a balanced existence. Perhaps the earliest full articulation of this *Middle Way* philosophy is that of the fifth-century BCE Chinese philosopher Zisi, who advises his readers to “maintain the mean at any time,” for “[e]quilibrium is the great foundation of the world, and harmony its universal path.”¹⁰

Aristotle explained the Middle Way path of ethical virtue¹¹ very concretely by considering a series of particular qualities of soul. Consider, for example *honesty*. Now ask yourselves: Can someone have too little honesty? Well, we could say that a habitual liar has too little honesty. But could there also be an excess of honesty—are there times when you don’t want someone to be completely honest? We might call the excess of honesty *tactlessness*.¹²

What would describe a balanced level of honesty, the middle ground between a deficit of honesty, lying, and too much honesty, being tactless? We might call this balance, “tactful honesty.”

The following chart shows the balance between the extremes:

Deficit	Balance, Middle Way	Excess
Dishonesty, lying	Tactful honesty	Tactlessness

Aristotle suggests that each person must determine for themselves where this balance is found, individually and situationally. This is what makes Aristotle’s approach so modern: instead of setting forth an absolute morality—“always be honest”—he recognizes that the middle path of virtue is to be in balance, and that any absolutism represents a dangerous extremism.

Let’s choose another quality: peacefulness. Can there be too much peacefulness? What would this look like? Perhaps laziness or inertia?

Can there also be too little peacefulness? Irritableness, agitation, anxiety, or even hyperactivity might come to mind.

10 Zisi, “The Doctrine of the Mean,” in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, by Wing-tsit Chan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 98–99. Buddha also articulated a Middle Way philosophy, but original articulation of this is usually understood to refer to a mean between sensualism and asceticism; later Buddhist philosophy, particularly the Mahayana tradition, first generalized this.

11 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapters 6–9.

12 In the discussion, I let the students come up with the terms to describe deficits, excesses, and balances.

What would be the balance between too much and too little peacefulness? Shall we call this calm? Or is peacefulness itself a good description?

Let’s add this new polarity to our chart:

Deficit	Balance	Excess
Agitation	Calm, peacefulness	Laziness, inertia
Dishonesty	Tactful honesty	Tactlessness

I encourage my readers to explore other qualities. What about generosity, love, pride? (It is also possible to start with one of the extremes, e.g., grumpiness, naivety, or aggressiveness, and derive the middle point and the other extreme from this.)

Rather than expecting unrealizable perfection (complete honesty, complete serenity, complete generosity, complete self-abnegation, etc.), Middle Path philosophers focus on achieving a healthy balance, on finding a middle ground. This seems remarkably modern in several respects. It is situational: we are free to find the middle path in each situation on its own merits. It is individual: each person is responsible for determining where the balance lies for them. It is dynamic: the healthy balance need not be located at some abstract middle-point between the extremes, but can tend toward one extreme or the other—for example, we might prefer to lean toward more, rather than less, honesty or generosity.

Theme Two: Non-Attachment

Does happiness or success in life depend solely on ourselves, or is it dependent upon what external circumstances bring to us? In what have become known as the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha taught that a successful life depends on achieving non-attachment:

- Suffering suffuses the lives of all experiencing beings.
- Attachment to things is the root of suffering. (The Buddha went on to specify three typical kinds of objects to which people become attached: attachment to sensory pleasures or objects, to one’s identity or experiences, and to avoidance of particular experiences, or experience *per se*.)
- When attachments cease, suffering will be overcome.
- To free oneself from false attachments, it is necessary to practice self-improvement, with the goal

of achieving Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This is known as the Eightfold Path.

I ask the students to reflect on the role suffering has played in their lives. I invite my readers to do the same. Consider the following:

- Was the source of this suffering attachment?
- Would it have been possible, would it have been better, to not have had the attachments that led to your suffering?
- Are you in some way thankful for something suffering brought to you?

Stoic philosophers formulated a strikingly parallel philosophy of non-attachment. Compare Epictetus' approach:

[I]f you are averse only to what is against nature among the things that are up to you, then you will never fall into anything that you are averse to; but if you are averse to illness or death or poverty, you will meet misfortune. So detach your aversion from everything not up to us, and transfer it to what is against nature among the things that are up to us... What upsets people is not things themselves but their judgments about the things.¹³

Is it really only our own judgments that upset us? Should we never blame anything external to us for our emotions and reactions? The discussions on these themes are lively.

[R]emind yourself that what you love is mortal, that what you love is not your own; it has been granted to you just for the present, not irrevocably, and not for ever, but like a fig or bunch of grapes, for a particular season of the year; so that if you long for it in the winter, you're a fool. And likewise, if you long for your son or friend at a time when he's no longer granted to you, you should know that you're longing for a fig in winter. For as winter is to a fig, so is every circumstance that arises from the general order of things in relation to the things that are destroyed in accordance with that circumstance. From now on, whenever you take delight in anything, call to mind the opposite impression; what harm is there in your saying beneath your breath as you're kissing your child, 'Tomorrow you'll die'?'¹⁴

This raises many questions. Should a person not be attached to their friends, siblings, or children? Is this truly a Middle Way philosophy, or should we perhaps seek a balance? What kind of attachment is balanced? Is it possible to attain a kind of love that cares for its objects without striving to hold on to these? Relationships between parents and children, between friends, and between lovers provide rich example for our discussions.

Theme Three: Improving the World by Improving Oneself

A next theme of the block takes an outward turn. An important aspect of ethics is how to improve the world. In the block, this has two phases.

In the first phase, we investigate the path to societal transformation articulated by Martin Buber, a twentieth-century German Jewish philosopher. Buber suggested that when we see a problem in the world, before trying to change the world, it is important to go through the following preliminary steps:

- First, find how this problem manifests or is reflected in *yourself*.
- Second, heal or overcome the problem in *your own being*.
- Third, now go out to heal or overcome the problem *in the world*.

I ask the students why these steps might make a person a more effective change agent. They identify a number of factors. Rather than repeating these here, I leave readers free to contemplate this question and come up with their own answers.

A second exercise is based on Steiner's ethical philosophy.¹⁵ Inspired by Kant's radical affirmation of the autonomous moral will,¹⁶ Steiner believed that each person (1) can discover through acts of individual intuition those moral ideals they wish to live by, (2) can visualize how to apply the chosen principles to real situations (without such vision, ideals remain impractical), and (3) having visualized the needed change, can determine what practical skills (including social skills to build coalitions and technical skills to build sustainable structures) would support accomplishing the desired change.

I will describe the process we go through in class, but I urge the readers to go through this process themselves

13 Epictetus, *The Handbook (The Encheiridion)*, trans. Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 12.

14 Epictetus, "Discourses," in *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 207.

15 Rudolf Steiner, *Intuitive Thinking As a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom*, trans. Michael Lipson (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1995). Chapter 12.

16 See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals and Critique of Practical Reason*.

to experience its transformative power. At each of the four invitations below, therefore, please take a moment to really respond to the question posed.

I ask each student to choose any social issue important to them, an aspect of the world that they find in some way problematic.

(I invite the readers to identify an aspect of the world they find problematic.)

Once students have chosen an issue, I ask them to consider what moral principle they believe should be at work in this issue. What ethical idea should guide this aspect of the world, but is not yet doing so?

(I invite the readers to determine what ethical principle they feel should be at work in their chosen theme.)

Next, I ask what concrete change would take place if this principle were to take hold in this particular area. At this stage, it is important to describe the envisioned implementation of this moral principle in as concrete terms as possible.

(I invite the readers to consider how, if this ethical principle were to be followed, they envision the world changing.)

Third, what social or practical skills would enable people to achieve the change you described in part two? What would you, in particular, have to learn to contribute to achieving this transformation?

(I invite the reader to consider what concrete skills would be necessary to accomplish the change?)

Each student then presents the social problem they identified, the moral principle they would wish to see realized in this realm, their image of what would be different if this moral principle were fulfilled, and the practical steps that would be needed to effect this change.

All three stages offer the possibility of deeply individual insights. For example, one year, sensitized by extensive media reports of police shootings, two students chose the theme of police violence. Strikingly, when it came to visualizing a solution in this area, one aimed at better education of police, so they would have a wider toolkit of responses to the situations they will confront and awareness of when to use what response, while the other aimed to enact stricter laws regulating police that provided effective consequences for misbehavior. These radically different approaches brought home to the students that it is possible to have a diversity of responses to the same social challenges.

This is what makes Aristotle’s approach so modern: instead of setting forth an absolute morality—“be honest”—he recognizes that the middle path of virtue is to be in balance.

Theme Four: Applied Ethics

There are many themes of burning contemporary societal relevance that resonate with young adults. As questions of social justice are at the forefront of many people’s minds today, I will illustrate my approach to a theme within this general area: the role of punishment in a justice system.

I begin with the question: If someone purposefully injured you or someone close to you, what would you wish would be done to the perpetrator in response? While virtually everybody feels that something should be done, what this ‘something’ is differs from person to person. To go deeper, I ask about the goal of these responses.

What are they intended to accomplish? Responses to wrongdoing are generally justified by one of the following:

- To take revenge on the wrongdoer (or that person’s family or friends)¹⁷
- To prevent wrongdoers from committing further crimes (e.g., by incarcerating them)
- To dissuade others from doing wrong
- To enable or to obligate wrongdoers to make amends for their wrongdoing
- To rehabilitate wrongdoers

Here are some thoughts on the theme from the 19th century English philosopher John Stuart Mill:

There are some who say, that it is unjust to punish any one for the sake of example to others; that punishment is just, only when intended for the good of the sufferer himself. Others maintain the extreme reverse, contending that to punish persons who have attained years of discretion, for their own benefit, is despotism and injustice, since if the matter at issue is solely their own good, no one has a right to control their own judgment of it; but that they may justly be punished to prevent evil to others, this being the exercise of the legitimate right of self-defense. Mr. Owen [a social reformer]... affirms that it is unjust to punish at all; for the criminal did not make his own character; his education, and the circumstances which surrounded him, have made him a criminal, and for these he is not responsible. All these opinions are extremely plausible; and so

¹⁷ It may seem unlikely that a modern society would take revenge on family and friends, but there are countless examples: the 2001 US attack on Afghanistan (the hosts of the real perpetrators), Israeli policy of destroying the homes of family members of suicide bombers, etc.

long as the question is argued as one of justice simply, without going down to the principles which lie under justice and are the source of its authority, I am unable to see how any of these reasoners can be refuted. For in truth every one of the three builds upon rules of justice confessedly true. The first appeals to the acknowledged injustice of singling out an individual, and making a sacrifice, without his consent, for other people's benefit. The second relies on the acknowledged justice of self-defense, and the admitted injustice of forcing one person to conform to another's notions of what constitutes his good. The Owenite invokes the admitted principle, that it is unjust to punish any one for what he cannot help. Each is triumphant so long as he is not compelled to take into consideration any other maxims of justice than the one he has selected; but as soon as their several maxims are brought face to face, each disputant seems to have exactly as much to say for himself as the others. No one of them can carry out his own notion of justice without trampling upon another equally binding.¹⁸

The class is invited to discuss whether our current justice system is effective in achieving any of these aims. Alternative approaches are considered, such as South Africa's "Truth and Reconciliation Committees" and the application of transformative justice in post-genocide Rwanda. Both of these were inspired by *Ubuntu*, an ethical principle that centers community and the restoration of community:

Ubuntu is a Zulu social and ethical concept which literally means human-ness, those composite qualities which constitute the core of what it means to be human... it is a quality of personhood which is rooted in one of the most important African ethical concepts, i.e., reciprocal relationships as the ground of being and becoming human. This concept is expressed in Zulu as umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, i.e., a person is a person through other persons.

This idea of coming into being and achieving the fullness of our human-ness in and thru relationships is perhaps best known from John Mbiti's maxim, "I am because we are and, because we are therefore I am." Adding agency to this fundamental principle, Kawaiida philosophy posits it as "I

am related and I relate therefore I am." Or in the collective, we are related and relate; therefore, we are. In other words, we come into being and come into the fullness of ourselves in and thru reciprocal relationship. And these rightful relationships are rooted in our human identities as both social and natural beings, and must be aligned in such a way that we truly feel at home in and with the world.

Ubuntu is also an ethical and spiritual foundation for building and living a truly human life, and a social and political ideal towards which we constantly strive. Its core values seek not only to cultivate a truly human person, but also a truly human society and world. Some of these core values are: mutual respect, mutual caring, mutual sharing, harmonious living together and a shared commitment to the ongoing work of peace thru justice. Again, at the heart of the concept and practice of Ubuntu is the value reciprocity in relationship and practice. Indeed, reciprocity or mutual responsiveness inform and undergird each principle and practice of Ubuntu.¹⁹

The principle of Ubuntu has relevance beyond its transformative power in the justice system. Might its centering of community provide a healing counterbalance in other areas where individualism has gone to excess? In our increasingly polarized society, are "mutual respect, mutual caring, mutual sharing, harmonious living together and a shared commitment to the ongoing work of peace thru justice" perhaps what we are missing?

At this point, I show videos of individuals from Rwanda, Israel, and the United States expressing friendship and solidarity with those who had previously grievously injured them and their families. I ask the students: Could you forgive those who have transgressed against you and welcome them back into community with you? Even if this forgiveness is predicated on the transgressors

coming to genuine remorse, many find it difficult to comprehend the congregants of the South Carolina Emanuel AME Church who reached out to express their forgiveness to the perpetrator after a terrible massacre was committed during a Sunday service,²⁰ or the

Ubuntu is a Zulu social and ethical concept, which literally means human-ness, those composite qualities which constitute the core of what it means to be human.

18 John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," in *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 168.

19 Maulana Karenga, "The Ideal and Ethics of Ubuntu," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 24, 2010, <https://lasentinel.net/the-ideal-and-ethics-of-ubuntu.html>.

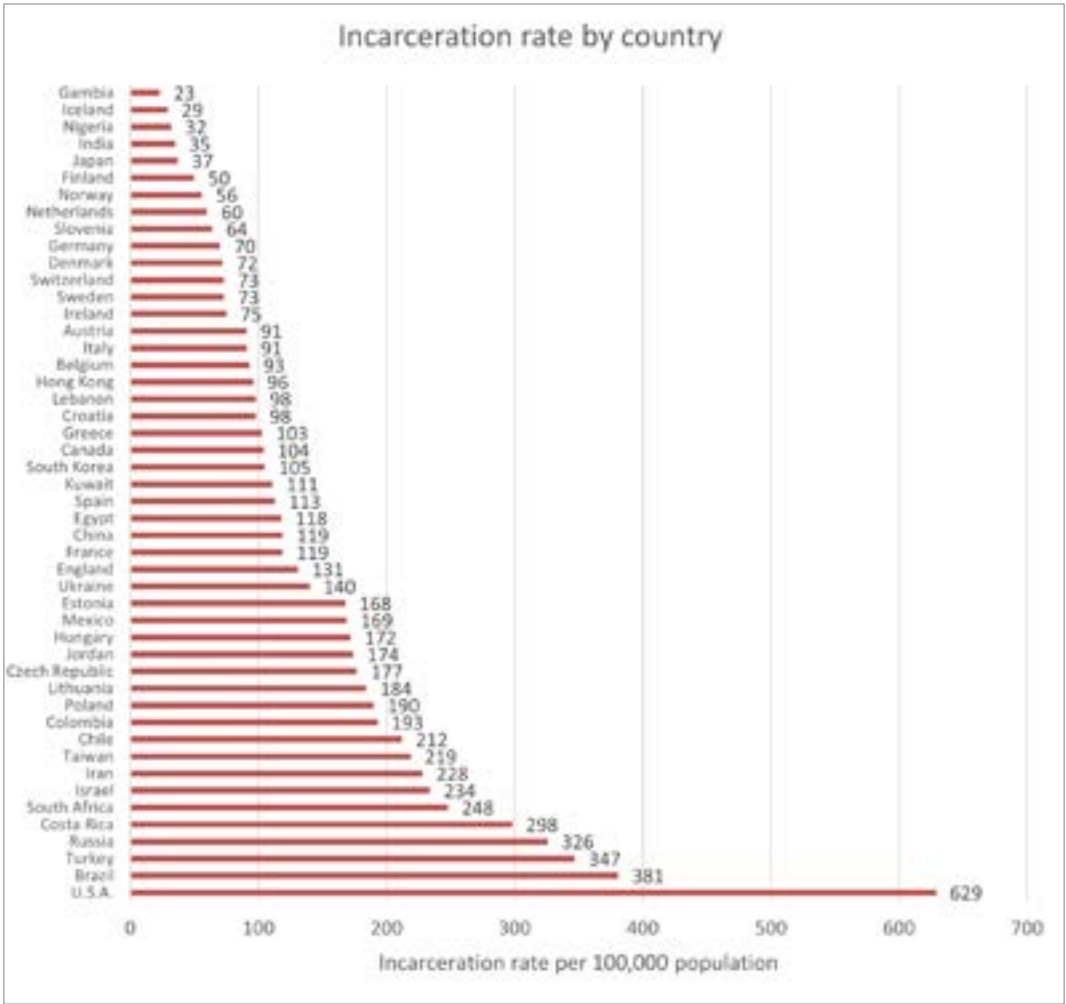
20 Mark Berman, "'I Forgive You.' Relatives of Charleston Church Shooting Victims Address Dylann Roof," *Washington Post*, October 26, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/19/i-forgive-you-relatives-of-charleston-church-victims-address-dylann-roof/>.

mother who speaks of the person who had killed her child as “her spiritual son.”²¹

I find it impossible to leave the subject of justice and punishment without considering the incarceration rate in the United States in its historical and world context (see charts below). Questions I invite the class to ponder include:

- The US incarceration rate is almost quadruple the median rate of 141 persons per 100,000.²² Why does the United States, the self-proclaimed land of the free, imprison a far higher percentage of its residents than any other country?

- How are countries such as Gambia, Iceland, Nigeria, India, and Japan able to achieve such low incarceration rates?
- Why has the imprisoned population in the United States increased so dramatically over recent years?
- What are we trying to achieve with incarceration, and is the means effective in achieving these ends?



Data from World Prison Brief’s World Prison Population List (13th edition), 2023. Image by author.

21 Rachel Bird, “Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel,” *The Forgiveness Project* (blog), accessed March 18, 2023, <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories-library/mary-johnson-oshea-israel/>.
22 Helen Fair and Roy Walmsley, “World Prison Population List (13th Edition)” (World Prison Brief, 2021), https://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/world_prison_population_list_13th_edition.pdf.



Public domain image by the November Coalition. URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_incarceration_timeline-clean.gif, accessed March 10, 2023

Theme Five: Ontology

At some point in the block, I try to give a brief sense of the questions about the fundamental nature of the world that metaphysics and ontology raise. I open with explorations of early philosophers, as their pregnant statements gives rise to fascinating discussions:

You cannot step into the same river twice.

(Heraclitus, Fragments)

Why not? What does this say about the world, and what does it say about those stepping into it?

Thirty spokes are united around the hub to make a wheel,

But it is on its non-being that the utility of the carriage depends.

Clay is molded to form a utensil,

But it is on its non-being that the utility of the utensil depends.

Doors and windows are cut out to make a room,

But it is on its non-being that the utility of the room depends.

(Laozi, Tao Te Ching, 11)

Again, if this is a statement about the world, is it also a statement about human beings?

A second portal, if there is time, leads us to explore the ontology of the human being. A slightly modified version of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs provides an easy entry path:

Ontological aspect of the human being	Needs á la Maslow
Physical body	Physical security (protection from bodily harm or death)
Physiological processes	Nourishment (food, water, air), warmth (clothing and housing), exercise, sexual fulfillment
Psychological experience	Friendship, happiness, enjoyment, interest, activity
Selfhood	Self-respect, respect from others, sense of direction, freedom
	Self-actualization, ability to grow, ideals

I have purposely left the last entry on the ontological side blank, as people prefer various terms for that aspect of ourselves that seeks to grow, to become more than what we already are—in Maslow’s terminology, to self-actualize. In this context, the question of whether what people seek is to fulfill our destiny can be tentatively raised.

Conclusion

The topics I cover in this philosophy course represent a very personal choice, and any reader will no doubt see other fruitful possibilities. Discussions in class usually begin with one or two students reading either a quotation or a personal reflection from their journals. Lively and self-sustaining conversations take wing and bear many surprises, as philosophical themes naturally lend themselves to analogy, example, personal reflection, and other well-springs of fruitful ideation.

My main goal is to enable students to contemplate more deeply. Philosophy is a means of expanding one’s ideas and interests, a step toward inner freedom.

In a very real sense, all that we take up unquestioningly has us in its thrall. This was powerfully brought home to me one year, when a group of teachers who had come from China to visit a variety of school types in the United States came to Green Meadow. We happened to be the last school they were visiting before they returned to

China. The group visited my philosophy main lesson, over several days, on one of which students were giving short reports on the themes they had investigated for their independent projects. Fortuitously, one student that year happened to present Marx’s philosophy in a very positive light. At the end of their visit, the teachers asked to speak to me. They told me that over the whole visit to the United States, these philosophy lessons had most clearly showed them the difference between education in the two countries. Philosophy lessons in China, they informed me, were meant to train students in the proper Marxist-Leninist-Maoist way of thought. It was unthinkable to express criticism or divergent opinions. To see students freely discussing and critiquing philosophical ideas was startling to them, and that in the US, students could quite positively cite socialist ideas without fear of repercussions really brought home to them the extreme difference between the societies.

