Contents

From the Editor 1
Douglas Sloan

The Vital Role of Play in Early Childhood Education 3
Joan Almon

In What Respect Are Star Children