Earlier in the year, our students are offered a main lesson dedicated to exploring American Voices such as Emerson’s, Thoreau’s, and Frederick Douglas’. The Ethical Philosophy course complements the earlier offering by incorporating a much broader cultural and historical range of voices, making it possible to situate these American voices in a broader historical tradition. This is in line with one of the most important aims of the final school year, “an overview of the connections within history” that fosters a comparative understanding across time and traditions.²³

By exposing students to one of the central disciplines of human experience, this block can be an important preparation for young people getting ready to make a transition to independent study and life. Over the years, many alumni have told me that the senior philosophy course inspired them to take philosophy classes in college. Others have shown me their heavily highlighted copies of the source book we draw on for many of our texts, *The Good Life*.²⁴

I hope you, dear readers, might be equally stimulated; I will have fully succeeded if one or two of you are furiously journaling away right now!

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23 Rudolf Steiner, *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner: 1922-1924*, trans. Robert Lathe and Nancy Parsons Whittaker, vol. 2, *Foundations of Waldorf Education* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1998), 738.

24 Charles Guignon, *The Good Life* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999).



Between Worlds

The Fairytale as a Threshold Experience¹

Holly Koteen-Soulé

During the past three years, we early childhood educators have had to open our arms wider than ever and reach even deeper for the inner strength to meet all of the seemingly endless challenges. What has kept us going? How do human beings face the little bumps in the road and the huge gaping chasms? Not surprisingly, this is the stuff of the fairytale world.

For thousands of years the cultural wisdom of previous generations was passed down through stories. In our current times, stories are seen less as guides for our development, and more as entertainment, especially when they come to us through technology. Because of this, I wonder if modern human beings understand or even grasp the inherent power of stories and storytelling, not only for children, but for all of us.

At a recent conference where I was asked to speak about fairytales, I asked listeners to participate in a short experiment in order to explore this question. I asked each person to find a partner and for both partners to share a favorite fairytale, story, or book that they treasured as a child, as well as any thoughts they might have about how they felt connected to that story.

The participants offered a variety of comments: they were transported back to their childhood; the memories still felt real in every detail; the partners experienced finding a common ground. Participants were then asked to describe what happened to the space between the partners and how it changed during their conversation. A few more comments were offered.

What happened is an occurrence that we can easily take for granted. In sharing our biographical experiences—our stories—something arose between us that did not previously exist. From what was it created? It arose out of our imaginations! Together, our imaginations created something that did not previously exist; it brought to life something that was only potential or seed-like in our souls.

When I started thinking about how early childhood teachers could deepen our capacities in relation to fairytales and storytelling, a particular phrase kept coming to mind, “between worlds.” Between worlds is where stories live. They live between my world and

your world, between the visible world and the invisible world, between the physical world and the soul world, between cultures, between generations, between individuals and humanity.

Stories live in the space between! They mediate between our physical-bodily nature and our soul-spiritual nature, between the worlds within us and the worlds outside of us. They form a bridge between different realms of life and bring us to the threshold where we can experience the concurrent reality of more than one world.

The Oral Story as Guide, Teacher, and Healer

A 1979 issue of the magazine *Parabola* focused on Storytelling in Education. Among the articles was a short piece by depth psychologist, James Hillman, titled “A Note on Story,” that moved me deeply. In this piece Hillman wrote about “story-awareness” as an indicator of soul resilience in his clients:

To have had stories in childhood, oral stories, rather than watching them on a screen, puts a person into a basic recognition and familiarity with the legitimate reality of story. It is something given with life, with speech and communication, not something that comes later with literature. Coming early in life, it is already a perspective on life. One integrates life as a story because one has stories in the back of the mind (unconsciously) as containers for organizing events into meaningful experiences.²

It is my firm conviction that unless we Waldorf teachers have a sincere grasp of the power and wisdom inherent in the images that live in myths, folk and fairytales, we cannot embrace or embody these universal truths in such a way as to keep that bridge between worlds open for the children. In actuality, the bridge exists for them when they are very young, and the real danger is that we inadvertently destroy it or teach them not to trust it.

Joseph Campbell was a collector of stories who spoke about how the picture language of fairytales encompasses both the path of the individual soul and universal

¹ This essay is based on a presentation given by the author at the Northern California/Nevada WECAN Early Childhood Regional Conference, November 2022.

² James Hillman, *A Note on Story* (Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition: Parabola, Volume IV, No 4, November 1979), 43.

human experience. While the motifs of folk and fairytales are “plucked from the tree of myth,” the stories themselves are artistic revelations of eternal principles through earthly, mortal things. Fairytale descriptions, he explains, while not being naturalistic, are nonetheless, precise expressions of spiritual realities. If there was ever an art that the whole human community worked on, it is the folk and fairytale. Campbell wrote: “The folktale is a primer of the picture-language of the soul.”³ Campbell calls these stories instruments of “instructive wonder.”

These wonder tales have arisen and evolved in every culture. While certain symbols may be unique to a specific culture, researchers, more often than not, have found common elements, themes, and types of characters among the fairytales from a variety of cultures.

Sacred Stories

Not all stories speak to us in our deepest soul. Anne and Charles Simpkinson gathered together and published talks by a variety of individuals who presented at a conference on Sacred Stories. In their introduction to their book, they quoted Jane Yolen, a well-known author of children’s books. For Yolen, sacred stories are those that tell us who we are and how we are related to the world and the gods. The Simpkinsons highlight two essential aspects of sacred stories. The first is that they allow for a transformation in the self. The second is that they connect us to our fellow human beings. It seems to me that social life in our current times is longing for both of these elements. In their view, the content of sacred stories is less important than the process it ignites within the listener. Even if we do not understand the message intellectually, we are still aware of the profundity of the lesson.⁴ This is always the case for children.

For Joseph Bruchac, a storyteller from the Abenaki Nation, the story “is a living presence.” This is a particularly notable quality of storytelling in indigenous cultures. For Bruchac, telling a story is like calling on the gods. At times, the storyteller can feel as if the story is telling itself.⁵

When I started thinking about how early childhood teachers could deepen our capacities in relation to fairytales and storytelling, a particular phrase kept coming to mind, “between worlds.”

For me, the essential characteristics of a true fairytale are transformation and healing. In a fairytale, the outer experiences bring the main character to a crisis that can only be met by reaching into the depths of the soul life. There are, however, always helpers in the crisis. The helpers may be nature elements, enchanted beings, animals endowed with magical powers, or wise men or women, often disguised as beggars or ordinary people. Through the successful navigation of the crisis, the soul is transformed and healing occurs. Clarissa Pinkola Estes (author of *Women Who Run with Wolves*) refers to the flow of images in a story as “medicine.”⁶

Waldorf educators know that the fairytale proper is deep soul nourishment for the kindergarten child and the first grader. We offer simpler stories to younger children that are appropriate to their stage of development. Each kind of story builds a foundation for the growing story-awareness within the child.

For example, stories for the one- and two-year-old are typically concrete, because at that age, young children are discovering the world. Stories of everyday things and events help preserve their inborn capacity for *wonder*. Rhythmic stories, in which concrete and magical elements exist side by side, support the development and understanding of *relationships* for the three- and four-year-old. Folk and fairytales, as culminating story experiences for the first seven-year period, build the capacity for creative *imagination* in the five- to seven-year-old child.

Archetypes and Stereotypes

In exploring fairytales in our current times, we need to acknowledge concerns about cultural stereotypes that appear to be at odds with our desire not to perpetrate harmful biases. Understanding the important difference between a stereotype and an archetype can be enormously helpful.

The word “archetype” is derived from the Greek, meaning original pattern or model. In Plato’s philosophical treatises, archetype meant ideal form. Carl Jung, the psychologist, studied both dreams and mythology from many cultures. Out of his research he formed a theory of a collective unconscious within which can be found universal symbols and images that he called

3 Joseph Campbell, Folkloristic Commentary in *The Complete Grimm’s Fairytales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1944 / 1972), 864.

4 Anne and Charles H. Simpkinson, *Sacred Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1.

5 Ibid, 2.

6 Ibid, 6.

archetypes. It was primarily his work that brought the word “archetype” into common usage in literature as well as psychology.

One of C. G. Jung’s gifts to psychology was the notion that we are all of the characters in our dreams. Like the dreamer, the listener is, in the same way, related to all of the characters in a fairy tale. In a fairytale, each and every aspect of the soul is in conversation with all of the other aspects.

There are several authors that offer interpretations of the images and symbols in well-known fairytales. While these resources can be helpful, the beauty of a symbol is that it can have more than one, and sometimes many layers of meaning. It is a good practice to think about all of the various meanings of a fairytale image, such as an apple, a shoe, a wall, a key, a gate, a dark forest, a desert, a sea monster.

If the images in folk and fairytales are truly connected to our universal human consciousness, then, in time, we can learn to trust our own capacity to discover what is being revealed through the pictures being presented. This, of course, requires dedicating time and effort to contemplating and living with the images, characters, and themes of the story that we are preparing to tell. However, it is also important to do research on the meanings of symbols in cultures with which we are less familiar. In studying African fairytales, for example, I learned that the frog often serves the role of a messenger.

While an archetype is an image in which many people can see themselves reflected, stereotypes are over-generalizations that are limiting and not open to new information. We can all think of many racial, cultural, and gender stereotypes that exist in popular culture. We can also find stereotypes in some traditional stories. We can also find modern themes in traditional stories, for example, stories about non-binary gender characters or that contain role reversals. Our task is to choose stories that speak livingly to us and meet the soul needs of the children in our classes.

Timeless Treasures

If we allow ourselves to be educated by the deep wisdom of the truly universal folk and fairytales that have been passed down through the ages, then we can also become genuine story creators. We can engage in all aspects of the story process with greater confidence, including reshaping a traditional tale, fashioning a nature story, or developing a therapeutic story for a class or an individual child.

The gifts to children from humanity’s storytelling heritage are many, but three gifts stand out to me as especially critical in our times.

1. Through the oral story and fairytale, children experience the radical power of the *imagination*.
2. They receive an education in *trust*, trust in oneself, in our helpers and in the web of our relationships.
3. They take in the *goodness* that is contained in the great basket of sacred world stories.

Stories also help us learn how to compose a life, according to Mary Catherine Bateson. From the visual arts, she says, we learn about balance of elements. From the musical arts, we learn how to work with transitions in time. In stories, we find lenses for interpreting our experiences. This process is not a matter of establishing a true or false narrative, but rather a recognition that we have freedom to choose how to frame our lives.⁷

The oral stories of childhood are like seeds nestled in the soul that remain until they are needed as “picture medicine” to help us solve our life’s riddles. A seed is built up from the forces of earth, water, air, and, finally, the sacrifice of fire. Once formed, it remains suspended outside of time, eternal, until the conditions for regeneration are met. In the first stage of growth, the inner physical substance of the seed dissolves itself entirely, as it gives rise to the new seedling. In the soul, the renewed spiritual pattern or archetype flames up and shines like a light on what might otherwise be an unpredictable and perilous path!

Holly Koteen-Soulé received her BA and MA from Antioch University in Seattle and studied Waldorf education at Emerson College. She was a Waldorf Early Childhood teacher for 25 years, first at the Seattle Waldorf School and then at the Bright Water School, where she taught Kindergarten and also pioneered the first Parent and Child classes in the Seattle area. She was a founding member of Sound Circle Center for Arts and Anthroposophy and is currently serving as its Director of Early Childhood Education. She is a member of the WECAN Board and served as the WECAN Coordinator of Teacher Education for five years. She is also member of the Pedagogical Section Council of the Anthroposophical Society.

⁷ Mary Catherine Bateson, *Sacred Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 41.

Fairy Tale Pedagogy¹

Peter Lawton



I. Pedagogy vs. Curriculum

Pedagogy refers to the art and science of teaching and learning. The term “pedagogy” is generally employed to distinguish *how* we teach and learn from *what* we teach and learn, which is denoted by the more ubiquitous and familiar term “curriculum.”² *Pedagogy*, or *how* we teach and learn, might refer to different teaching methods (e.g., teaching through art or stories) or various learning styles (e.g., learning experientially or conceptually). On the other hand, *curriculum*, or *what* we teach and learn, might refer to a topic, subject, or discipline (e.g., math), a fact or datum (e.g., $6 \times 8 = 48$), or the development of a particular skill or capacity (e.g., how to factor polynomials). The next section will explore in more depth what is meant by the “art” and “science” of teaching and learning. But, first, let’s take a short detour and examine some of the differences between *pedagogy*—*how* we teach and learn—and *curriculum*—*what* we teach and learn. By way of preview.

1. Fairy Tales or Other Stories May Constitute Learning Goals or Curriculum

Fairy tales may be taught as a learning or instructional goal, although this approach, I argue, is largely developmentally inappropriate for young children. Fairy tales are one of the *pedagogical centerpieces* of the Waldorf kindergarten and first grade, and the telling of folktales and myths runs throughout the Waldorf primary and intermediate grades. Notice, however, that fairy tales are described here as *pedagogical* as opposed to *curricular*. In fact, Waldorf teachers don’t *teach* fairy tales. Rather, they *tell* them. And students don’t *learn* fairy tales. They *listen* to them. In other words, fairy tales are predominantly *experiential* in Waldorf pedagogy, as will be explored in more depth below. Fairy tales are also *pedagogical*, meaning that they are used as a teaching method, and that will be explored below too. But when it comes to young children, fairy tales are not really *curricular*. When young children listen to fairy tales, they are *not* learning about fairy tales in the same way that,

when they play, they are *not* learning about play. Yes, young children are learning when they play, but play is one of the *methods* through which they learn, not the learning goal itself.

The fairy tales told to young children may constitute a method or *pedagogy* through which they may learn all sorts of wonderful things, many of which are not *things* at all! Additionally, and as explored in more detail further below, fairy tales provide children with *experiences* to develop and become, to *know* and *be*! In other words, the fairy tale told to young children may provide an *instructional pedagogy* and/or an *educational experience*.

2. Fairy Tales or Other Stories May Constitute a Teaching Method or Pedagogy

Fairy tales may be used as a teaching method, pedagogy, approach, or instructional “tool.” More specifically, fairy tales may comprise a medium through which learners may gain knowledge of the world or develop real-world skills. In one example, fairy tales may provide a narrative lens through which students may gain knowledge about, or develop skills in, math, writing, geography, history, science, and other academic disciplines. In another example, fairy tales may provide an imaginative landscape in which learners may practice thinking skills, such as isolating variables or comparing and contrasting. In yet another example, fairy tales may offer a dramatic venue for discussing, thinking about, or writing about characterological traits, about which behaviors are and are not effective in various situations. In all three cases—in terms of learning academic facts and skills, practicing thinking skills, and contemplating behaviors—fairy tales may provide a concrete, imagistic, and active medium through which learners may get their first concrete “tastes” of what will later (hopefully) “metabolize” into abstract concepts. Stories do this by providing concrete instantiations of principles-in-action. They demonstrate abstract concepts by embodying or “clothing” them in concrete images and moving those images through narrative action. And whether the learning end-goal relates to math, thinking skills, or morals, young learners may ponder, discuss, write about, draw, paint, sculpt, or act out these concrete images and actions. Furthermore, learners may experiment and play with a story’s embodied-concepts or principles-in-action by applying them in

1 This article is adapted from the author’s forthcoming book, *The Pedagogy of Wonder: An Artistic and Critical Approach to Telling Fairy Tales to Young Children*, to be published later this year by Waldorf Publications.

2 It may be worth noting that in some contemporary and postmodern definitions, the term “curriculum” has been broadened to encompass not only pedagogy but a school’s operative explicit or implicit educational philosophies or, in some cases, ideologies, as well as its implicit culture. I employ a more traditional, discrete definitions of curriculum and pedagogy in keeping with one of the main themes of the current work, namely, the difference between the outward appearance of *things-that-change* and the hidden reality of *change itself*, between forms (i.e., curriculum) and forces that form, reform, and transform (i.e., pedagogy).

real-world situations or by using them to solve world-as-is problems.

Before examining the fairy tale as *experience*, let's take a brief side trip to consider the nature of experience.

Experience

Recall the example of factoring polynomials provided above. The curricular *what* (i.e., how to factor polynomials) involves a *how*. In this case, the curricular goal involves the development of a *skill*. The development of a *skill*, or what we might call an *outer, tangible movement*, may be distinguished from the development of the *self*, or what we might call an *inner, intangible "movement."* In this sense, factoring polynomials is more of an *instructional goal* than *educational aim* (although math in general also has educational aims). The larger point in sharing this example, however, concerns *experience*. In the case of the development of a skill (and the development of the self, as will be investigated below), *the best teacher is experience*. The best pedagogy or method for teaching how to factor polynomials is... factoring polynomials. In many cases, experience truly *is* the best teacher! The best singing pedagogy is not having singing explained or analyzed. No, the best singing-together pedagogy is singing together. In both cases—in the activities of factoring polynomials and singing together—curriculum (e.g., singing together) and pedagogy (e.g., singing together) are essentially one and the same. In the spirit of Marshall McLuhan's statement, "The Medium is the Message,"³ the pedagogy sometimes *is* the curriculum! And there just happens to be a word for the process of learning by doing. The word is *experience*.

The educational (and existential) aim of singing is to *know* and *be*, to understand and relate to the world, others, and ourselves. However, it is difficult to bring to consciousness or put into words how exactly singing—or playing sports, for that matter—does this, how the development of various musical or athletic knowledge or skills help us to know and to be ourselves. Translating the educational how-to-know-and-be aim into discrete curricular learning goals is extremely difficult, in part because those goals are not only mysterious but uniquely individual! How we *know* and how we *are* relate to the processes of developing and becoming, respectively. Although the process of development encompasses universal elements and conventional

milestones the same for all humans (e.g., standing upright as a toddler), it is nonetheless a deeply inexplicable and individual process. And the process of becoming—that is, the process of walking one's own dark, lonely, and scary path of regeneration or rebirth—is necessarily and quintessentially individual.

Camping, singing, and playing sports are all pedagogies (i.e., *hows*) that respond to an educational aim (a deeper *why*) that seeks not only to deliver an experience of meaning and shared humanity in the here-and-now but provide experiences conducive to the processes of development and becoming. Camping, singing, and playing sports provide, in very simple terms, a *very special form of experience*.

But why are these and other similar experiential activities so potentially transformative? Certain types of experiences are especially transformative in part because they engage *whole* persons, body-soul-mind, thinking-feeling-willing, and past-present-future persons. These experiences are further transformative because they are *open* experiences. *Open* experiences are open to interpretation, significance, direction. They allow each individual the opportunity not only to find their own, personal *meaning* but to essentially "write" their own curricular goals! On the contrary, $6 \times 8 = 48$ is not open to interpretation (despite what some postmodern educational theorists would have us believe!). While the act of factoring polynomials *is* an experience, and while there are many "pathways" to the solution, there is only one "destination," one correct answer (well, two correct answers; quadratics have two solutions!). While experience is often

the best teacher, and while all experiences are transformational, only very special types of experience offer the types of "teachings" that are potentially transformative in terms of development or becoming. As we'll see below, listening to and reading fairy tales and other stories offer just this *special* type of experience.

In sum, some of the most effective pedagogies involve direct *experience*, meaning learners often learn best by doing, meaning that pedagogy (i.e., *how* we learn) and curriculum (i.e., *what* we learn) are one and the same. Additionally, the most potentially *transformative* pedagogies provide learners with experiences that promote the processes of development and becoming. Certain experiences are particularly transformational because they both engage the *whole* learner and provide *open* experiences, that is, experiences that allow not only for personal interpretation and meaning but for the

Waldorf teachers don't teach fairy tales. Rather, they tell them. And students don't learn fairy tales. They listen to them.

³ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

“writing” of one’s own curricular goals, for taking away precisely what is wanted and needed.

3. Fairy Tales or Other Stories May Constitute *Experiences* – a Curriculum and Pedagogy at the Same Time

When fairy tales are *told*, as opposed to taught, in addition to providing a pedagogy or method for teaching curricular or instructional goals, they may also fulfill *educational aims*. In addition to their instructional, “putting-in,” world-as-is pedagogical uses, fairy tales have potential *educational*, “bringing-out,” worlds-that-may-be purposes, and these pertain to *knowing* and *being*, to the processes of developing and becoming. Fairy tales and other stories provide a “special” pair of glasses through which to observe the world, others, and one’s self. And, in this sense, a fairy tale is both a pedagogy and curriculum at the same time, which is to say, an *experience*. While all experiences are transformational in the sense that change is inexorable, the fairy tale provides a *very special* type of experience. In addition to the spontaneous experience of engagement and meaning, fairy tales (and stories and literature in general) provide experiential opportunities for *development* and *becoming*. Fairy tales and other “good stories,” similar to activities like singing, camping, and playing sports, provide transformational experiences in several important ways already described. Firstly, fairy tales engage learners on multiple levels simultaneously, that is, intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. Secondly, fairy tales meet learners individually, subjectively, and uniquely. Each fairy tale reader or listener takes away their own personal meaning, which is to say, they write their own curricular *whats!* The unique meanings and “movements” that each learner encounters in their fairy-tale experience lie along separate pathways of development and becoming—one unique, labyrinthine pathway per learner.

Although all stories are *experienced* to some extent, the types of experiences they offer are admittedly qualitatively different from those afforded by activities like singing, camping, or even factoring polynomials. Good stories are transformational because readers and listeners *find meaning* or are *meaningfully engaged* on multiple levels. While camping is meaningful predominantly in a volitional sense, through the engagement of the body, its limbs, and senses (i.e., the sensori-motor system), and while factoring polynomials is meaningful in a largely conceptual sense, through the engagement

of the mind, stories are meaningful primarily in an *emotional* sense.

However, stories are not different simply because they provide heightened emotional or “feeling” experiences. The experiences good stories provide are transformational not only because they engage learners holistically on multiple levels but because they are *open*, because they allow each listener or reader to leave with their own meanings, interpretations, and lessons in hand (and heart and head). But good stories are *doubly* special. They are special squared! The especially special transformative quality of good stories stems from their unique superhero power. Stories have the power—through their use of poetic images and narrative movements—to reveal the nature of *change itself*. Stories are able to “hold” transformation still long enough for readers and listeners to bring it to consciousness, to *observe* it.

Good stories allow us to experience change more *consciously*, to “see” it with special “glasses” that only good stories and some other forms of art can provide. In addition, fairy tales provide us with special “hands” capable of “holding” change long enough to extract wakeful meaning

from it. The fairy tale’s ability to embody and act out the changes taking place *out there* in reality and *within* us as humans is simply a consequence of a good story’s greater ability to “clothe” abstract processes in poetic images and dramatize or *move* those images through narrative. In this sense, stories are not only meaningful but also *therapeutic*. The fairy tale’s superhero ability to capture *change itself* allows readers and listeners to *objectify* and *externalize* the changes constantly and unconsciously taking place within them. These objectified and externalized changes—to borrow a word from contemporary psychological speak—may then be *processed*. Expressly, our ability to externalize inner processes through stories helps us integrate various aspects of our being and further helps us incorporate new ways of understanding and relating to the world.

II. The Art and Science of Fairy Tale Pedagogy

For the purposes of the storytelling approach advocated by this work, pedagogy may be defined thusly:

Pedagogy = the art and science of teaching and learning.

But what is meant by “art” and “science”? The answer to this question represents the crux of the pedagogical matter and foreshadows analysis of the specific examples of fairy tale pedagogy explored in later sections. *Art* and *science* constitute the two “lines” of an ‘X’ that marks the spot, and *pedagogy* forms the center point, the axis upon which the artistic and scientific lines hinge. Pedagogy is one of the ways in which storytellers may attempt to balance and integrate artistic and scientific (e.g., critical) truth claims or interpretations. The threefold approach to storytelling advocated by this work, after all, involves interpreting fairy tales through *artistic* and *critical* lenses, while the third, intermediary approach considered in this and subsequent chapters involves a *pedagogical* balance scale of sorts, a scale capable of integrating both art and science. Before we explore in more detail how the pedagogical “balance scale” works, let’s review the *artistic* and *critical* approaches outlined in previous sections.

An *artistic* approach to storytelling is, among other things:

1. Personal
2. Generative
3. Dialogical
4. Intuitive

Significantly, an artistic approach is personal (i.e., *subjective*) and *intuitive*. *Subjectivity* concerns experiences (e.g., sensations, perceptions, emotions, or understandings) that are wholly unique in the world. In the camping example given in the previous chapter, each camper experiences unique sensations, perceptions, and emotions and, importantly, also forms unique interpretations and understandings of those individual experiences. In terms of the dark, scary woods analogy, each fairy tale listener, reader, or *subject* has a completely different, wholly unique experience as they “traverse” the woods; each subject forges a completely different, wholly unique “route” through the woods; and each subject comes out of the woods at a different, wholly unique “spot” on the other side. Furthermore, subjectivity has an *active* rather than passive quality. In addition to the experiences themselves, subjectivity concerns the outward *expression* of those experiences, the expression of sensations, perceptions, emotions, or understandings. An *intuition* is an inner, wholly personal construction arising in the mind or psyche (or soul) of the knower. Rather than a particular or concrete notion

or image, intuitions are more general and abstract in character. And rather than fully conscious, intuitions are more un- or semi-conscious in their essence. Because of their generalized and abstract character, intuitions pertain to underlying patterns or *forces* rather than fixed thoughts, ideas, or concepts. Intuitions rise above particular instances or concrete examples, mutating (seemingly magically) into generally applicable principles. Which is all to say, intuitions are a way of understanding and relating to the world.

“Critical” pertains to analysis of the application of *power*, in particular, the un- or semi-conscious forms of power wielded by societies, institutions, and other so-called structures or systems, especially those uses of power that are unfair, unjust, unequal, or lead directly to inequitable outcomes.

A *critical* approach to storytelling is, among other things:

1. Self-reflective
2. Systemically-reflective
3. Transitive
4. Scientific

Importantly, a critical approach is *scientific*, which is to say *objective*. Scientific approaches are distinct from *artistic* approaches, which, as we saw above, are *subjective*. Admittedly, this interpretation of the meaning of “critical” will be rejected by some (but not all) postmodernists and ideologues who may dispute the validity of objectivity. However, if *critical* truth claims are not scientific or objective, then they are necessarily artistic and subjective! The assertion being made here is not that artistic, subjective claims have any less validity than scientific, objective claims. Artistic truth claims are equally as valid; they are just not scientific!

Whereas subjectivity concerns experiences that are wholly unique in the world, *objectivity* pertains to experiences that are *common*, that may be shared or communicated for others to experience or understand and that, in some cases, can be measured using empirical methods. While the subjective experiences offered

by camping are different for every camper, some of the experiences offered by factoring polynomials, for example, are common. Those experiences may be said to be *objective*. Although there are different recipes or algorithms a budding mathematician may follow to solve a quadratic equation, those ways may be understood commonly by all. The algorithms are therefore

In the spirit of Marshall McLuhan’s statement, “The Medium is the Message,” the pedagogy sometimes is the curriculum!

objective. Furthermore, a quadratic equation has only two possible solutions regardless of which algorithm is followed and regardless of the mathematician. Those solutions are objective. And although each mathematician may form some unique, subjective definitions of words like “algorithms” and “solutions,” there will be many common understandings. These, too, are objective. In terms of the dark, scary woods analogy, each mathematician will have some unique and some common experiences traversing the woods, but most of the pathways are well-established and understood to be so, and all the paths converge in the same spot (well, in the case of quadratics, the same two spots!). Those experiences that are common along the way, as well as the common destination, are all *objective*. In addition to referring to common experiences, objectivity has a *passive* rather than active character. While *subjectivity* has an *active*, expressive character, *objectivity* suggests more *passive* forms of expression, such as observation, awareness, and comprehension.

The term “science,” as employed here, doesn’t distinguish between formal and informal science, between the professional scientist in a lab coat testing formal hypotheses and the teacher who informally tries out two different ways of telling a story to see which gets the best response. In terms of the holistic approach to interpreting stories advocated here, neither science nor art is a *better* way of knowing, but science and art may be distinguished from each other in terms of their objectives. Whereas the aim of art is to produce experiences that offer maximal opportunities for the expression of subjectivity, the goal of science is to produce experiences that offer maximal opportunities for a common experience. For example, no two people in the history of the world have experienced the story “Rumpelstiltskin” the same way, nor should they. Each listener or reader’s experience of the story throughout history (and each telling) has been different, wholly unique, and *subjective*. On the contrary, everyone who has accurately counted how many words are in the English translation of the Grimms’ 1812 version of “Rumpelstiltskin” has arrived at the same, common, *objective* answer—1,055. Subjective and objective claims are each valid, but each has their own, unique set of methodologies, and each has more or less utility in different situations.

Firstly, fairy tales engage learners on multiple levels simultaneously, that is, intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. Secondly, fairy tales meet learners individually, subjectively, and uniquely.

Interestingly, both art and science share many of the same neutral criteria for evaluating the validity or efficacy of their own truth claims. These neutral criteria include *logical coherence* and *empirical validity*. Taken together, logical coherence and empirical validity constitute what I previously defined as *rationality*, or the process by which we simultaneously check our ideas for internal logic and map them onto our experiences to check for alignment. A third shared artistic and scientific criterion is *flexibility*, that is, *openness* to the revision of ideas in the face of new evidence. Logic, empiricism, and attention to evidence are not, as many people assume, exclusively scientific criteria. Rationality and flexibility encompass *both* artistic and scientific processes. It is further crucial to note that when artistic and scientific understandings achieve some measure of dynamic balance, they constitute a system of checks and balances; they counteract and constrain each other.

It is probably fair to say that pedagogies either draw on predominantly *artistic* approaches to interpreting and telling stories, predominantly *scientific* approaches to describing and teaching stories, or some creative *amalgamation of the two*.

III. A Creative Amalgamation of Artistic and Scientific Approaches

In any real-world interaction with a story (like telling one to young children), it is impossible to imagine an entirely artistic or completely scientific approach. In terms of telling or reading stories to young children, all of the artistic and scientific ways of interpreting and describing fairy tales may be understood as analogous to a palette of paints, and those paints may be mixed in infinite combinations to create any imaginable shade or hue, with the purpose of painting any picture that needs, wants, or must be painted. I arrived at the fairy tale *truths* described earlier using a predominantly *artistic* approach, and I later described various fairy tale *realities* using a predominantly *scientific* approach. In what follows, I will utilize both artistic and scientific frameworks to provide some specific examples of the fairy tale’s pedagogical uses. In fact, there is not an approach—artistic or scientific—that I don’t utilize at least in some small way when I tell a fairy tale to my young students. As a way of summing up this

exploration of the “art” and “science” of pedagogy, the following is an illustration of some of the ways I personally utilize every one of the approaches when I tell a fairy tale to my young students.

Artistic. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to make sense of it artistically, subjectively, intuitively. I ask myself (and the cosmos), *what does this story have to say to me personally?* Then I ask, *what do I have to say to my young listeners through this story?* I then try to leave a quiet “space.” If an imagination, intuition, and/or inspiration comes a-calling, I want to be able to hear it knocking.

Literary. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I take special note of those elements of the story that seem foundational or irreducible, elements that—ignorant of any historical or geographic context—seem to repeat themselves in story after story, elements that seem part of some basic “recipe,” formula, or underlying pattern, elements that leave me with a feeling of *déjà vu*. Then I pause for a moment, leaving a “what if” space. Then I submit anything I find to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Psychoanalytic. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I scan the story for those images that feel poetic or symbolic of what it is like to *know* or *be*, or those actions that “tell the story” of the experience of knowing or being. I scan again for elements that move, change, or grow. I further scan for elements that resemble a struggle or adventure. In other words, I scan for images and actions symbolic of *development* or *transformation*. Additionally, I think about any of my students who are experiencing current challenges or who have experienced traumas in the past. And then I pause... to see if any of those listeners have something to “say” to me. Then I submit anything I find to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Spiritual/Religious. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I do everything I described above in the psychoanalytic section. Then I pause for a moment before saying something like a prayer. It goes something like this: “There but for grace....” Then I pause for a minute before submitting anything that arises to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Ideological. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I ask myself, *what are my deepest held beliefs, philosophies, principles?* And then I inspect the story for any concrete representations, illustrations, embodiments, personifications, instantiations, dramatizations, etc.,

of those beliefs. I don’t have to ask myself, *what are the most cogent arguments against my most cherished beliefs?* The answers just come unbidden, like little devils, monsters, or tormentors. Then I pause to let the demons have their say. These boogiemens are in part my own feelings of inadequacy, inconsistency, and hypocrisy come to haunt and taunt me. They are also partly just a contemporary affliction, the price of self-consciousness. I entertain the self-critiques momentarily—I engage them in good faith—but I try not to wallow in self doubt. If the specters don’t have any new “information” to share, it’s best to move on. Then I submit anything I find to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Scientific. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to make sense of it scientifically, objectively, reflectively. I first ask myself a purely practical storytelling question: *what worked and what didn’t work in the last three stories I told? What are my listeners desperately trying to tell me?* Then I ask myself a general comprehension question related to both my listeners’ cognition and their general, technical, and historical knowledge: *what is the absolute minimum amount of modifications I need to make, or explanations I need to provide, so that the story will be comprehensible to my listeners?* Finally, I ask a self-reflective question: *am I telling this story for any selfish reasons (e.g., for attention, for power, to make my life easier, etc.)?* Then I submit anything I “observe” to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Folklorist. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to find tales or tale-variants from as many different cultures and geographical regions as possible. I do this for two reasons, neither of which is what is typically understood as “multicultural.” Firstly, different cultural treatments have their own, unique “flavor profiles,” helping to ensure an overall listening experience of *umami*. Variety is, indeed, the spice of life. Secondly, the different treatments, settings, socio-historical contexts, etc., offered

by stories from different regions and cultures enhance the experience of the fairy tale’s fundamental images, movements, and lessons. In other words, hearing the same “song” sung in different musical styles helps bring home its universal message or appeal. Then, no matter the story’s provenance, I submit it to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Socio-historical. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I have a layman’s interest in how the story reflects the

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I try to make sense of it artistically, subjectively, intuitively. I ask myself (and the cosmos), *what does this story have to say to me personally?*

social and historical conditions of the early modern, mostly European once-upon-a-times in which it was first “frozen” in writing, and I try to have some reasonably informed sense of the original “meaning” of popular, traditional fairy tale motifs and themes. To these ends, I’m not afraid to do a little historical or literary research. But my interest and research is generally not in service of some ideological, political, or even historical end, but for artistic reasons, to help me tell better stories! I don’t spend any extra energy wondering if the stories I tell originally had disciplinary functions or if they worked to reproduce societal inequalities; I just assume they did. But I also assume they had educational (i.e., “bringing-out”) and liberatory (i.e., resurrectional) messages as well. Either way, I’m *only* interested in the way the stories are educational or instructional, liberatory or oppressive, in the here-and-now, in the extemporaneous alchemy of a Monday morning storytime. Yes, I monitor for scientific “evidence” of liberation or oppression in the students’ oral and written responses to my telling, in overheard conversations between students or during parent-reported dinner-table or bedtime conversations, in the ways stories are reenacted on the playground, and in the students’ faces and body language before, during, and after the story is told. But the truth is, I don’t believe I’ve ever seen any scientific evidence of either oppression or liberation. Instead, I observe excited or bored faces, engaged or disengaged faces, lucid or incomprehensible oral and written responses, good or... more good questions. In other words, the question of whether stories are ultimately liberatory or oppressive has only *artistic* answers. So, whatever I learn from my scientific study of history or my students’ reactions, I submit it to the main *artistic* approach described above.

Psychological. When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I am interested in both the *whole* beings and the *developing* beings who will hear it. I’m equally interested in my listeners’ more *thingy* natures—i.e., their present-moment experiences—and their *changing* natures—i.e., how their present-moment experiences may plant seeds for future growth or transformation. With respect to their *whole* beings, I’m interested in the ways stories are meaningful on potentially multiple levels, that is, the ways they simultaneously concretize abstract concepts, satisfy and challenge emotions, and offer engaging, imaginative experiences. With respect to their *developing* beings, I’m interested in the ways stories speak in the psychological “language” of my listeners. Especially when it comes to children, I need to have some knowledge of the unique ways in which

they think, feel, and act during different developmental stages, which I understand are qualitatively different from my own. Whatever comes to me through my research into these holistic and developmental aspects of child psychology, I submit it to the main *artistic* approach described above.

IV. An Introduction to Some of the Pedagogical Uses of Fairy Tales

A working definition of “pedagogy” was provided previously:

Pedagogy = the art and science of teaching and learning.

When it comes to fairy tales, the word “pedagogy” has been traditionally employed in the context of teaching conventional values or morals, to preaching “thou shall nots.” In other words, the mention of the words “fairy tales” and “pedagogy” in the same sentence has traditionally conjured visions of the indoctrination of children in the conventional values and social mores of the age, be it the prudish Victorian values of the fairy tale chapbooks (cheaply printed children’s books) of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the politically conservative values of Walt Disney’s post-war, 1950s America, or the multicultural, politically-correct values of Disney Inc.’s 21st century values. On

the contrary, as employed here, “pedagogy” refers not only to *instruction* (i.e., the “putting-in” of world-as-is knowledge or values) but *education* (i.e., the “bringing-out” of worlds-that-may-be possibilities). In terms of developmental approaches, pedagogy encompasses not only movement and growth, but the processes of development and becoming. And in terms of holistic approaches, pedagogy pertains not only to *behaviors*, but to *feelings* and *thoughts*, not only to *behavioral regulation* (i.e., character), but the development of *socio-emotional regulation* (e.g., social skills and emotional resiliency) and *thinking skills* (e.g., thinking based on reason, logic, and arguments predicated on evidence).

V. Fairy Tales Promote the Development of Thinking Skills in Young Children

Fairy tales may constitute a method or *pedagogy* for teaching young children knowledge or skills about various world-as-is subjects, such as language arts, math, social studies, or science, or for practicing thinking skills, such as evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing, as laid out in previous chapters. The concentration of

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I scan the story for those images that feel poetic or symbolic of what it is like to *know* or *be*.

this chapter will be the fairy tale's use as a teaching method or instructional pedagogy. In other words, the primary focus is on the fairy tale's use as an imaginary "landscape" in which young children may gain world-as-is knowledge or practice world-as-is skills.

In terms of language arts, for example, after being told a fairy tale, and after discussing it and rendering it artistically, students might compose a simple written version of the tale; they might practice reading simple versions of the tale written out by their teacher; or the teacher might employ the tale's narrative content as an imaginary "backdrop" against which to study or practice handwriting, spelling, or grammar. In terms of math, teachers might generate written or "mental" math problems, employing the tale's narrative content as an imaginative world in which to practice real-world arithmetic (e.g., "If a skein of wool yielded four spools of yarn, how many spools would eight skeins yield?"). In addition to providing a lens through which to develop real-world knowledge or skills related to language arts, math, social studies, or science, the fairy tale provides an imaginary albeit concrete "landscape" in which young children may practice various higher order thinking skills, such as those involved in isolating variables, describing phenomena, attributing cause and effect, putting events in the proper sequence, and comparing and contrasting, to name but a few.

Crucially, the fairy tale universe is both magical and concrete. In fact, magic is what makes fairy tales concrete! After all, fairy tales concretize physical, biological, psychological, and other invisible *forces* by "clothing" them in image and movement, in the same way the Invisible Man wraps himself in gauze in order to be seen. This relationship between magic and concreteness is not only a key to the development of concrete thinking for the very young, magical-thinking child (e.g., the four-year-old), it is a key to the development of abstract thinking for the young, concrete-thinking child (e.g., the eight-year-old). Not only does the fairy tale provide an imaginary "room" in which young children may develop concrete thinking skills, it serves as a key to more abstract "rooms." Put simply, the concrete thinking skills developed in the primary school years provide the cognitive infrastructure for the development of more abstract thinking skills in adolescence. The fairy tale's images and actions offer concrete instantiations of principles-in-action. Young fairy tale listeners may "operate" on these "clothed concepts" precisely because of their concreteness, which is to say, they may think about them, experiment with them,

mentally "play" with them, write about them, discuss them, paint them, and act them out. In addition to its concreteness, the fairy tale is accessible to young children because of its simplicity and one-dimensionality. The one-dimensionality of fairy tale characters and the simplicity of its narrative structures, for example, permit young children to more easily "operate" on or think about one element to the exclusion of others. The fairy tale's one-dimensionality allows young listeners to more easily focus on or describe one "variable," or sequence two or more "events," which they cannot as easily do with more complex, psychologically three-dimensional characters or plots.

In his 1956 *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Benjamin Bloom laid out six different categories of thinking skills. They are:

1. Knowing about (i.e., remembering)
2. Understanding
3. Applying
4. Analyzing
5. Evaluating
6. Creating (i.e., synthesizing, integrating)

The categories, which are often portrayed in pyramid form with "knowing about" on the bottom and "creating" on the top, represent both a *holistic framework* and a *developmental progression*. In terms of *holistic frameworks*, for instance, the ability to "apply" a concept presupposes that the knower both "knows about" it (i.e., remembers it or recognizes it) and has some general "understanding" about it. In other words, "applying" both extends and *contains* "knowing about" and "understanding." In terms of its *developmental progression*, different thinking skills are not only contained or incorporated within each other, they are developed in a particular order. For instance, while "understanding" contains "knowing about," young children *know about* a phenomenon before they *understand*

it. For example, young children can identify the names of objects before they understand their purpose or how they work. The first three of Bloom's categories—knowing about, understanding, and applying—may be understood as relating to the development of *concrete* thinking skills, while the last three—analyzing, evaluating, and creating—may be understood as relating to the development of more *abstract*, or higher order, thinking skills. Here are just a handful of the almost inexhaustible words that might be used to describe specific

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I ask myself, *what are my deepest held beliefs, philosophies, principles?*

concrete activities related to each general thinking-skill category, just a few of the thinking activities that young children may practice and apply within the magical and concrete “landscape” of fairy tales:

Know About	Understand	Apply
Identify	Explain	Solve
Describe	Classify	Calculate
Recognize	Define	Demonstrate
Tell	Compare	Experiment
Recite	Differentiate	Construct
Memorize	Discuss	Dramatize
Select	Relate	Predict
Label	Summarize	Illustrate
Name	Associate	Produce

All fairy tales promote the development of thinking skills in young children, but the “Three Languages” tale-type offers a particularly illustrative example. Examples of “Three Languages” stories include the Japanese tale “The Magic Ear,” collected by Keigo Seki in *Folktales of Japan*, the Italian tale “Animal Speech,” collected by Italo Calvino in *Italian Folktales*, and the German tale “The Three Languages,” from the Grimms’ *Children’s and Household Tales*. In “Three Languages” stories, the protagonist is considered stupid by their father, usually a king or rich merchant. The child struggles to learn the conventional (read: *instructional, world-as-is*) lessons their father wants them to learn and that their older siblings seem to learn with ease.⁴ However, while the protagonist does not learn their father’s intellectual, materialistic, “academic” lessons, they do learn how to speak animal languages, usually those of three animals, often animals symbolic of the three elements of earth, water, and air (representing the integration of three aspects of knowing or being, the intellectual, socio-emotional, and volitional). The protagonist’s father, believing this knowledge to be useless, banishes them from the family, sometimes condemning them to death. The protagonist then uses their special knowledge to gain wealth and power, which they often

4 Readers may notice how I used the ambiguously gendered “their” pronoun, which may be employed to refer to a variety of gender identifications. Storytellers could make a story’s protagonist male or female, or even leave the protagonist’s gender ambiguous by using “they,” “them,” and “their” pronouns, though, yes, the protagonist is a boy in many traditional tellings. Similar to the use of non-gendered pronouns, instead of becoming Pope, a storyteller might have the protagonist become something less associated with a specific religious tradition, like a “great spiritual leader” or “holy person,” although fairy tales subvert many cultural and religious norms.

renounce. In the Grimm’s version of the tale, the protagonist becomes Pope.

Considering “The Three Languages” in terms of *instructional goals* related to the development of thinking skills, this and other fairy tales provide both simple, one-dimensional characters and a simple, straightforward sequence of events. Additionally, fairy tales concretize invisible forces and abstract concepts in image and action, which are comprehensible to young listeners. In terms of Bloom’s first cognitive objective—knowing about—young listeners might be asked to orally retell the story or recall elements of it; they might be asked to draw or act out a particular character or scene; or they might be asked to describe their favorite part of the story in as much detail as possible. In terms of Bloom’s second objective—understanding—young listeners might be asked to discuss how the protagonist and his siblings are similar and different from each other (the discussion could then serve as the basis for writing out two short word lists); they might have tiny sections of the story retold to them and then be asked to describe what happened immediately before or after; or they might be asked to explain why the father kicked his son out of the house (or answer the question, “What was the father thinking or feeling?”). And in terms of the third objective—applying—listeners might be asked to explain to fellow listeners which of the three animal languages they think would be the most helpful to know and why; they might be asked to draw a “book cover” or “theatrical poster” for the story; or they might be asked to run an experiment where one person uses gibberish to try to get another person to understand what they’re telling them or to try to get them to perform a task.

These are just a handful of the infinite number of possible thinking activities a teacher might engage in with young students and, yes, the lines between activities like the ones of describing and explaining are somewhat fuzzy. Hopefully, readers get some sense of how—in addition to learning knowledge about the real-world of language, math, social studies, or science—young children can strengthen their thinking skills (and other practical verbal, writing, artistic skills) by imaginatively “walking” the fairy tale’s imaginative landscape. Perhaps readers can also see how invisible forces, relationships, or processes are concretized. For example, the hidden, transformative forces of language, that is to say, the transformative forces of speaking, listening, and understanding, are instantiated in the concrete and magical animal languages, which are further dramatized by what happens when the protagonist can understand and speak them.

So far, the current analysis has been limited to the fairy tale as a methodology or *pedagogy* for teaching young children world-as-is knowledge or skills. Before leaving the topic of the development of thinking skills, let us consider “The Three Languages” in terms of the educational *experiences* it and other fairy tales offer. Fairy tales are *wonderful* rather than informational. Hearing “The Three Languages” provides listeners with an *open* experience from which they may take away their own, unique meanings and “write” their own curricular goals. In terms of *thinking skills*, the tale provides experiences of *open* (and closed) ways of understanding and relating to the world. While the father, the older siblings, and aspects of the so-called real world demand that the protagonist close his mind around a world of *things*, to “grasp” this or that concept or belief as a hand might grasp a stone, the protagonist remains open to the hidden world of transformative forces and invisible relationships that underlie the “things” upon which his father and others fixate. These invisible forces and relationships nevertheless energize, animate, and ultimately transform what can be seen. Rather than being frivolous, useless, or worthless, understanding and relating to the world through curiosity, humility, honesty, compassion, and other open ways of knowing ultimately connects the protagonist with the fundamental forces of transformation, which leads to riches untold. And while those “riches” are highly practical, useful, and valuable, they are not necessarily material.

VI. Fairy Tales Promote the Development of Social and Emotional Regulation in Young Children

With regard to the development of *social and emotional regulation*, fairy tales provide children with imaginary experiences in which they may confront inner emotional fears and outer social struggles alike. While all experiences offer children the opportunity to face their fears and challenges, fairy tales offer a very *special* kind of experience. Firstly, fairy tales and similar types of stories externalize and objectify a child’s fears and challenges. Through their employment of symbolic images and actions, fairy tales give names, shapes, and movements to unfathomable fears and inexplicable challenges that, although they are deeply felt and experienced, children struggle to name, let alone comprehend. For example, one of the names fairy tales give to the child’s deep and latent fear that their mother will cast them out (for a second time!) into the

cold, cruel world is... stepmother! Secondly, the fairy tale magically reveals the nature of change; it “holds” transformation still long enough for young readers and listeners to “see” it and bring it to consciousness. This externalization and “holding” allows young listeners to “process” the changes they undergo, meaning, it helps them integrate and incorporate new ways of understanding and relating to the world, to others, and to themselves. Finally, the protagonist’s success and the fairy tale’s obligatory happy ending provide young children much needed consolation and hope.

Some of the fears and challenges we experience as children and throughout our lives are associated with the processes of developing and becoming. Developmental changes pertain to archetypal physical and psychological changes all humans undergo. The physical and psychological changes children experience around the loss of their baby teeth at around the age of six and at puberty around the age of twelve are just two examples of such developmental changes. On the contrary, transformations associated with the process of individuation or becoming are both more mysterious

and individual. One of the two archetypal developmental transformations most symbolized in fairy tales concerns the changes that accompany the child’s separation from their family of origin and their entrance into society proper, which happens for most modern children when they first go off to formal school at around the age of five or six (and about the time they first start losing their baby teeth); this may be characterized as a *call to adventure*. The other developmental transformation concerns the changes that accompany the onset of puberty at around the age of twelve and the stage of life that contemporary society calls adolescence; this may be characterized as a *quest for selfhood*. The more mysterious process of becoming, which occurs coincidentally with the developmental changes described above, also involves two archetypal transformations. The first involves the transformation from a family- or hereditary-self, subject primarily to physical and biological forces, to a tribal- or cultural-self, subject predominantly to psychological and societal forces. The second involves the transformation from a cultural-self to an individual-self, *self*-self, or culture-of-one-self, subject principally to forces whose source cannot be named.

Before leaving the topic of social and emotional regulation, let us briefly consider fairy tales like those of the “Children and Ogre” and “Snow White” variety in terms of their pedagogical or instructional uses. Fairy tales and other similar stories may be used for more

When I prepare to tell a fairy tale, I am interested in both the *whole* beings and the *developing* beings who will hear it.

explicit pedagogical or therapeutic purposes; they may serve as allegories, parables, or moral lessons. In less moralistic and more clinical or therapeutic terms, fairy tales may be used as a “lens” through which to examine or “process” real-world social and emotional challenges. However, if a story is to conjure any magic for a young child, if the story is to be truly educational, its meanings must remain *implicit*. While a storyteller may explicitly choose a particular story or craft a particular telling for its specific social or emotional messages, and while the story may be discussed or “processed” to a young listener’s heart’s content (so long as the processing “language” remains developmentally comprehensible), artistic meanings are necessarily implicit; they are necessarily “constructed” by each individual knower. There are other types of more explicit messaging systems of course, including explaining, instructing, lecturing, proselytizing, preaching, etc., and these all have their place. But a story’s most potent and potentially transformative meanings are mysterious, personal, and unique. When choosing a story or crafting a telling for a particular pedagogical purpose, while it is relatively easy for a storyteller to pinpoint a child’s outer *social* challenges, it is extremely difficult to locate the underlying, inner *emotional* anxieties or fears that ignite or enflame those surface tensions, as children (and adults, for that matter) cannot generally express or name their deep, existential fears, let alone draw a causal line between their inner fears and outer social challenges. And this is partly why storytellers should be cautious when they try to explicitly “aim” their stories’ messages. While storytellers may have an intuition of the general direction they’re aiming in, they cannot see their targets!

While children cannot verbalize their existential fears or the sources of their social challenges, curious storytellers interested in picking particularly pedagogical or therapeutic stories will nevertheless notice children expressing their feelings about stories in many un- or semi-conscious ways, including through the nature of their questions, the ways they act out stories in their play, and through their body language. For instance, children may ask to hear the same stories over and over again, they may want to discuss one part of a story to the exclusion of all the other parts, or their cheeks may take on a particularly rosy complexion at the telling of certain tales. It behooves storytellers to pay particularly close attention to their young listener’s reactions, as they are not always what they may seem at first glance. For example, young children might complain that a particular story was scary or disturbing, but, upon closer inspection, a storyteller often learns that listeners yearn to hear that one story or similar stories again and

again, that more than it was frightening, the experience of the story was satisfying or invigorating.

Just because a story is scary or disturbing doesn’t mean it is not desperately needed! If fairy tales and other similar stories do serve to externalize fears and challenges, and if fears and challenges may be more easily worked through, integrated, or processed by naming and facing them, then one shudders to think how a child deprived of magical stories makes it to adulthood in one piece. Of course, due to the inexorable nature of change, none of us makes it anywhere in one piece! But it is important to understand that *all* acts of learning and especially acts of transformation require acts of courage and self-sacrifice, which is to say, they involve going into scary places *on purpose*. As Kate Morton writes in her novel, *The Forgotten Garden*, “Mother didn’t understand that children aren’t frightened by stories; that their lives are full of far more frightening things than those contained in fairy tales.”⁵

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5 Kate Morton, *The Forgotten Garden* (New York: Atria Books, 2009).



One Pedagogy – Many Practices

Variations on Formal and Enacted Curricula in Steiner/Waldorf Schools¹

Ruhi Tyson

Introduction

After 100 years of development Steiner/Waldorf² pedagogy displays a variation in practice that is seldom visible in published curricula (Waldorfskolefederationen 2016; Mathisen 2014; Rawson & Avison 2013; Avison & Rawson 2014; Richter 2016). This variation manifests, in part, on the formal level where e.g., the Hibernia school in the German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen has developed a vocationally oriented form of the Steiner curriculum. It also manifests on the enacted level, i.e. in what teachers and schools practice, where there is a significantly larger plurality in the pedagogy than what the published curricula tend to express (see Gabriel & Schneider 1996, pp. 322-324 for a similar, critical, perspective).

This is not to imply that the published versions of the “orthodox,” henceforth called “standard,” curriculum make strong claims to represent the totality of the Steiner educational tradition. Statements such as the following make this abundantly clear (Rawson & Avison 2013, p. 13, italics in original):

The present new overview must not in any way be regarded as a prescription of how things *ought to be done*. Teachers’ own imagination is their greatest treasure and must not be curtailed in any way.

It should also be regarded as self-evident that the standard curriculum is far from unchanging, something the many editions testify to, owing both to a need for development as times change and in reaction to changing national laws and policies on education.

Finally, this is not, to my knowledge, an issue limited to Steiner education but one that is ubiquitous in how we describe curricula and other matters where there is a formalized, written element and a practical application of it in some way. The tendency is generally to describe an average or idealized practice and seldom, if ever, to include deviations. This could be taken as a good argument against doing so since no one else seems to be. As I hope to show this is more an effect of cultural habits

than any overt reflection of what might best promote development and understanding.

The general problem with this kind of homogeneous presentation was noted at least as early as 1935 by Ludwick Fleck in his book *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* where he distinguishes (in relation to medical texts) between journal science and textbooks. The former is heterogeneous and difficult to synthesize since it consists of sometimes conflicting arguments. The latter is ordered so as to provide a coherent view of a field but in the process tends to obscure the many uncertainties and variations that exist in journal science. A similar issue is at hand here regarding curricula but there is no reason why a textbook in principle shouldn’t be able to incorporate at least some of the variations and uncertainties of practice (practice being analogous to journal science in this case). The problems with not doing so can be outlined briefly.³

First, it reinforces the perception that Steiner education is comparatively homogenous, especially together with publications such as *The Seven Core Principles of Waldorf Education* (Leibner 2017) where the focus is on the common or essential aspects of Steiner education. This is not to deny that there are many aspects that are constant across Steiner schools and throughout the first century of the curriculum’s existence or to claim that there are no core principles. But an exclusive focus on average or standard curricula (both formal and enacted) together with core principles increases the difficulty of enacting innovative practice and research runs the risk of simplifying what is, in practice, a significant diversity.

Second, we understand ideas and practices not only through what they have in common but often just as much through tracking their boundaries, e.g., it is sometimes easier to comprehend how conflict resolution works by studying unusually successful “deviations” from the norm (cf. Tyson 2016a). Thus the standard curriculum can also be understood better through

1 This article first appeared in RoSE – *Research on Steiner Education* Vol. 12, Special Issue, 2021. We are grateful to the author and to the editors at RoSE for giving permission to reprint the article here.

2 Known [outside of North America] by both terms and often called Steiner-Waldorf in contemporary texts, henceforth called Steiner pedagogy or Steiner education (two terms I will be using synonymously) in this article.

3 There is an interesting comparison to be made between Fleck’s arguments and those of the anthroposophical author Owen Barfield in his book *Saving the Appearances* (1988) where both refer to similar phenomena in the middle ages and make use of the same anthropological research by Levi Bruhl and Durkheim. Fleck’s conclusions seem to be reached from an implicit subjective idealism or constructivism whereas Barfield’s result from the standpoint of an explicit objective idealism.

the documentation of deviant curricula. This is especially important for novice teachers given that beginners have a tendency to interpret guidelines more like rules and thus the presentation of a singular form, no matter how couched it is in language emphasizing the need for flexibility and imagination, tends to be taken at face value. Novices benefit from having ideas presented together with cases that illustrate major differences in how the ideas are enacted. Thus, proceeding from the core principles or foundational ideas of Steiner pedagogy, a standard curriculum has developed. But, proceeding from those same ideas *several formal deviations from the standard curriculum* have also developed. To say nothing of the variations in enacted curricula.

Third, the cultural habit noted above of thinking in singular terms reinforces the prejudice that there is a one-to-one relationship between idea and practice as well as the accompanying sense that there is a singular orthodoxy where the only alternative is full relativism. The possibility of systematically explored pluralism is then overlooked. From a pluralist point of view there can still be clear differences between curricula and a comparative valuation of them. However, the point is that when we do not actively pursue an interest in difference, we implicitly enforce an unnecessary conservatism both in research and development something that the sociology of science, as developed by e.g., Bordo (1987), Fleck (1935/1979), Kuhn (1962), and Hacking (1999), provides ample evidence of, even if these authors are not always aligned with the full argument presented here.

The purpose of this article is to argue for the value of systematically exploring the concrete diversity of Steiner educational practice and to suggest ways in which this can also be incorporated in the publication of formal curricula on the national and international level as well as how it can enrich comparative curriculum research.

One issue, it should be noted, with exploring diversity is that ad-hoc documentations run the risk of providing one-sided views on diversity compared with more systematic reviews, since it is difficult to know if the entire field is really covered. It is not within the scope of this article to provide such a systematic review but rather to argue for its value and potential, to suggest ways of achieving it and to provide an example

When we teach there is no neutral baseline or final, perfect, approach since we are concerned with the ethically charged issue of intervening in the life of other individuals.

of where this might take us through two case studies, one focusing on the integration of vocational education in the standard curriculum at the Hibernia school and one focusing on the integration of a craft-based social development project at the Waldorf school in Ulm, Römerstraße. Thus, the examples provided need to be approached with some care since there are other ones not included in this study that are of significance to our understanding of the potential expansiveness of the Steiner curriculum in the fields of vocational education and social development work (for a more systematic exploration of the former see Tyson 2019).

Finally, the general context of this kind of study is what Flyvbjerg (2001) has called phronetic social science, based on the Aristotelian

concept of phronesis or practical wisdom. The aim of such research is not primarily to develop new theory but to increase our understanding for the purpose of acting wisely. Briefly put, Flyvbjerg's argument is that too much social science research has tried to generate theories on par with natural science theory, i.e. capable of prediction, something he argues is impossible in social contexts. What we need instead is more research where the aim is to increase our capacity to act for the greater good in the Aristotelian sense of human flourishing or *eudaimonia*. This perspective fits well with pedagogical research where it is especially clear that it is difficult to avoid implicitly normative matters. When we teach there is no neutral baseline or final, perfect, approach since we are concerned with the ethically charged issue of intervening in the life of other individuals. Similarly, with the creation of curricula, each curriculum is an ethical stance on what we consider wise (implicitly or explicitly) regarding how and what to teach. As such, it cannot be viewed as anything more than a temporary construct until a time comes where we recognize wiser constructs. The kind of comparative research argued for here is meant to be a more systematic approach to the continuous development of pedagogy and curricula.

In what follows, I will begin with a general discussion on the Steiner curriculum considering it in relation to the issues raised in the introduction. After this, a section on method and research design considers both the general framework for this kind of case study and the specific methods followed in documenting the two cases. These are then presented and a discussion follows after

which a final section outlines the main conclusions and suggestions.

Curriculum Studies and the Steiner Curriculum

A common distinction in curriculum studies is that between formal, enacted and experienced curricula (e.g., Billett 2011). Formal curricula consist of that which is written and published as a curriculum as well as the general structure of lessons, etc. Enacted curricula consist of the actions of teachers in the classroom and may diverge significantly from whatever formal one they proceed from. Finally, what students experience is a third aspect of a curriculum that needs to be studied in its own right. Such student-centered studies are especially important in the evaluation of formal and enacted curricula and sometimes enacted curricula are only possible to explore from the point of view of the students who experienced them (e.g., when the original teacher is no longer around to describe his or her actions).

Not all formal curricula need to be written, it is also possible that they are transmitted as part of the oral culture of an institution. This complicates things since it may require more or less extensive visits to a school in order to document those aspects of its formal curriculum that have not been committed to writing.

The original, formal, Steiner curriculum was first established in writing by the teachers Caroline von Heydebrand and E. A. Karl Stockmeyer (Heydebrand 2010, Stockmeyer 1991). These have been the basic templates for the main part of the later curricula, and today the most common text is Richter (2016), translated and edited into English by Richter & Rawson (2000), and, according to Rawson (n.d. possibly 2015), into a further 17 languages. It contains a vertical progression for each subject starting in grade 1 and culminating in grade 12, as well as a horizontal consideration of the interrelations between the subjects for each grade. At its foundation lies the understanding that the curriculum can be “read” from the child, i.e. the child provides us with the knowledge we need in order to create a curriculum (content wise and structurally) that corresponds to the child’s current and future needs (cf. e.g., Skiera 2010, p. 248). Or, as Gabriel and Schneider write (1996, p. 315, my translation): “the child is the curriculum”. It follows that any formal, written, curriculum is dependent on such a “reading” and

can be modified or discarded in situations where “further reading” has invalidated previous ones. Although Steiner provided a large corpus of indications regarding how to “read” from the perspective of spiritual science (e.g., Steiner 1984, 1986, 1992), this does not preclude that, especially as the curriculum became formalized in writing, several other elements came to influence it, not least the social and practical context of the first Steiner schools (cf. Skiera 2010). The variations across Steiner educational practice suggest that such “reading” is far from straightforward.

It is difficult to give a brief summary of this curriculum, especially since the deviations considered here both more or less conform to its basic tenets. They are largely deviations *within* the basic framework. One comparison might be with the critical-constructive *Bildung* ideas of Klafki (see Sommer 2014) since the Steiner curriculum can be described as a distinctively *Bildung*-oriented curriculum. However, this is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, since the aim is first and foremost to explore what deviant curricula can contribute, the main differences between them and the standard curriculum are presented together with the case studies so that it is possible to at least get an idea of what they are deviating from (since neither represents a deviation from the standard curriculum in its totality).

Furthermore, countries also have to square this standard curriculum with their own national curricula and these tend to then go through various stages of development and change (compare e.g., the iterations of the Swedish curriculum *En väg till frihet* from 2007 and 2016). A separate study would be needed to compare such iterations of formal curricula in selected countries and to make a cross-country comparison of how the Steiner curriculum has been adopted and changed as it migrated from one cultural context to another.

Already in the Nordic countries, this would present significant differences, especially on the upper secondary level where several changes over the last 20 years have taken place. For example,

the Swedish Steiner schools had to adapt their curriculum to the new national curriculum in 2011 creating a number of issues with how to square the standard curriculum with it. This also meant that the latest iteration of the Swedish Steiner curriculum is written in order to outline how it fits within this new national curriculum. However, on an institutional level, there are several schools where the Steiner curriculum has been further changed in various ways. One

The Hibernia school in the German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen has developed a vocationally oriented form of the Steiner curriculum.

such place is the agricultural vocational track at *Järna Naturbruksgymnasium* (Järna agricultural gymnasium) resulting in an amalgam of the Steiner curriculum with various agricultural courses that are, in turn, treated from a biodynamic perspective.

Another, particularly interesting, example from Sweden can be found from the 1980s, when a group of students, mainly from the Solvik school (itself a significant variation on the standard Steiner curriculum) started an independent upper secondary school together with the teachers Erik Norlin and Ivar Heckscher. This is all the more interesting since one of its main characteristics was an almost complete lack of formal curriculum. Instead the interests and will of the students were placed at the center. This included that the students largely financed their education themselves and found their teachers among various practitioners as they went along (Norlin 1986). The project was done in two cycles somewhat apart from each other, the first one being documented in the above-mentioned publication and the second one documented in manuscript form only.

Beyond this there are a number of documented examples. To take a few from the German-speaking context there are variations on the traditional Steiner curriculum represented by the previously mentioned Hibernia school, by the Steiner school in Gröbenzell, by the Intercultural Waldorf school in Mannheim (all in Germany), and by the *Regionale Oberstufe Jura-Südfuss* (ROJ) in Switzerland. All have seen more or less extensive evaluations over the years and one, the Hibernia school, will be considered further below (Brater 2000; Brater & Munz 1996; Brater et al. 2009; Rist & Schneider 1979).

It seems that the greatest diversity exists at the upper secondary level, at least on the level of formal curricula although this would require a more systematic study to be concluded with certainty. A possible reason for this is in the nature of most central European and Nordic school systems which select into different tracks, generally somewhere between 6th and 10th grade. These selections are mainly done with the purpose of sending students to vocational tracks or to tracks preparing for higher education. Already within the first decade of its existence this was an issue facing the original Steiner school/s where a tradition established itself of mainly preparing for the “Abitur”, the German track for higher studies at the university level. This has largely been followed, at least in the Nordic countries and in Britain as well as the US. It belongs to the exceptions

that Steiner schools have developed ways in which to incorporate vocational elements or tracks at the upper secondary level. This selection issue has been at the center of an ongoing discussion in the Steiner educational movement resulting in different approaches. The wide-spread disregard in most societies for vocational education and accompanying appreciation of academic training has been a contributing factor as well.

Turning to the enacted curriculum – this has seen a variety of single or multiple case-studies over the years (e.g., Berg et al., 2003; Tyson 2018a, b). These studies can be viewed as part of a wider trend in curriculum research where one prominent focus has been on Martin Wagenschein’s genetic-socratic-exemplary didactics (e.g., Berg 2003; Berg, Klafki & Schultze 2003, 2001; Wagenschein 1991; Westbury, Hopmann & Riquarts 2000). As they relate to Steiner education, the studies have mainly served the purpose of documenting individual innovations in subject didactics rather than exploring their relationships to the Steiner curriculum in a wider sense. Here the issue is also complicated by the difficulty of conducting such research in any systematic way given the comparatively large number of schools world-wide. Several smaller studies would perhaps need to be made on a national and regional level in order to explore systematically the variations across practice that can be found. One might also focus here on specific subject areas such as the teaching of history. In such cases it would be easier to systematically cover practice and potential variations across it. Such documentation could then be related to the formal curriculum, expanding its general concepts, functioning as supplemental material that clarifies interpretive variations and finally providing a more stringent presentation of Steiner educational didactics that doesn’t give the impression that there is a given single norm for how to teach a subject.

Finally, on the level of the experienced curriculum, there are any number of ways in which research has been conducted. On the biographical level there are large scale studies, such as that of Barz & Randoll (2007), using questionnaires to explore some of the experienced effects of the Steiner curriculum. There are also biographical studies, such as that of Gessler (1988), focusing on the experienced effects of individual schools, in that case the Hibernia school. Common to both are a wider biographical perspective. I am not aware of any studies in Steiner education focusing more on how students experience the daily enacted practice in schools,

Each curriculum is an ethical stance on what we consider wise (implicitly or explicitly) regarding how and what to teach.

as is the case with e.g., *Bildungsgangdidaktik* (cf. e.g., Hericks et al. 2001; Meyer & Reinartz 1998).

Methodologies and Research Design

This discussion has two aims, first to outline how the two case studies were documented and, second, to provide some remarks more generally on how this kind of study can be conducted. As such it is based on the work done in Tyson (2018a, c, 2016a, b) where the purpose was, in part, to develop a framework for this kind of research.

Generally speaking, the methods available for documenting cases are relatively straightforward. Regarding formal curricula, they are already, for the most part, present as written sources. This is also the case with case study 1 on the Hibernia school. Beyond this, the documentation of mostly orally transmitted formal curricula can require both interviews and observations. Interviews to the degree that the participants are easily capable of articulating them and observations when this is not the case. However, any systematic approach here is bound to be difficult since it is hard to know as an outsider if such curricula exist at a particular institution. Thus, finding out about them and accessing them is perhaps the main difficulty. For example, the Kristoffer school in Sweden has long had variations in its formal crafts curriculum where a brief course in bookbinding is included in 9th grade as well as 11th grade and where the 12th grade consists of a full year of specialization in one chosen material rather than several smaller courses (cf. Tyson 2018b). This represents a significant deviation from the standard craft curriculum and the inspiration for it came, as I have been told but with no real possibility to verify, in the late 1970s or early 80s from the Hibernia school.

Enacted curricula are open to be studied, both through interviews and observation as well as by looking at the lesson plans, weekly curriculum and other documents of an individual school. The interviews can be done with teachers or students, in person or through written testimonies. In case study 2, on the social development project, a combination of interviews and reviews of informal documents has been used. The appropriate method depends on the kind of enacted curriculum in question, is it a major block of educational activity or a specific aspect? Is it easy to grasp its major elements through condensed writing/retelling or does it require a more detail-oriented approach? However, for the most part one can expect interviews or written reports to be sufficient since the focus is on enacted curricula close to the level of formal

curricula rather than to didactical practice. For example, a written report of the craft tasks given at the Kristoffer school (as detailed in Tyson 2018b) is sufficient from a curriculum perspective, whereas observations might be needed in order to clarify the way in which this is taught, i.e. the practical didactical aspects. These are clearly not two distinctly separate matters but rather represent two ends of a continuum.

Studies of experienced curricula are mostly conducted in a similar fashion to those of enacted ones.

When it comes to method of analysis, it is fundamentally comparative. It does not, however, necessarily involve any specific analytical tools (although this depends on the context) but tends to work with conceptual comparisons and these concepts are grounded in the cases chosen. Thus, in case study 1 the concepts are mainly related to crafts vocational education given that these are the concepts that have been most heavily influential in how the curriculum has come to deviate from the standard one. In case study 2 the concepts are social work combined with craftwork since these are at the center of the case. Other deviant curricula such as that at the Solvik school mentioned in passing earlier would proceed from the concepts that are central to their deviation (probably intuitive pedagogy and the movable classroom, see for example Schönherr-Dhom 2014).

The purpose of such comparative conceptual analysis is, following the phronetic approach, the development of practical wisdom rather than theory. Thus, the analysis or discussion is interesting and relevant to the degree that it can increase our understanding for the purpose of acting wisely in practice, i.e. increasing human flourishing (Tyson 2017 pp. 94-96). Thus, what might be considered lacking in empirical analysis from other

research perspectives represents a different research aim. This, of course, does not free the researcher from the responsibility to argue clearly and coherently. But the question of validity relates more to the case studies' capacity to enrich our practice, a pragmatic kind of validity as Flyvbjerg calls it (2001).

Common to all of these methods is a research design oriented towards extreme cases (Flyvbjerg 2001), where cases are actively sought that deviate from the average norm. The average norm is not simply a given, but, in the current context, can be considered to be the national standard curricula as well as established textbooks that remain close to their formulations when suggesting ways in which to enact their

The Swedish Steiner schools had to adapt their curriculum to the new national curriculum in 2011.

prescriptions in practice. In Sweden this would be e.g., the national Steiner curriculum *En väg till frihet* (Waldorfskolefederationen 2016) and perhaps literature such as the book *Waldorfpädagogik* (Liebendörfer & Liebendörfer 2013).

One also needs to bear in mind that there are highly interesting deviations from didactical practice that nevertheless do not significantly represent a deviation from the standard curriculum. An example of this, as far as I can tell, is the approach of the Swiss Waldorf teacher Christian Breme to embryology, where he has developed an extensive class that centers on modeling the stages of the embryo's development in clay (Breme 2012). Such case studies of didactical practice are at least as important as the curriculum studies suggested here and some indications of their potential can be found in Tyson (2018a).

Exemplifying the Approach

Vocational and Social Developments in the Steiner Curriculum

Case Study 1 – The Hibernia School

A good way of testing the main thesis of this article, that deviant versions of the Steiner curriculum are largely marginalized, is to look at the impact that the most widely discussed one has had internationally. The Hibernia school, founded by Klaus Fintelmann in the 1950s, represents a significant modification of the curriculum from grade 7 onwards, mainly through an integration of vocational elements including, a full apprenticeship-training at the upper secondary level. The standard Steiner curriculum otherwise normally qualifies students at the upper secondary level for further academic rather than vocational studies.

As a consequence of these changes at the Hibernia school, some of the more advanced natural science and social science contents of the standard curriculum were left out of the curriculum for grades 10-12 and reserved for an optional two-year *Kolleg*, where students could go in order to get their Abitur. Other than this, the standard curriculum is largely followed so that the additions of the apprenticeships (and more general considerations on practical Bildung that will not be further discussed here) represents the main difference. This take on the Steiner curriculum was extensively documented in the 1970s and 80s culminating in a UNESCO study by Rist & Schneider (1979). Furthermore, it also

represents a significant deviation from conventional apprenticeship-based vocational education and training in Germany.

Within the German-speaking sphere, this and other similar initiatives in Kassel and Nürnberg have seen a

good number of works devoted to their curriculum innovations and generally to the integration of vocational elements in upper secondary curricula (cf. e.g., Edding et al. 1985; Fintelmann 1991; Fücke 1996, 1981). There have also been further developments in more recent years (cf. the special edition of the journal *Erziehungskunst*, February 2018, for a review). However, it is not mentioned in the German standard curriculum (Richter 2016) and none of this seems to have had any impact

in the English literature on Steiner curricula or Steiner education more generally. All that exists in English from the Hibernia school is the UNESCO-published aforementioned study by Rist & Schneider (1979) and one chapter that reiterated elements of that study in a larger compilation (Loose 1988), and that is all. The only research articles or dissertations mentioning these matters are not directly concerned with Steiner education but rather with vocational education (Tyson 2015, 2017). A reasonable assumption is that the combination of language barriers and the weak position of vocational education in most countries has contributed to this. However, the point here is that had there been a concerted and systematic effort to explore deviations from the standard Steiner curriculum, these and other initiatives could not have been overlooked. As it stands, more than 50 years of development and experience remain to be discussed and learned from, at least outside of the German-speaking context.

The basic ideas behind the Hibernia curriculum are that students at this stage in their biography benefit immensely from a kind of general vocational education or *Berufliche Bildung* (vocational Bildung). The argument can be summarized in three points:

1. That training of manual skills is a general education of the will (where arts, humanities and sciences tend to involve a general cognitive and emotional education).
2. That (manual or crafts) vocational education for all students is a path of overcoming the social division of labor.
3. That vocational education is a way to introduce a biographical relationship towards work and of

The basic ideas behind the Hibernia curriculum are that students at this stage in their biography benefit immensely from a kind of general vocational education.

supporting both the transition to work after school and the capacity for self-directed lifelong learning.

Fully exploring these matters or even summarizing more than the bare minimum would be beyond the scope of this article. Here I will focus on the main deviations from the standard curriculum.

The school began as an apprenticeship training at the Hibernia chemistry factories in the Ruhr area where its founder, Klaus Fintelmann, was invited to take responsibility for their general education. He introduced elements from the standard Steiner curriculum, such as the so-called main lessons in the mornings, where the same subject is taught over the course of 2-4 weeks and in time the initiative grew to form a comprehensive school. Owing to this beginning in vocational education and Fintelmann's ideas about the general educational value of a vocational education at the upper secondary level, the school came to develop its main deviation from the standard curriculum. Basically, this consists in having all students at the upper secondary level in grades 10-12 train in a vocation to the point where they are able to complete a journeyman's test and earn their vocational certificate. The students are able to choose between several crafts such as carpentry, tailoring, the now discontinued chemical engineering at the Hibernia factories, tool making, electrics, as well as childcare for those not interested in a more traditional craft education. The curriculum also impacts grades 7-9 because the students, up until the second semester in grade 10, are exposed to the basic elements of all crafts, thereby making their choice of specialization midway through grade 10 with approximately the first apprenticeship year completed in all of them. For those that wish, there is the possibility to remain at the school after graduation to attend their *Kolleg* where one or two-years of further study allows for the acquisition of an Abitur or other certificates that give access to the various levels of German post-secondary education.

The main innovation, then, is in including vocational education, mostly in crafts or industrial crafts. These are then generally taught in a conventional way; Fintelmann notes that the technical world of work is functionally divided today so that most work-tasks are dispersed to such a degree that an immediate experience of the full context is no longer possible. This, he argues, creates a situation where workers need to be taught how to act out of insight and knowledge of the whole process they

are engaged in. He goes on to say that the implication is that we need to foster a motivation among workers to understand the aims and purposes of their work, even if the sense of it cannot be experienced immediately but only through synthesizing experiences across a wider field. This, in turn, presupposes a kind of education that prepares one for it, something that needs to be taught before one enters the workforce since at that point the division of work-tasks is already in practice. His concluding argument here (Fintelmann 1985, p. 124f., my translation) is that

No one can carry out a socially qualified planning if he isn't – in principle – able to carry out the tasks he is planning for. And no one should be forced to carry out what he – in principle – wouldn't be able to plan and imagine, i.e. the ability to cognitively understand the context of one's work. Thus, on the practical *Bildungspath* of the Hibernia school the work-tasks are from the start created in such a way as to allow a shared participation in the experience of their solutions. The learners are asked to develop their own drafts and to independently carry them out with the responsible co-thought of the workshop teacher. [italics in original]

This not only outlines something of the potential differences between the way the vocations are taught at the Hibernia school compared to conventional vocational education and training (although that is a massive simplification, it can be assumed that there is significant variance in the "conventional" way as well, cf. Tyson 2015). It also clarifies the fundamental aim of including vocational education in a general educational curriculum. We cannot expect that students will learn these things today after school when entering vocational education because at that stage the training is already fragmented.

Although this brief introduction to the Hibernia school doesn't qualify as a full review of its curriculum, it exemplifies the central aspects of the curriculum enough that it should be clear how it offers a distinct deviation from the standard Steiner curriculum. In effect, it constitutes a Steiner educational perspective on vocational education together with a practical enactment of it. Its absence from standard curricula, along with the absence of similar variations, enforce the impression that Steiner education has little to offer in relation to vocational education and that vocational education has little to offer Steiner education.

In effect, [the Hibernia school curriculum] constitutes a Steiner educational perspective on vocational education together with a practical enactment of it.

Case Study 2 - The Social Development Project

The second example is of an enacted curriculum in social work, reported and discussed more extensively in Tyson (2016c).⁴ ‘Social work’ is a phrase intended to cover those elements of a curriculum where students are directed outwards into society for the purpose of engaging in some kind of social development work. In the standard Waldorf curriculum, a tradition has established itself where students go on a social practicum (generally at the upper secondary level) for 2-3 weeks. Often, this entails working in childcare or in homes for the elderly or disabled. The case presented here represents a deviation from this practice, regarding both continuity and focus. The description has been kept short, focusing on these deviations to the exclusion of detail and other aspects since the relevant issue here is the comparison with the standard curriculum.

The case stems from eurythmy teacher, Mr. Wilfried Kessler, who works at the *Freie Waldorfschule Römerstrasse*, in Ulm.⁵ From 1992 until today he has carried out a developmental project together with students in the village of Masloc, in Romania. During these decades, they have assisted in the construction of an anthroposophical clinic, herbal garden for medicinal herbs, a small medicine making facility, a youth center, staff accommodation, a large clinic park with a swimming pool and chapel, as well as the renovation of a kindergarten and a retirement home. There is also an ecological waste treatment plant that purifies the sewage from the buildings.

This development in Masloc has been the result of repeated visits by Kessler and student groups, initially the students he was class sponsor for, and later students from all of the upper secondary school (grades 10-12), mostly visiting for a week or two and working at the site. Almost all building materials were donated by large firms, making the project an important example of resource redistribution and recycling. For example, one large firm making radiators turned out to have a person working full time on donating equipment that had been returned by customers for reasons other than technical issues. Generally, the construction work was done with the full participation of the village and many of its inhabitants, beginning with the first trip down

after purchasing the land when it had to be cleaned, as it had been used as an informal landfill until then. The purchase was made possible through the staging of a play by the students where they collected the money needed for the initial piece of land.

Compared to standard practice, this case is one in which developmental work is done mainly through construction, i.e. in the field of crafts rather than working with children, the elderly, or the disabled (something that can well be done through crafts but that is another matter to consider). The long continuity of the project, more than 25 years, has also made it possible to increase the scale of the developmental work, allowing it to achieve lasting and extensive changes, even with relatively few weeks of actual work. The devel-

opmental project also provided a focus for many of the cultural activities undertaken by the students, allowing those activities to contribute resources to its further development.

Of central importance to the present discussion is that the majority of this developmental project was done outside of the formal curriculum and sometimes in conflict with it. Generally, it took place during holidays and similar spaces free from the demands of formal schooling, something that seems to be common when social development projects are integrated into schools. This example of an enacted curriculum is therefore easy to overlook *as a curriculum*, since it has resisted formalization. Which leads me to the discussion.

Discussing the Cases and Rereading Each through the Lens of the Other

Before returning to the issues initially raised, it is important to engage in a brief discussion of the two cases outlined in the previous section, since this illustrates the potential of the comparative method noted previously.

The cases are at opposite ends of a spectrum regarding length. The Hibernia curriculum is given here more briefly than a full presentation would entail, and the social development project is presented only in outline to demonstrate its relevance as an enacted curriculum. As parts of a standard curriculum text, the relative brevity is warranted and in the context of more systematic reviews they could well be categorized as variations on vocational education curricula and social development curricula.

‘Social work’ is a phrase intended to cover those elements of a curriculum where students are directed outwards into society for the purpose of engaging in some kind of social development work.

⁴ The report is mainly based on personal communication with Wilfried Kessler and complemented with some information from published news articles and pamphlets.

⁵ Eurythmy is a movement art established by Rudolf Steiner.

Presenting the cases together also allows for a rereading of both where they cast light on each other.

Schools as drivers of social development represent a massive and largely untapped resource at the upper secondary level. If ways could be found to turn part of education outwards into society, while today students spend the absolute majority of their time in classrooms, this potential could be unlocked. As the example of Wilfried Kessler's project demonstrates, even in circumstances where the formal curriculum contributes little, it is still possible to achieve extraordinary results, but this relies almost exclusively on individuals who possess an unusual engagement with the issue at hand.

What has remained largely unrecognized at the formal level is the potential that especially craft-vocational education contains in this respect. The results of craft-work are often such that they could be made part of social development projects, and since students need to practice in order to learn their chosen craft, it would be possible to integrate social development into the formal curriculum in many if not all vocational education programs. Thus, each case can be viewed through the lens of the other, and this suggests that vocational curricula could profit from integrating social development projects and upper secondary education could benefit from integrating vocational elements in order to drive social development.

In effect, the two deviations presented here have produced, I would argue, a potential major innovation in education predicated on someone actually combining them. What other possible innovations remain unknown to us because they are either documented in isolation and not in relation to other variations or not documented at all?

On a methodological note, these reflections do not follow in any direct way from the presentation of the two cases, rather they stem from the kind of comparative and imaginative conceptual analysis discussed in the methods section. Curriculum studies with a phronetic approach could be expected to yield such results given that the aim is to improve and enrich practice.

Conclusions

The first conclusion follows immediately from the preceding discussion: a lack of systematic documentation and comparison deprives us of possibly important

educational innovations. This conclusion is clearly not limited to Steiner education. In effect, Steiner education as a whole serves as a deviation from education in general making the issue easier to clarify by using it as an exemplifying case. State-issued curricula can be compared as reforms change them but tend otherwise to be fixed at the formal level. Given the vast number of state schools, they are more difficult to explore systematically on the informal, enacted level. Thus, Steiner education also provides an interesting look at what can happen when the formal curriculum is not as completely "owned" by one national actor and instead is relatively open to change at the institutional level. Perhaps this might even result in an argument that more diversity among formal curricula would be beneficial.

A second conclusion is that the two cases that have been taken as examples for the purpose of this argument about curriculum research and development illustrate the issues raised initially. The standard curriculum takes on the same character as a textbook that glosses over important matters of controversy or difference. In particular, the formal curriculum of the Hibernia school is an example of how the exclusion of deviations in standard publications simplifies Steiner education to its own detriment. One might be of the view that presenting diversity has not been the established purpose of curriculum publications and that

such discussions are better suited for other kinds of publications, however, it is precisely this matter that is up for debate here. If curriculum publications have not, hitherto, been written with the purpose of highlighting pluralism, the argument here is that they should be. This could be done in at least two ways, the first being to expand standard publications with some chapters on deviating Steiner curricula together with a more principled discussion on

what a comparative approach can bring. The second would be a separate publication focusing more extensively on this matter. Nothing precludes both, since the space available in publications focusing on the standard curriculum would of necessity be limited and a more extensive treatment is probably warranted.

A textbook focusing on deviating Steiner curricula would be especially valuable for teacher education where the inclusion of cases such as the ones presented provide teacher students with a more dynamic view of the Steiner curriculum. Although this argument refers

Vocational curricula could profit from integrating social development projects and upper secondary education could benefit from integrating vocational elements in order to drive social development.

specifically to Steiner teacher education, it holds validity across all teacher education. It becomes easier to perceive the biases and perspectives taken in standard curricula through such deviations.

A singular curriculum reinforces narrow and exclusionary views and impedes reflective practice (Schön 1983, 1987).

The two cases presented also highlight the importance for researchers unfamiliar with Steiner education to be cognizant of the diversity in practice, especially when doing empirical studies. Depending on the cases selected, e.g., the particular schools studied, one can develop quite different lines of inquiry. For instance, the Hibernia school represents an important case to compare with regular vocational education and training, whereas most Steiner schools have much less to offer.

It remains an open question for further empirical research to determine if, and then to what degree, the emphasis on a standard curriculum has reinforced conservatism in Steiner educational research and development. Perhaps a systematic look at the various deviations from the standard curriculum would rather support the conclusion that either or both research and development are characterized by innovation and plurality in practice. Be that as it may, the active and systematic inclusion of deviations in published curricula can hardly be expected to reduce such innovation and plurality.

Finally, an ongoing question for the Steiner school movement is its purpose. Is it a major alternative pedagogy that needs to preserve a distinct tradition or is it a framework for ongoing pedagogical research and development?

This is hardly an either-or-question. Steiner education has developed a curriculum that is largely Bildung-oriented (cf. Tyson 2018a) and as such potentially appeals to those teachers, parents, and students who desire this kind of educational focus. However, a one-sided focus on this runs the risk of marginalizing the importance of Steiner education to the larger educational community by positioning it as one of several alternative pedagogies catering to the minority that are unsatisfied with “regular” schools. Both researchers from within and from outside of the Steiner educational context could potentially contribute to the general development of pedagogy and didactics by focusing some of their efforts on cases that represent interesting developmental initiatives. This is perhaps even more important for the teacher training institutions who in

A lack of systematic documentation and comparison deprives us of possibly important educational innovations.

many ways function as gatekeepers for what we count as Steiner pedagogy. If teacher students are taught only, or almost only, what counts as the pedagogical and didactical norm or standard, this inhibits systematic development. Steiner education has the ongoing potential to be a significant source of curriculum innovation that can enrich society at large (to the extent that there is a shared interest in Bildung). However, unless there is more of a systematic cooperation between teacher training institutions, researchers, and individual schools interested in actively enacting such innovations, the potential for this will remain largely untapped.

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Waldorf Biology in a Reductionist Setting¹

Michael Holdrege

Most biology teaching in the United States today is based on a reductive-analytic approach to the life sciences. As one well-respected biology textbook says in its introductory chapter (Raven et al. 2016):

Scientists often use the philosophical approach of reductionism to understand a complex system by reducing it to its working parts. Reductionism has been the general approach of biochemistry, which has been enormously successful at unraveling the complexity of cellular metabolism by concentrating on individual pathways and specific enzymes. By analyzing all of the pathways and their components, scientists now have an overall picture of the metabolism of cells.

After breaking down the organism into its smallest entities, the many functions of biological systems are seen as

both determined and constrained by the principles of chemistry and physics. ... Every level of biological organization is governed by the nature of energy transactions learned from the study of thermodynamics. (p. 7)

Raven et al. conclude their introductory chapter on “The Science of Biology” with the following statement:

Biology as a science is broad and complex, but some unifying themes help to organize this complexity. Cells are the basic unit of life, and they are information-processing machines. (p. 14)

This introduction is followed by a chapter on “The Nature of Molecules” and one on “The Chemical Building Blocks of Life.” The textbook then devotes 335 pages to the biology of the cell and its genetic and molecular manifestations. All of this before the themes of evolution, plants and animals and, lastly, ecology are considered. Such an organizational sequence and emphasis in a modern textbook on biology will surprise no one who has taken such a course in the last 50 years. This is the way that students in high schools and universities across the country are introduced to this field of study. The reductionist approach maintains that the parts are not only prior to the whole, but are,

lastly, more real. Any form of integrative, holistic thinking is given, at best, secondary status. This fragmentary view extends far beyond biology textbooks. It is deeply rooted in the habits and attitudes of the modern science in general. As the distinguished physicist David Bohm put it:

Of course, the prevailing tendency in science ... tends very strongly to re-enforce the general fragmenting approach because it gives men a picture of the whole world as constituted of nothing but an aggregate of separately existent atomic building blocks, and provides experimental evidence from which is drawn the conclusion that this view is necessary and inevitable. In this way, people are led to feel that fragmentation is nothing but an expression of “the way everything really is” and that anything else is impossible. So there is very little disposition to look for evidence to the contrary. ... Even when such evidence does arise... the general tendency is to minimize its significance or even to ignore it altogether. (1981, p. 15)

Although such a reductionist view of the world has proven very effective at certain levels of existence, if taken seriously as the primary basis for viewing all existence, it leads to a picture of nature that is—in the words of the eminent philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead—“a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly” (1969, p. 54).

Whitehead also points to another kind of conclusion that can follow from the reductionist understanding of the laws of nature.²

The human body is a collection of molecules. Therefore, the human body blindly runs, and therefore there can be no individual responsibility for the actions of the body. If you once accept that the molecule is definitely determined to be what it is, independently of any determination by reason of the total organism of the body, and if you further admit that the blind run is settled by the general mechanical laws, there can be no escape from this conclusion. (p. 78)

1. This excerpt is taken from Michael Holdrege’s recently published book, *From Mechanism to Organism: Enlivening the Study of Human Biology* (Waldorf Publication, 2022), where it appears under the heading “Intermezzo.” We are grateful to the author for his permission to reprint the excerpt here.

2. Whitehead is not saying that the above description represents his own view of the relationship between mind and body.

If we continue in this vein and take one of the fathers of modern genetics, Francis Crick, seriously, then when we are speaking of the human being we assume a complex system that is explained by the behavior of its parts (which, in turn, have to be explained by the properties of the “parts of those parts” and how they interact). To understand the brain, for example, we need to know not only the interaction of the neurons themselves, but these also need to be explained in terms of the ions and molecules of which they are composed. If we see this as a sufficient means for understanding the brain then we must agree with Crick that we are “*nothing but a pack of neurons*.” In other words, our joys and sorrows, our sense of personal identity, our memories and ambitions are “in fact, no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules”³ (1994, p. 3).

Seen from a pedagogical perspective, such a view—if taken seriously by students at the high school or university level—can lead to the conclusion that life is, in fact, meaningless. The obvious question for them becomes “What’s the point in this life we live, if reality is only matter in motion?”

And even if they do not think things through to this ultimate conclusion, their picture of nature remains one of a lifeless interaction at the level of molecules. This has consequences for the way we relate to the world around us. In his thought-provoking article, “Beyond the Mechanistic World View,” Douglas Sloan describes how the mechanistic picture of the natural world,

by removing the holistic view of a meaningful and valuable picture of nature has led to a relentless dismantling of nature... the view of nature as nothing but matter in motion also supports the exploitation and misuse of the earth through an unrestrained economism... The costs to the earth are now painfully apparent. The destruction of forests; the degrading of arable land; the pollution of lakes; the mass extinction of living species. ... As long

as nature is regarded as having no qualities—no inner life, no meaning, no living wholeness—taking it apart for our own immediate pleasure and economic advantage is obviously that much easier to justify. (2018, p. 14)

Sloan goes on to describe the tragic consequences that this mindset leads to in the widely prevalent factory farming of animals, where the suffering of animals—above all cows, pigs and poultry—is almost never addressed.

Daily our culture inflicts cruelty and suffering on millions of animals of an intensity hitherto unknown. The animals are defined as “units of production” and are treated accordingly as useful pieces of machinery without feelings. Their entire lives are unrelieved wretchedness. A pall of suffering of living, feeling creatures hangs over our modern culture, and most of us are complicit in it, if only through willful ignorance of what is taking place. ... The withholding of mercy to these fellow creatures bespeaks an appalling failure of imagination in thinking, a lack of empathy in feeling, and a weakness in moral willing. (p. 15)

Seen from a pedagogical perspective, such a view—if taken seriously by students at the high school or university level—can lead to the conclusion that life is, in fact, meaningless.

Of course, the reductionist, mechanistic approach is only one possible way to investigate nature. The poignant question is whether this way of viewing nature suffices for grasping all levels of existence—or does it, already from the outset, exclude certain aspects of nature that are actually characteristic of living organisms. Might it be that this approach is not completely false, but just extremely one-sided and thus unable to think outside its own self-created box, which makes it incapable of recognizing different levels of existence, such as plant, animal, and human?

The eminent psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, characterized this reduction of phenomena to what only fits into the narrow lens of the specialist as “*nothing-but-ness*.” Thus, for Francis Crick humans are—as cited earlier—“nothing but” a pack of neurons. Through limited perspectives such as this, as Frankl put it: “Human phenomena are thus turned into mere epiphenomena” (1969, p. 398).

E.F. Schumacher provides an original and insightful analysis of such issues in his book, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (1977, p. 17), where he speaks of the inability of reductionist approaches to distinguish between what he calls

3 That such a description undermines itself has been pointed out by numerous more reflective, philosophically-schooled individuals. In the words of Douglas Sloan (2018): “The paradox in such writing lies in the fact that the ideas, values, and positions advanced by these scientists and thinkers must also be regarded as ‘electrochemical brain processes,’ thereby losing any qualitative advantage over other ideas, values, and position, all reduced to the same level of electrochemical mechanism. Either these thinkers are making exceptions for their own ideas or they are unaware of the implications of the mechanistic view so deeply ingrained in the modern scientific mind” (p. 10). [See also Douglas Sloan’s “Brief Reflections on Waldorf Education,” later in this volume.]

“ontological discontinuities” or “jumps in the Level of Being”—such as the fundamental difference between a stone, a plant, and an animal. From a rigid reductionist perspective—he humorously observes—a dog could be defined as a “barking plant” or as a “running cabbage.” As farfetched as this may sound, it is common in the realm of human biology, for example, to simply refer to the heart as “nothing but” a pressure-propulsion pump.

One attempt to deal with the challenge of “ontological discontinuities” can be found in the concept of “emergence,” which points to the limitations of exclusively reductionist explanations when it comes to higher levels of complexity in nature. In the periodical, *Horizons*, published by the Swiss National Science Foundation, we find the following description of “emergence”:

Emergence is one of the most puzzling but fundamental phenomena of the universe: the appearance of new characteristics at each higher level of complexity which cannot be predicted from the previous level. An example: The characteristics of life cannot be deduced from lifeless matter. However far we pursue research in physics and chemistry, this route will never enable us to predict the specific behavior of living organisms. It appears to be a generally valid principle that the (complex) whole cannot be traced back to its (simple) parts. This includes all stages of increasing complexity. At the level of the atom: Observing hydrogen and oxygen atoms in isolation gives no clue to the characteristics of a water molecule. Or, at the end of the scale: The characteristics of consciousness do not result from the extrapolation of behavior. (Kiefer 2007)

Teaching the life sciences in a Waldorf high school includes an awareness that questions around reductionism, “nothing-but-ness,” ontological discontinuities, etc., are not trivial. Fortunately, a great deal of significant research from a holistic/phenomenological perspective has been done in the life sciences over the past century. These efforts provide Waldorf science teachers with many new and exciting vantage points to draw upon as they try to nourish the “emerging capacities” of their students moving through the four years of high school. Many of these resources will be referred to in what follows, because they provide a means for fostering new kinds of thinking in our students, thinking that allows them to move beyond mere “nothing-but-ness” and linear causality into a more dynamic and multifaceted understanding of the nature of nature.

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- Michael Holdrege, M.S., M.A., M.B.A.**, did his Waldorf teacher training in Stuttgart, Germany, before becoming a high school biology teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School in Vienna, Austria, followed by seven years at the Institute for Goethean Studies in Vienna. He has taught Life and Earth Sciences, Economics, and German at the Chicago Waldorf School. He is faculty member at the Waldorf Teacher Institute of Chicago and at the Waldorf Teacher Training Program in Xi’an, China. Michael is author of *From Creative Ideas to Innovative Practices: Change-adept Organizations for a Changing World (2010)*, as well as of *From Mechanism to Organism: Enlivening the Study of Human Biology (Waldorf Publication, 2022)*, from which this excerpt is taken.

Exodus and Impetus

Douglas Gerwin

Children two years behind in their learning due to a lingering pandemic. Fights in the school hallway and shootings in the classroom. Parent meetings in uproar over the teaching of history and civics or discussions concerning sexuality and gender. Books banned from the shelves of school libraries. Smart phones replacing social discourse at recess. Classes doubled in size for lack of staff. Is it a wonder that teachers are fleeing their profession in record number this year? According to a recent Gallup poll, the burn-out rate today among U.S. teachers, K through 12th grade, is the highest of all professions in the country. Some 600,000 teachers quit the classroom between the start of the pandemic in January 2020 and the end of this past school year, including a growing percentage mid-year. And the schools are still feeling the consequences of the epidemic. A report just released shows that K-12 education lost over 20,000 employees in September; there are now some 310,000 fewer teachers and support staff employed in public schools than there were pre-pandemic.

Interestingly, a good number of them are redirecting their attention away from children to human beings approaching the other end of life by signing on as caretakers in old age homes. Other teachers are gravitating to jobs in business, or launching a self-employed tutoring venture from home, or simply taking early retirement.

The problem of teacher flight is further aggravated these days by a decline in the number of young people opting to become teachers. According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), enrollment in teacher training programs fell by a third during the last decade (2010-2020) and shows few signs of picking up, despite a chronic listing of classroom vacancies. We hear stories of schools summoning members of the National Guard or pressing untrained staff, even upper-level high school teenagers, into service as substitutes for trained teachers. Other American schools are stepping up their recruiting of teachers overseas, especially from Asia.

However, beneath these readily understandable grounds for leaving the teaching profession—along with common complaints about low pay, long hours, high-stress environments, and the requirement of endless administrative reports—there may lie a more

radical and all-pervasive reason for this widespread exodus. Education as we commonly know it is simply not working, and it hasn't been working for a timespan lasting much longer than the months of Covid or years of technological encroachment or decades, by now, of school violence. Blue-ribboned reports stretching back as far as 1983 have bewailed the decline of the American system of education.¹ And yet the problems chronicled in these reports persist. We need to ask, at a deeper level, what is amiss?

Society as an Organism

In his depiction of a healthy society, Rudolf Steiner laid out three spheres, each organically integrated with the other two yet distinct in its operation. Steiner delineated them in terms of an economic sphere for matters of finance and commerce, a political sphere for issues of rights and agreements, and a cultural sphere embracing the arts, sciences, and practices of religion in the broadest meaning of these terms. Cooking, farming, sports, medicine, research experiments: these are all expressions of artistic, scientific, ethical activity and, hence, form part of the cultural sphere.

From the outset, Steiner described these three spheres as a three-folded or tri-une organism, meaning that each sphere of activity is fully integrated into the others while remaining distinct in character and objective. Just as in the human organism, where bodily systems of nerve and blood, bone and muscle, lymph and digestion, etc. work together while remaining distinct in their function and purpose, so, too, these three spheres of society work separately yet as a coherent organism.²

Each of these three societal spheres, Steiner pointed out, flourishes under the aegis of a specific ideal: cultural life will flourish to the degree its activities are

1 Recall, for instance, the celebrated government report comparing U.S. educational practices to a declaration of enemy hostilities: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." From *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education (1983).

2 Steiner referred to this arrangement as "*die Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*," which is most accurately translated as "the threefolding of the social organism." On occasion he referred to the latter as "*die soziale Ordnung*," which is best translated as "the social ordering" of society, a translation that still points to the active, dynamic nature of the relationship among the three social spheres. However, these German terms have frequently been translated more loosely as "the threefold social order," a rendering that obscures the fundamentally living—that is to say, *organic*—nature of the relationship existing among these spheres.

imbued with the ideal of human freedom; the political sphere will flourish harmoniously when guided by the ideal of human equality; the economic sphere will flourish most profitably when led by the ideal of human collaboration or association. These three ideals—already sounded in the rallying cry of the French Revolution as *Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!*—hold the secret, he said, to the thriving of a healthy, because whole, society. Their absence presages the onset of an unhealthy society.

Specifically, mischief begins when the ideal of one sphere is appropriated by another – when, for instance, the ideal of *Liberté* is applied in the economic sphere, resulting in an unbounded system of “free enterprise.” Or when the ideal of *Egalité* is imposed on the cultural life, and consequently all members of a society are required to adopt uniform social behaviors or group-think. Or when the ideal of *Fraternité* is adopted in the political arena, with the result that policies are decided (and enforced) by the associating of exclusive cliques, pressure groups, or clubby brotherhoods. Our history is littered with examples of these kinds of misappropriation.

Out of Lofty Ideals to Practical Values

To take this tri-une outline a step further: each sphere has not only its own guiding ideal but also its own values, or heuristic practices. In the sphere of economic production, for instance, it makes sense to value and practice, among other considerations, *efficiency*, *speed*, *predictability*, and *reproducibility*. These practices give rise, for instance, to greater economic productivity and (at least in theory) to greater financial wealth for those who work collaboratively in these ways.

However, apply these same values or practices to cultural activity and they will tend to undermine the richness and ultimately the health of cultural life itself. For instance:

- Prepare food under the pressure of *speed* and it becomes fast food
- Build houses guided by the practice of *reproducibility* and they become prefabricated tenement blocks or tract housing
- Grow crops guided by the principle of *efficiency* and they will yield vulnerable hot-housed plants or disease-prone monocultures
- Speak or write with a quality of *predictability* and words become clichés and acronyms. Soon, as we

say, they are “not worth the paper they’re written on” and we LOL!

On this view, teaching—or what is rightly called the “art” of education—is fundamentally a cultural endeavor. Like all cultural practices, it participates also in the other two spheres of society without, however, originating from them. Consequently, the cultural enterprise of teaching is decidedly *not* enhanced by the practices of efficiency, speed, predictability, or reproducibility, which can be of such great help to economic activity. On the contrary, education—for that matter, human development as a whole—needs time to unfold. (Indeed, the very word “school” is derived from a Latin term for “leisure.”) Moreover, teacher and student alike need space to make mistakes; these may appear to be an inefficient practice yet can provide such great learning moments! As well, successful teaching requires space for the element of surprise and the promise of the unexpected. And every teacher

knows that a successful lesson is one of a kind: it cannot simply be repeated in the same way next time. In other words, successful teaching is by nature *inefficient*, *not-speedy*, *unpredictable*, and utterly *irreproducible*.

And this, to my mind, is why education, as it is widely practiced in our time on this continent, is not working: it is essentially guided by economic, rather than cultural, values and objectives, as the following common practices suggest.

- *Speed*: “Timed tests” rely not simply on what students know but on how quickly they can articulate it — or, in the case of a multiple-choice test, how swiftly they can recognize it.
- *Reproducibility*: “Worksheets” inevitably entail repeated usage and standardized content, especially when used to compare the performance of one group of students against another.
- *Efficiency*: “Textbooks” provide one of the most succinct ways to transmit material from teacher to student and to compress a maximum of pre-organized content into a minimum of reading space, whether on a page (or increasingly on a screen).
- *Predictability*: “Uniform lesson plans and schedules” determine the content and timing of a teacher’s progress through a curriculum prescribed by the school to the point that one can know precisely how far a class has progressed in a subject on any given day, regardless of who is teaching it.

More generally, we hear a lot about how teachers are expected—and consequently how schools will be

Successful teaching is by nature *inefficient*, *not-speedy*, *unpredictable*, and utterly *irreproducible*.

funded—to prepare students for the workforce and for better paying jobs. This outcome may indeed be a helpful *consequence* of education but that does not make it the rightful *motive* for promoting it. Far more than helping children become successful participants in the economic sphere, the primary task of teachers is to instill in their students the will to learn more — i.e., to further enrich the life of the cultural sphere. This is not to deny the value of developing good learning habits or essential skills during the children’s school years. Rather, the point here is to reorient the motive for teaching and learning from economic to cultural values.

By subjecting teaching practices to values that rightfully belong to economic realms, we have essentially converted schools into mudrooms or antechambers for the economic sphere of society. But to be true to its nature, the art of teaching (as opposed to specific job training) needs to be governed by the cultural ideal of freedom and the practical values that flow from it. An education guided by the ideal of freedom will allow teachers to explore a subject without presupposing a predetermined outcome, or muse and imagine without keeping a constant eye on the clock, or leave space for something totally unforeseen to break forth as a lesson unfolds. For this to happen, teaching practices will need to be the very *opposite* of efficient, speedy, predictable, or reproducible.

An education imbued with the ideal of freedom will assuredly prepare children to range freely and effectively in all realms of society, whether economic, political, or cultural. Waldorf schools, to the degree they operate out of this ideal, demonstrate this efficacy through their alumni, who have been shown to fan out to a wide range of secondary education and careers.³ But more compelling is this consideration: teachers working out of the cultural ideal of freedom prepare their students to help heal in free and fresh ways the ailments currently afflicting human society. Free thinking begets fresh solutions.

If the art of teaching, as sketched here, is recognized and honored as a force for social healing, we may hope for this recognition to serve as the impetus to attract a new generation of educators to this venerable profession.

Douglas Gerwin, Ph.D., has taught history, literature, German, music, and life science at college and Waldorf high school levels for over 40 years. As Executive Director of the Center for Anthroposophy (CfA), he divides his time between adult education and mentoring Waldorf schools across North America.

Himself a Waldorf graduate, Douglas is the founder of CfA's Waldorf High School Teacher Education Program, as well as the first Executive Director of the Research Institute for Waldorf Education. He is author and editor of ten books on Waldorf education, as well as numerous articles on education and anthroposophy. He recently co-authored the latest survey of Waldorf graduates, published in book form with the titled *Into the World: How Waldorf Graduates Fare After High School (2020)*. At present, Douglas resides on the outskirts of Amherst, Massachusetts.

3 According to a survey conducted by the Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE), graduates from Waldorf high schools matriculated into 18 of the 20 different categories of North American colleges and universities. See *Survey of Waldorf Graduates, Phase II* (Research Institute for Waldorf Education, 2007).

Douglas Sloan celebrated his 90th birthday recently with an open house at which a stream of illustrious friends and colleagues coursed through the Sloan's warm and lovely home!

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE) saluted Douglas at this gathering from both near and far with flowers and visits. It could be that few realize the powerful gifts Douglas Sloan has given RIWE and the whole Waldorf community over his years of steadfast work for Waldorf education. He was co-founder of the RIWE in 1996 and the first editor of the *Research Bulletin*, now in its 28th year.

Douglas' life is one of those miracle stories of unlikely beginnings and remarkable pathways. Born in 1933, in Kansas, during the Great Depression and in the first year of the catastrophic Dust Bowl events in the Midwest, Douglas once reported that he assisted on the family farm by spraying DDT (touted to farmers as an answer to all problems) and was covered in the stuff along with the fields he was treating. He wondered how he had lived this long with such events in his early years — a fine tribute to the health-giving power of discerning clarity of thought, a defining characteristic of Douglas Sloan.

In high school, Douglas held the record in the Central Kansas district for the one mile run at 4 minutes and thirty seconds. This might have led to his capacity for quick and deep thinking and may have helped in his attaining a degree in Philosophy from Southern Methodist University, and later, with a scholarship to Yale's Divinity School, a master's degree in Theology. He spent an additional scholarship year studying theology in Edinburgh, Scotland, and returned as a Methodist minister in the city of Protection, Kansas.

In Protection, Douglas met Fern Sloan's mother and eventually her daughter, who was living at that time in New York City and training to become the storied actress she is today. The origin of their meeting has a prophetic ring to it, as Douglas has been a lifelong protector of the arts and of Fern, a gifted actress and teacher of the Michal Chekov acting technique. Fern and Douglas married in 1962 (60 years together — still counting!) and moved to New York City.

Douglas earned a doctorate in History, on scholarship once more, at Columbia University and was Professor of

History and Education at Teachers' College from 1969 to 2003. As curriculum theorist and author, he also taught for many summers at the Rudolf Steiner Institute, and in the 1990s he taught teachers at the Sunbridge College master's degree program. In addition, for several years Douglas taught Rudolf Steiner's *Occult Science – An Outline*, at the Alkion Teacher Education at the Hawthorne Valley Association in Harlemville. He is a retired class reader for the Harlemville community group of the School for Spiritual Science of the Anthroposophical Society.

While at Columbia's Teachers' College (TC), Douglas served for seven years as editor of the national journal of education, the *TC Record*. Several grants secured made possible a series of conferences on "Education and Modern Culture" at Columbia, which included perspectives from Waldorf education — a first in many ways — along with other philosophies of education.

Douglas has been an active author throughout his lifetime. Among his many writings are the following books:

The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal (Teachers College Press, 1971), in which he points to the influence of Presbyterian Scots on American education. This book contributed to a larger, ongoing discussion of Scottish-American relations.

The Computer in Education: A Critical Perspective (Columbia University Press, 1985), an edited collection of essays. His 1993 book, *Insight-Imagination: The Emancipation of Thought and the Modern World* (published by the Resource Center for Redesigning), argues that "a fundamental transformation of our ideas about knowing, our selves, and our world is not only possible, but necessary. The key to this transformation lies in an understanding of 'insight-imagination'—the involvement of the thinking, feeling, willing, valuing person in knowing."

In 1994, Douglas published *Faith and Knowledge: Main Line Protestantism and Higher Education* (Westminster John Knox Press), which calls attention to the almost forgotten theological renaissance of the 1930s and the involvement of mainline American Protestant churches in higher education.

Douglas Sloan's *The Redemption of the Animals: Their Evolution, Their Inner Life, and Our Future Together*

(Lindisfarne, 2015) is a thoroughly researched and masterful study of the relationship between animals and human beings. Using observations from his own life with animals as well as extensive research into past and current practices with animals, Douglas defines new ideas and imaginations for a better future with all living things on earth. (We can testify that during the time Douglas was conducting his research for this book, the facts of current practices in our standard treatment of animals hung like a shadow over him – the only time “curmudgeon” could ever be applied to this sunny, cheerful personage!)

Douglas Sloan participated in multiple RIWE colloquia over the decades since its foundation. In a 2019 colloquium, he gave a fascinating presentation on his work on this last book, addressing the needs and necessities around our attitudes towards and relationships with animals. In his customary style of engagement and teaching, Douglas engendered a mood of reverence and open inquiry, precipitating warm and robust discussion about our responsibilities toward all living things.

The festivities marking Douglas’ 90th birthday included an apt social engagement, in which participants pulled out of a bowl a written fact about 1933, the year of Douglas’ birth, and were tasked with incorporating their allotted fact into conversation. The party favors? Poems and wise thoughts from a broad and eclectic selection of Douglas’ favorite authors, poets, and philosophers. Each of the assembled guests departed the party with thoughts and artistry to carry us into the future.

The Research Bulletin would like to honor Douglas on this occasion by reprinting two of his past contributions to this journal, to which Douglas Sloan served as first editor.

Some Brief Reflections on Waldorf Education as a Powerful Counterforce to the Modern Assault on the Human Being

Douglas Sloan

From "Editor's Introduction," *Research Bulletin* Vol. X-1, 2005.

Every educational theory and its practice implies and draws upon some image of the human being. So we must ask of every educational endeavor, "What image of the human being is at work in it, and what are the consequences?" To drastically oversimplify, Waldorf education views the human being as a wholeness of body, soul, and spirit with the potential of becoming a free, responsible, caring, and creative individual.

Through its pedagogy and curriculum, Waldorf education strives to nurture that becoming to its fullest in each individual child. Unfortunately, [...] modern culture and education are increasingly dominated by images of the human being that fix and reduce the human to something less than human, to some kind of mechanistic entity.

In the preface to his recent book, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, Ray Kurzweil, a leading figure in the "artificial intelligence" community, writes: "The primary political and philosophical issue of the next century [this century] will be the definition of who we are—of how we define human."¹ Kurzweil has, indeed, identified one of the central questions facing us today. Kurzweil himself, however, is not simply making a neutral statement. Rather, he is contending for a specific image of the human being as a machine. Granted, his is not the old machine of wheels, gears, and cogs, but, rather, the new, streamlined, cybernetic machine of electronic and chemical reactions as information carriers. This image nonetheless depicts the human being as entirely the product of material forces, and, in effect, reduces meaning, values, purpose, the whole realm of qualities, and selves to mere reflections of material, mechanistic forces and processes.

The late Francis Crick, noted biochemist become cognitive scientist, starkly expressed this view a few years ago in the opening paragraph of his book, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*. Crick wrote:

You, your joys and sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast

assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. . . . you're nothing but a pack of neurons.²

Such an image of the human being is dominant today in many fields—cognitive science, genetic research, and much of modern medicine, to name a few. This image also permeates a good deal of popular culture, popular consciousness, and modern education. Consider, for example, this 1997 statement of the International Academy of Humanism in which Crick was joined by other leading figures, including biologists Richard Dawkins and E.O. Wilson and the "humanists" Isaiah Berlin, W.V. Quine, and Kurt Vonnegut. In justification for the scientists' demanding a free hand in human cloning, they write:

Humanity's rich repertoire of thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and hopes seems to arise from electrochemical brain processes, not from an immaterial soul that operates in ways no instrument can discover. . . . Views of human nature rooted in humanity's tribal past [tribal past meaning, as they say earlier in their statement, humankind's religious and moral traditions] ought not to be our primary criterion for making moral judgments about cloning [and presumably about anything else].³

Several observations should make us highly suspicious of such statements from the outset. In the first place, if we agree that the whole "rich repertoire" of culture is simply the reflection of electrochemical brain processes and nothing else, we have to include in those processes the thoughts and words of those who write such statements. So why should we accept the results of their electrochemical brain processes rather than our own? Furthermore, these statements are patently self-serving. In spite of the seemingly objective, scientific language, the clear intent is to justify unrestrained scientific and technological development without any considerations of the moral and environmental consequences.

Power and profit are intimately intertwined with this supposedly scientific view. Beyond these initial common sense responses, there are other reasons for

1 Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

2 Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Scribners, 1994).

3 Quoted in Leon Kass, "The Moral Meaning of Genetic Technology," *Commentary*, Vol. 108 (September, 1999): 38.

calling into question an exclusively mechanistic view of the human being. The doctrine of the mind as simply another word for brain mechanisms means, to Crick and others, that no non-sensory, immaterial realities exist: no soul and spirit, for sure; but also no meaning, purpose, values, truth, beauty, or goodness. No ideas even. All these are, at most, a kind of illusory foam churned up by the electrochemical discharges of the human machine.

Such a view can, of course, never do justice to the reality of ideas, because ideas are non-sensory, immaterial. To be sure, most of our ideas probably arise initially in connection with our sense experiences of the physical world, but they themselves are never found among the objects of that world. Nonetheless, they can be powerful enough to penetrate that world, enabling us to understand and transform it radically. After all, it is by means of ideas that atoms are split.

The fundamental power of ideas was once vividly expressed by the great mathematician Stanislaus Ulam, who was active in the Manhattan Project. “It is still an unending source of surprise for me,” he wrote, “to see how a few scribbles on a blackboard or on a sheet of paper could change the course of human affairs.”⁴ And we ought not to forget that books that reduce ideas to mechanistic electrochemical discharges are themselves presented in the form of ideas.

Furthermore, a whole class of ideas exists called *ideals*: truth, beauty, goodness, love, joy, patience, kindness, fidelity, and so forth. These ideas—non-sensory, immaterial through and through—are extraordinarily powerful, for, to the extent that we are able to identify with them, they change us.

Machines, obviously, are unaffected by ideal, moral considerations, and neither will human beings be so affected to the extent that they allow themselves to be defined, treated, and act as machines.

Taken seriously, the view of the human being as a machine permits programming of the machine. But it means also that all actions of the individual are unfree, completely determined by the automatic operations of the machine, rather than by an at least partially free and responsible self. Since mechanical operations cannot take responsibility or be held accountable, any conceptions of human freedom, self-directed action,

responsibility, and creativity are rendered meaningless. And, yet, all of us, including those who hold to the mechanistic view of the human being, have to assume in practice that our behavior is influenced by plans, purposes, and motives, for which we are responsible.

When people write books promulgating the view of the human being as mechanistically determined, they surely believe that they themselves freely write those books, even though for the purpose of persuading readers that there is no freedom, purpose, or self-determination. A theory that has to assume in practice a freedom, purpose, and self-determination denied by the theory itself would appear to be rampantly self-contradictory.

Of course, a view that denies the existence of a self that can be held accountable would lend itself to the interests of those who are eager to engineer and control nature and human beings, and, in short, to employ any technology that works to their special advantage—and to do all this at will, without restraint, and for a profit. This is a view, moreover, that undergirds the growing global conglomerate of scientists, governments, universities, and corporations that seek to exploit and control nature and human beings for their own power, profit, and prestige. Unfortunately, this image of the human—and of all life itself—permeates much modern education from top to bottom.

Over a century ago, in an essay on education, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that “the surest bulwark of all that is sacred in the human being is not to accept degrading views.” Our culture and education today are shot through with degrading views and their destructive consequences. Nevertheless, the human being is—for a time at least—still human, a being of body, soul, and spirit; a being of interwoven intelligence, emotion, and intention, all capable of infinite development. This, our full human being, contains within itself the resources for countering and transforming all those forces that would reduce the human to the non-human. But we must recognize, strengthen, and draw upon this fullness of the human being while it is still possible, while there is still time. Ours is now a critical moment, for ominous signs exist that the time remaining for the fully human is seriously threatened and may be drastically limited. This is why Waldorf education is far more important than we ourselves are perhaps even aware.

We ought not to forget that books that reduce ideas to mechanistic electrochemical discharges are themselves presented in the form of ideas.

4 Quoted in Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 11.



Science and the Humanities

The Great Rift in Modern Consciousness¹

Douglas Sloan

This may at first seem like a strange title. After all, the curricular division between science and the humanities has long been the basic organizing principle for the main subjects in the whole of modern education. It is an organizing principle that reaches from the university level all the way down. Even if, as we shall see, regard for the distinction has often become in modern education little more than lip service, has not the science/humanities division been, nevertheless, extremely useful, and does it not, in spite of problems, remain so? In fact, is it not a given task of thoughtful educators to wrestle perpetually with the relationship between science and the humanities, and are not the problems thrown up by this wrestling and the need to grapple with them a part of the essential service rendered by the distinction itself? Moreover, is not the suggestion in the title of this essay more than a little overblown; namely, that the science/humanities division is not only an issue for education, but is deeply implicated in a major crisis in the whole of modern culture and consciousness?

This essay will attempt in brief form two main things: first, to explore how the educational division between science and the humanities has helped produce a profound split in modern consciousness—a split with far-reaching deleterious consequences; and, second, to point to some actual directions for overcoming and healing the split.

The development of the relationship between science and the humanities has a fascinating and venerable history. It lies far beyond the scope of this essay to trace this history here in any detail. Suffice it to say that perhaps the first firm outlines of the modern form of the science/humanities classification, though this was not its first appearance, can be discerned in the rise of the medieval university in the eleventh and twelfth centuries with its division of the seven liberal arts between the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). Even then, lines between the subject areas were not hard and fast. Mathematics, for one example, was still looked upon as “the Queen of the Arts.” With the emergence of the scientific revolution at the end of the Middle Ages and the almost simultaneous development of Renaissance Humanism, boundaries

began to grow sharper. Still, there was much overlap and movement back and forth.

The Renaissance Humanists inherited the seven liberal arts from the medieval university, and bringing these up to date, joined them with the newly recovered Greek and Latin authors, whose wisdom they regarded as essential to a fully developed human being. Central to the humanists' educational ideal, beyond providing entrance to career advancement, was the conviction that knowledge and the development of character should go hand in hand. The primary goal of education was, for them, to enable the forming of a strong sense of self, to equip that self with effective means of self-expression and communication, and to instill in the individual a solid ethic of service to church, state, and community. Scientific knowledge was still seen by the humanists as an important part of the educational ideal. The humanists helped foster a climate of eager inquiry in which scientific questioning could flourish; they encouraged the inclusion of natural science in the curriculum; and they themselves often engaged in actual natural science inquiry. Indeed, a leading historian of the humanities has shown that the Renaissance Humanists played an important role, directly and indirectly, in “the birth of modern science.”² He has pointed out, for instance, that Galileo credited his own humanistic studies, including Greek and Latin literature, with having given him the sense of self-confidence and effective modes of expression that enabled him to stand firm and independent in advancing his own scientific views against mainstream opposition. With Renaissance Humanism and the scientific revolution, a new consciousness began to emerge in the West, a consciousness full of promise for the human future and for the earth.

This positive potential of modern consciousness, including especially its connection with the emerging natural sciences, needs to be acknowledged and stressed. And yet, it is precisely these positive potentials that have been endangered by central conceptual presuppositions of modern science itself. In criticizing, as we shall, certain of these presuppositions, it is not to reject or disparage the positive potentials of modern science, but to explore how these might

1 This article originally appeared in *Research Bulletin*, Vol. XVI-2, Fall 2011.

2 John Paul Russo, *The Future without a Past: The Humanities in a Technological Society* (University of Missouri Press, Columbia, MO, 2005), pp. 86-87.

be maintained and developed further. The positive potentials of modern consciousness, as they made their appearance with Renaissance Humanism and the scientific revolution, can be variously described. They include: a new sense of wonder and respect for the material world; a clear and precise thinking that made possible new powers of control over the material world, and, accordingly, new possibilities for human freedom, as well as new demands on human responsibility; and, a new sense of separation from nature that went together with a newly heightened experience of individual selfhood and self-identity. The realization and fulfillment of these positive potentials required, however, that the quantitative and qualitative realms, at first shared alike by both the scientists and the humanists (who often overlapped in the same person), be held together—the quantitative realm, exemplified especially by the new powers of mathematics and technology, and the qualitative realm of meaning, value, and purpose.

If these two become separated and fall apart, the genuinely new, positive potentials of modern consciousness begin to be undermined. Controlling reason and technology, cut off from a larger matrix of meaning and purpose, begin to run amok and out of control. Individuality, severed from a larger and more encompassing context of meaning and purpose, becomes either rugged and rapacious individualism or leads to the lonely and alienated modern self. And apart from a larger reality of meaning and responsibility, freedom disappears into deterministic mechanism or meaningless caprice.

It was the scientific revolution itself that very early served to fix an increasingly sharp boundary between the sciences and the humanities, between the quantitative and the qualitative (and Galileo himself played a key role in this). Since the beginning of the scientific revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the West, three main assumptions about what we can know and how we know emerged very early and have since come to dominate modern thinking and consciousness. These assumptions have had momentous consequences for all of modern life.

The first assumption is what can be called the quantitative-mechanistic assumption about the ultimate nature of reality. It received its modern stamp very early in the scientific revolution in the writings of such scientists as Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and Boyle, and the philosopher John Locke. A fundamental

The educational division between science and the humanities has helped produce a profound split in modern consciousness — a split with far-reaching deleterious consequences.

distinction was made in the emerging new “mechanical philosophy” between what were designated at the time as “primary qualities” and “secondary qualities.” The primary qualities included such phenomena as extension in space, mass, weight, motion, number, and so forth. In other words, the realm of the primary qualities was essentially that of the quantitative. The primary qualities—quantities—it was thought could be known with clarity and certainty through empirical observation and mathematics. The secondary qualities

at first included such phenomena as color, taste, and sound, but were eventually extended to include what philosophers sometime designate as tertiary qualities—such qualitative domains as value, meaning, purpose, beauty, goodness, selves, and so forth. In this view, knowledge as such could be had only of the primary qualities, the quantitative. While the secondary and tertiary qualities might well be realities

of experience, they could not, strictly speaking, be known in any proper sense of the term. The qualities—secondary and tertiary—could provide no real material for precise, objective knowledge as such because they depended on the observer and, therefore, were considered too tainted by subjective feelings, habits, predispositions, and so on. True knowledge was to be had only of the quantitative.

The quantities to be known were considered to be related to each other like the parts of a machine. Accordingly, the clock became famously the main metaphor for the universe and for all of nature within it. The world—the universe—was to be regarded as a “law-based system of matter in motion”—matter in motion, colliding and combining according to mechanical laws of physical cause and effect.

The second assumption is related and, in fact, really arises out of the first. This has been described as the “objectivistic assumption,” which points to a fundamental separation between the knower and the object to be known. This assumption holds that, if we want to know something properly, we must detach ourselves from it as completely as possible and describe it from the perspective of a mere, uninvolved onlooker. Appropriately, the assumption is also sometimes referred to as the assumption of the “onlooker consciousness.” The relation of this to the first assumption is seen in that it was thought important not to intrude personal qualities such as feelings and values into the knowing activity. To do so would distort

and skew the pure knowledge of reality as objective and independent of the knower.

The third assumption that accompanied these first two has been called the “sensationist” or “sense-bound” assumption about knowable reality. This assumption, most forcibly expressed by the seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke, holds that we can know only that which is given through physical sense experience and abstractions from sense experience. This assumption further ensured the limitation of knowledge to the purely quantitative and mechanical. In this view, the non-sensory realms of value, meaning, purpose, qualities, spirit may exist, may even be experienced, but they cannot be known as such.

One result has been what can be described as a “two-realm theory of truth.” During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the distinction made earlier between primary and secondary qualities was further refined and institutionalized in modern education as the dominant classification in all education between natural science and the humanities. So we have two realms of truth: the truths of science, which are knowable, and the truths of the humanities, which, strictly speaking, are not. Science deals with nature, which of course is taken to include the human body.

The humanities, as the name suggests, deal with the human realms of values, meaning, and qualities. Only the “truths of science,” dealing through empirical observation and mathematics with nature conceived as matter in motion, are viewed as the results of objective knowledge.

The “truths of the humanities,” at most, arise from sources now regarded as subjective, such as faith, feelings, traditions, ethical action, social custom, mystical experience of some sort, and so forth.

How successful has been the two-realm theory of truth in keeping alive essential human qualities and concerns that the dominant view of knowledge cannot encompass? At their best, the humanities have helped cultivate a humanely critical spirit that has often stood as a bulwark against doctrinaire and even political infringements upon human freedom and human rights. Without the humanities many realities and experiences utterly central to a truly human existence would have long ago faded entirely. The affirmation of the two-realm theory of truth has also been the main response of religious thinkers who have been eager to reconcile their faith commitments with the materialism of modern science. It seems also to have been the main response of those

many scientists who are serious about both their science and their personal faith and ethical concerns. It would be difficult to overestimate the influence for good this two-realm theory has had for modern, Western society and culture. And yet, at bottom, the theory has extremely serious problems, including a number that have become increasingly acute.

A major problem, seldom recognized or acknowledged, is that the science/humanities division expresses, and institutionalizes, from the start, a deep alienation of the human being from nature. Nature, handed over to modern science, is seen in its totality as dead matter in motion. Completely separated from this nature, and essentially standing over against it, are the humanities. This division at the heart of our education system has, as expressed in our title, helped produce a profoundly split consciousness in Western civilization.

Some of the serious consequences of this split we will explore later, but first let us look at a second problem of the science/humanities dichotomy, namely, that, while in theory the relationship between the two sides is supposed to be symmetrical and balanced, in practice it turns out to be quite unequal. In this division, as in racial segregation, separate has not been equal. The quantitative side is nearly always regarded as the more important. It is often remarked that the arts and literature, not chemistry, physics, engineering, or computer science, are always the first to go in times of financial exigency. The desire to shape a self and a life, originally a central purpose of the humanities, has—in the last century especially—moved steadily down the list of priorities for higher education. The humanities continue to be placed on the defensive as business and political/social pressures step up their push for increased funding for technical and scientific subjects at the expense of the humanities. In the 1960s, the Columbia University professor Lionel Trilling, one of the leading champions of the humanities and the liberal arts, expressed his concern that our society “will tend increasingly to alienate itself from the humanistic educational ideal.”³

Since then, nothing has occurred to lessen his cause for concern.

Let us, for a moment, take a look at an event in the twentieth century which gives a clear example of both of these problems—the handing over of nature entirely to a mechanistic science and the uneven balance between the two realms. This example is provided by the work of some of the most creative religious thinkers

Nature, handed over to modern science, is seen in its totality as dead matter in motion.

3 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 115.

of the twentieth century. The first half of that century witnessed the beginnings of what promised to be a major theological renaissance—a renewal of theological insight and practice. This movement involved leading thinkers from all three of the major Western religious groups—Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic. Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel, Will Herberg; Catholic theologians such as Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, and Gabriel Marcel; and Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, the Niebuhr brothers Reinhold and H. Richard, and Paul Tillich are just some of the names of those who led this theological renaissance.

This look at how leading religious thinkers of the twentieth century came to see the relationship between science and the humanities is especially illuminating for at least two reasons. In the first place, religion, we might say, is the canary in the mineshaft of the science/humanities division. It is the first among the humanities to feel the effects of the cognitive disparity between the two views of truth, and so provides a vivid example of what is involved. In the second place, the theologians at the beginning, from the 1920s through the 1940s, actually turned their critical attention to developing some penetrating critiques of the influence of an exclusively quantitative-mechanistic science on the wider culture. However, in the end they were unable to extend their critiques to question the sense-bound methodological assumptions of modern science and, consequently, fell back into a total acceptance of the two-realm theory of truth.

The whole movement was exemplified in this in the work of the theologian Paul Tillich. Tillich himself responded to nature not as a mechanist but with a romantic, even mystical, sense of awe and wonder. And he criticized the widespread, modern scientific-technological abuse and rampant exploitation of nature. But, ultimately, Tillich, like the other theologians (and nearly all other humanists), was unable to draw the implications of his wonder and awe for a possible transformation of our dominant way of knowing itself. Instead he left the wall between science and religion (and with it all the humanities) standing and fully intact. This, Tillich came to feel, was a good thing because he could then claim that there is no conflict between science and religion because they each deal with two completely different realities. “There is no religious statement,” he said, “that can contradict a scientific statement if religion

is understood in its fundamental sense as ultimate concern [i.e., as the ultimate commitment of subjective consciousness] and science is understood as the inquiry into the finite facts and their relations.”⁴ Thus the dualism of the two-realm theory of truth remained for Tillich, and for the others finally, fully in place, as did the underlying alienation of the human from nature contained in that dualism.

By the early 1970s, the short-lived twentieth-century theological renaissance had essentially collapsed in its entirety. This was in spite of its thorough humanistic grounding in critical thinking, ethical concern, and aesthetic sensitivity (the arts were of great importance for the theological reformers). Despite its influence for a time in all the major religious traditions in the West, its existence is today hardly remembered. In its place has arisen a noisy, crude, and dogmatic religious fundamentalism, the reasons for

which we will consider later.

The failure of the humanistic religious reformers contains a lesson that ought not to be lost on the other humanities. Now, it is the case that representatives of the other humanities—art, history, philosophy, and so on—are often glad and quick to distance themselves from religion. This is probably owing to a number of reasons, some of them understandable, others not entirely lofty. Some humanists have distanced themselves from religion in an effort to attach to themselves a portion of the same prestige as that enjoyed by science in modern culture. Others deny any compatibility between their subjects and religion because they have rejected specific religious views—say, those of religious fundamentalism—and understandably do not want themselves or their subjects associated with these. Others reject religion because they assume that it is based on irrational, blind faith, which is more and more the case in the modern world because religion has largely lost all grounding in genuine knowledge. But the other humanities ought not to count themselves immune from the same fate that befell these most humanistic and rational theological reformers. All of the humanities share fully with the humanistic, theological reformers a dependence on the same non-sensory realm of values, meaning, purpose, and quality. It is just these in all

4 Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society* (Mercer University Press, 1988), p. 165.

subjects that have been denied an ultimate cognitive foundation by the two-realm theory of truth.⁵ Many of the consequences of the quantitative-mechanistic view of the world have been destructive, and have shown themselves to be increasingly so. One consequence has been a constant pendulum-swing between, on the one side, a spreading nihilism about the meaning of life, and, on the other side, a harsh and dogmatic—even violent—fundamentalist reaction. A sense of deep meaninglessness and futility is entrenched even among some of our most renowned cultural leaders—the scientific elite. The great twentieth-century mathematician and philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, did not share this nihilism, but he identified its origins in the picture of nature presented by the mechanistic-quantitative world view. In this view, Whitehead pointed out: “Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly.”⁶ Many prominent scientists today subscribe to this view. The eminent physicist, Steven Weinberg, has famously stated: “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”⁷ The biologist William Provine has written: “Our modern understanding of evolution implies that ultimate meaning in life is nonexistent.”⁸ The astronomer Sandra Faber has said: “The universe is

completely pointless from a human perspective” (note here the first problem of the two-realm theory). And echoing the same thought, the Harvard astronomer Margaret Geller asks, “Why should the universe have a point? What point? It’s just a physical system, what point is there?”⁹ These scientists are among the most influential of public figures. Since science is the dominant modern faith and these scientists are its high priests, their view of a totally meaningless world seeps down into all strata of modern society, sometimes subtly, other times not so subtly.

In reaction to this modern nihilism, we witness the spread worldwide of an ever more violent and dogmatic fundamentalism. This rise of fundamentalism is not surprising. It is not surprising because the non-sensory realities of value, meaning, purpose, and qualities are of the essence of human life, and they keep coming back. If they can find no grounding in genuine knowledge, they will, nevertheless, continue to reassert themselves, if necessary in ways that are irrational and arbitrary—that is, in ways that are dogmatic and fundamentalistic.

Religious fundamentalism is today widespread. Nearly every religion in the modern world has its fundamentalist wing—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but also Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and most others. And this has given added ammunition to those modern enemies of anything religious. The modern critics of all things religious are, however, missing a critical thing of importance in the upsurge of fundamentalism: namely, that they themselves are not immune. The pervasive and all-encompassing modern view that values have no knowledge-grounding affects the political, scientific, and economic realms as well. All those in the modern world who would affirm and advance value commitments that have no qualitative knowledge base (as is the case by fiat in the two-realm theory of truth) have to do so in ways that are ultimately dogmatic, drawing upon the givens, among other things, of tradition, ideological commitments, emotions, convention, and power interests. And so, an alert observer will note that, alongside religious fundamentalism, we have the full complement today of political, scientific, and economic fundamentalisms on all sides. It would seem that no group in the modern world is spared the fundamentalist temptation.

Of course, between the poles of nihilism and fundamentalism lies a middle ground in which thinkers of various stripes have attempted to avoid either extreme. But this middle ground is unstable, constantly

5 The late Stephen Jay Gould, the renowned Yale biologist, wrote an entire book not long before his death setting forth a view of the two realms of truth that is almost exactly the same as that presented by Tillich and the theological reformers. Like the theologians, Gould’s concern is to argue that science and religion represent two entirely different domains of experience. Borrowing a rather clumsy term from Roman Catholic theology—*magisteria*, referring to the sphere of authority in teaching—Gould argues that science and religion represent two “Non-Overlapping Magisteria.” “The net, or magisterium, of science covers the empirical realm: what is the universe made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of meaning and moral values.” (He does make room for a separate domain for art and beauty, but this simply reflects the predominately modern view that art has little to do with either knowledge-fact or value-ethics.) Gould’s concern in keeping the two realms strictly separate is, like that of Tillich’s, to prevent any occasion or reason for conflict between them. He wants to protect science from religion, and religion from science; each can go its own way with nothing to fear from the other. While he states his desire to respect each equally, his solution contains both of the problems we have seen with the theologians: the handing over of all knowledge as such to a quantitative-mechanistic science and the resulting lack of balance between the two realms of truth. This is clear in his affirmation that only science deals with “facts,” that is, with genuine knowledge. “Science,” he says, “tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts. Religion, on the other hand, operates with the equally important, but utterly different realm of human purpose, meanings, and values.” While he states that both sides are “equally important,” the attribution of true knowledge (facts) only to the one side ensures the tipping of the scales of influence toward that side and away from the other. Although Gould’s main focus here is on religion, his including in the domain of religion all “human purposes, meanings, and values” encompasses per force the larger domain of the other humanities as such. See Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999), especially pp. 4-6.

6 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 80.

7 Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 80.

8 Quoted in Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters* (San Francisco: Harper’s, 2001), p. 37.

9 Faber and Geller quoted in John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2000), p. 105.

shifting and fading away, as one attempt after another is made to hold the middle. Some of the efforts to maintain this middle ground achieve a degree of success and the effort itself warrants being encouraged, if for no other reason than that it helps keep alive the issues. So far, however, none of these middle ground efforts—philosophical, artistic, or spiritual—has been able to overcome the two-realm split, nor to do more than slow the pendulum swing.

Especially serious is the tendency for the mechanistic side to encroach constantly upon the humanities, such that all semblance of a symmetrical, equal relationship disappears. The claim is increasingly made that human beings and all that makes them uniquely human—values, meaning, ideals, love, selfhood—can be understood like everything else in terms of matter in motion. The mechanistic view not only attempts to explain nature, but also to explain away the human. This tendency has become especially strong in contemporary Western culture, with profoundly negative consequences.

Consider two of these consequences: the degradation of the human being and the actual and unremitting exploitation and destruction of the earth. Truncated and mechanistic models and images of the human being and of nature alike predominate in our thinking, guiding our research and practice and our education at every turn. Some of the models are reductionist in the extreme. Even those scientists who, in their own thinking, would not subscribe to full-scale reductionism—on the order of, e.g., that expressed by Francis Crick: All human joys and sorrows, memories, ambitions, and personal identity itself are, as he puts it, “no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules”¹⁰—are almost all bound in their actual research entirely to mechanist models of reality. In medicine, agriculture, biology, cognitive science—in nearly every field—mechanistic models of inquiry and application prevail and guide research, teaching, and technological development. Among the results are wrenching ethical, medical, ecological, and cultural dilemmas, as the fullness of the human being is forced to conform to the less-than-human “realities” that are generated in the laboratory and then released upon a hapless public. All the while, qualitative nature—the nature around and in us, the nature of beauty and life—continues, relentlessly, to be taken apart. As long as nature is regarded as having no qualities—no inner

life, no meaning, no living wholeness—dismantling it for our own pleasure and economic advantage is obviously that much easier to justify.

A major example, often disregarded, but a blot on the human heart, is the treatment of animals in modern factory farming. Daily our culture inflicts intense and unrelieved suffering on millions of animals—particularly pigs, cows, and poultry—all feeling, sentient creatures. The animals, defined as “units of production,” are treated like the rest of nature as useful pieces of machinery without feelings—things to be exploited and tortured without compunction in order to satisfy our gastronomic cravings.

The costs of this mechanistic justification for the exploitation of the earth are evident on all sides. The *Living Planet Report* for the World Wildlife Fund has recently concluded: “People are plundering the world’s resources at a pace that outstrips the planet’s capacity to sustain life.”¹¹

All of this is not to say that each of the three assumptions of the mechanical philosophy with which we began have not been subjected to penetrating criticisms. The criticisms have come from many quarters. The first assumption, that of the onlooker stance of the detached knower, has, perhaps, been the most thoroughly undercut by critics. Serious challenges to the notion of the objectivistic, detached knower come from ecological studies, from literary interpretation, from women’s studies, and especially from quantum physics—all of which stress the centrality of an interactive, participatory, and mutually transformative relationship between the knower and the known. An important challenge to the second, exclusively quantitative, mechanistic assumption has come from some philosophers and ecologists who maintain that the most adequate metaphor to guide our thinking about the earth is not the machine but the living organism. And this challenge to mechanistic exclusivity has even come from some quantum physicists—not yet all by any means—such as David Bohm, who has argued that the living whole, not the separate parts, must be the ultimate basis for understanding nature, as well as the human being. The third assumption, the sense-bound or sensationist assumption about all knowing, has been challenged by some philosophers who point out that we must presuppose a certain intuitive apprehension of non-sensory realities, such as ideas, moral norms,

The basic essential for qualitative knowledge is not merely to establish the need for it, but to develop capacities for it.

10 Francis Crick, *That Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Scribners, 1994).

11 http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/living_planet_report/.

meaning, cognitive rules of logic, and others, even for the possibility of all our ordinary sense-based knowing, including our practice of science.¹²

All of these criticisms suggest the need for the development of new ways of qualitative knowing on both sides of the science/humanities divide: ways of knowing that would ground in knowable reality the values, meaning, and qualities central to the humanities, ways of knowing that would enable us to deal not only with the material and mechanical dimensions of nature but also with the qualities in nature of life, beauty, and organic growth and development.

Why have the criticisms, and they are many, of the inadequacies of an exclusively mechanistic science not led to actual qualitative ways of knowing? The reason seems to be that recognition of the inadequacies and destructive consequences of the two-realm theory of truth is not enough. The basic essential for qualitative knowledge is not merely to establish the need for it, but to develop capacities for it. What might this entail?

Showing that such a transformation of knowing is both necessary and possible was a guiding concern of Rudolf Steiner's throughout his life's work. Connecting with the qualitative science of Goethe, especially, as an actual example in Western culture of the beginning possibility of such qualitative ways of knowing, Steiner provided insights, examples, and exercises whereby the beginnings of the Goethean impulse could be carried further—and in all fields, in both science and the humanities. Without in any way attempting here an account of the riches Steiner has to offer, let us conclude by focusing briefly on one essential aspect of the qualitative way of knowing that he was able to demonstrate in his own person, and that he was concerned to show is a possibility for all. This is the realization that a qualitative transformation of knowing requires a qualitative transformation of the self, the knower.

This means that, in the work of knowing, the whole person is involved—the thinking, feeling, willing, and moral character of the knower. A starting point can be the realization that, as we have already pointed out, even in our sense-based knowing a certain minimum grasp of non-sensory realities is necessary. As the historian and philosopher John Lukacs has said: "[A]

ll of our perceptions are, at least to some extent, extrasensory."¹³ And the philosopher and theologian David Ray Griffin has written: "Sensory perception is a very high-level, specialized type of perception which may or may not occur and which presupposes the existence of non-sensory perception."¹⁴ A beginning task, then, becomes one of developing these incipient, and usually unconscious, non-sensory capacities into full-fledged, conscious capacities for qualitative perception and understanding. Steiner, for example, provides many meditative and observational exercises and considerations to enable us in this task. And the education of the whole person in Waldorf education, when rightly grasped and practiced, can provide in the earliest years a firm foundation for these capacities.

Also essential to the qualitative transformation of knowing is that knowledge of qualities must be participatory. This is to say, I can only come to know qualities in the world—the world of nature, the world of others, the world of the spiritual—to the extent that I can bring those qualities to birth in myself. For example, the non-sensory qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, and many others, can be truly known by me as realities in the world *only if* I can come to experience them as realities in myself. And, it also works in

the other direction: Opening myself to the qualities in the world can nurture and enable them to take root within myself.

What is possible to us, and much needed in our time, is a deep healing of the split between "the two realms of truth" such that we can speak equally of genuine knowledge in both realms, qualitative knowledge that can enliven both science and the humanities. And in this, there would always be an honored place for quantity, for, to the extent that it has meaning, quantity is a subset of quality.

This means that, in the work of knowing, the whole person is involved—the thinking, feeling, willing, and moral character of the knower.

12 See, for example, David Ray Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts* (Albany: State University Press, 2000), p. 139.

13 John Lukacs, *At the End of an Age* (Yale University Press, 2002), p. 36. I have used the term "non-sensory" to distinguish clearly immaterial, qualitative realities from the material and sense-bound, but perhaps in the end his use of "extrasensory" is better.

14 David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 90.

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education and Waldorf Publications

Patrice Maynard

Director of Publications and Development

The Online Waldorf Library — www.waldorflibrary.org — has increased its offerings to a remarkable degree, as you can discern from Marianne Alsop's report on the OWL. The collection comprises eBooks, articles, research papers, all articles from the *Research Bulletin*, and now also from journals no longer in print, such as *The Golden Blade*, and *Child and Man*. Many articles and books are available in Spanish and in Mandarin; these resources are a continual work-in-progress as we have increasing amounts of material translated to reach colleagues in Mexico and China.

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE) is developing a meta-research project designed to gather the abundant research now available on primary elements of foundations of child development employed through Waldorf educational philosophy. The importance of sleep, the power of play, the direct experiences of people of color in Waldorf schools, teaching cursive handwriting, the impact of technology on learning, the effects of block teaching and looping on learning in school, and the effects of trauma on learning, are some of the topics under examination in this Meta-Research. Experienced Waldorf educators are at work in furthering this project. The result will be a book recording known research with a series of papers digesting the sea of available research on these topics, identifying and digesting the research, condensing it into accessible form to be useful to Waldorf teachers, schools, parents, researchers, and friends of education. The significance of this research project is manifold. Presented in digestible form, it will establish the modern scientific proof of the efficacy of the practices and insights used in Waldorf pedagogy for over a hundred years. As of this writing, RIWE is pursuing funding to continue and to complete this project.

This meta-research follows on the Survey of Waldorf Parents, which will soon be available in book form. This survey was waylaid by the pandemic, as so many things were, and the original survey was nimbly re-formed to address the topic of parental reactions to their Waldorf school's response to the pandemic and its associated lockdown. The results of this alternative survey were published in the Fall/Winter issue of the *Research Bulletin*, in an article titled, "The Community Speaks: What Waldorf Schools Can Learn from Their Parents" by David Sloan. Further research and evaluation continued

proceeded once the original parent survey analysis was completed, and results will be published soon.

Waldorf Publications has been at work in its steady efforts to produce and provide seven to ten books per year as reliable resources for Waldorf communities. An unusual project has been to assist in the translation and publication through Routledge and its affiliate, Taylor & Francis publishers, of the *Handbook of Waldorf Pedagogy*, compiled and edited by Jost Schieren. The book promises to be distributed widely by these respected academic publishers and covers an approach to Waldorf education based on science — philosophy, psychology, anthropology, child development — and the anthroposophical worldview that informs Waldorf education. Each AWSNA-recognized Waldorf school will receive a copy of this book as part of the BookBank program. We are confident that it will prove an invaluable resource for Waldorf schools and their communities.

In all these endeavors of RIWE — Research Institute, Online Waldorf Library, and Waldorf Publications — the commitment continues strong to act as a clearing-house for and creation of authentic research materials describing and enhancing Waldorf education in the light of Anthroposophy, its founding philosophy.

Report from the Online Waldorf Library

Marianne Alsop
OWL Site Administrator

Since 2001, the Online Waldorf Library has helped facilitate research and answer questions on a wide variety of topics. Recently, several parenting related questions have come to us, specifically about how to work with the effects of the pandemic on children going through their six-year and nine-year changes. The OWL offers eBooks that address these topics, namely, *Completing the Circle*, by Thomas Poplawski, and the article by the same author, “Paradise Lost: the Nine Year Change”; *Rubicon*, a compilation of what Rudolf Steiner has written about this time of transition; *You’re Not the Boss of Me*, edited by Ruth Ker and published by WECAN; and, from Gateways #48, the article, “Observing the Six-Year Change,” also by Ruth Ker. The OWL is very much interested in sharing more recent articles and studies on this subject.

In 2022, the OWL had 210,000 site visits from all English-speaking countries, as well as from India, Mexico, Spain, Argentina, Chile, and China.

We continue to offer an ever-expanding number of eBooks, articles, and journal articles available in pdf format, which can be accessed by downloading free software from Adobe Reader. New articles in Spanish and English are posted every month and can be accessed from the home page (www.waldorflibrary.org) and by clicking on *Artículos en Español* and *Articles*.

In our Journals section, we are pleased to continue to share all back issues of the *Research Bulletin* and *Gateways*.

As noted in previous reports, now available in our Journals section are back issues (1949 to 2009) of the *Golden Blade*. This remarkable annual intended to bring the outlook of anthroposophy to bear on questions and activities of interest in a way that may have lasting value, right up to the present. It was founded in 1949 by Charles Davy and Arnold Freeman, who were its first editors; the journal owes much to the twenty-three years of editorial guidance of Adam Bittleston.

eBooks added in English since the Fall of 2022

From WECAN Publications

- *Movement Journeys, Volume 1*
- *Movement Journeys, Volume 2*
Eurythmy in Kindergarten

From Waldorf Publications:

- *25 Chorales by J.S. Bach*
- *Bare Hand Knitting*
- *Star of the Sea*

New eBooks in Spanish include:

- *El Estudio General del ser Humano – Metodología y Didáctica – Coloquios Pedagógicos y Conferencias Curriculares* by Rudolf Steiner

The Online Waldorf Library welcomes your questions, and we are happy to help you find resources for your research projects.

Visit the Online Waldorf Library at
www.waldorflibrary.org

About the Research Institute for Waldorf Education



T

he Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE), founded in 1996 in order to deepen and enhance the quality of Waldorf education, engages in sustained dialogue with the wider educational-cultural community and supports research to serve a wide range of educators in their work with children and adolescents.

The Research Institute supports projects dealing with essential contemporary educational issues such as computers and the effects of media on children, alternatives to standardized testing, physical health and psychological well-being of students, science teaching with a phenomenological approach, the role of the arts in education, and the philosophical underpinnings of Waldorf education.

As a sponsor of colloquia and conferences, the Research Institute brings together educators, psychologists, physicians, and social scientists for discussions on current issues related to education. RIWE publishes a *Research Bulletin* twice a year and prepares educational resources, including collections of eBooks and articles (a growing

number of them newly translated into Spanish). Many of these publications are available without charge on the website of the Online Waldorf Library (OWL), a virtual library created and managed by the Research Institute: www.waldorflibrary.org.

In 2013 the Research Institute took over the publications arm of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) and re-branded it as Waldorf Publications. It includes resources for teachers and administrators, readers and children's books, collections of plays and poetry, science materials and kits, science and math newsletters, inspirational essays, proceedings of colloquia, and a range of publicity materials about Waldorf education. It also carries books published by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN) and the Pedagogical Section Council (PSC) of the School for Spiritual Science, as well as AWSNA's twice-yearly magazine *Renewal*.

Summary of Activities Supported by the Research Institute

Avalon Initiative

A think tank for questions of freedom in education
Heartsspeak.net website of stories from the classroom

Subject-Specific Colloquia

On Teaching (with published proceedings):

- Chemistry
- Computer and Information Technology
- English
- Life Sciences and Environmental Studies
- Mathematics
- Physical Sciences
- U.S. History
- World History: Symptomatology

Recent Research Projects

- Alternatives to Standardized Assessment
- Computer Technology in Waldorf Schools
- Handbook of Waldorf Pedagogy
- Human Sexuality Curriculum
- Meta Research on aspects of established Waldorf practices
- Screen Free September Initiative Worldwide
- Survey of Waldorf Graduates
- Survey of Waldorf Parents
- Waldorf High School Curriculum Research Projects

Online Waldorf Library (OWL)

Over 3000 articles and 880 books

Research Bulletin

Two issues per year of essays, articles, reviews,
and commentaries on educational themes

Retreats of the Research Institute

Presentations and discussions exploring contemporary
questions related to education

RIWE Website

Collections of articles and news features on current
educational issues

Waldorf Publications

Over 400 book titles, plus science kits,
publicity materials on Waldorf education

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WALDORF SCHOOLS AND TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTES IN NORTH AMERICA

United States

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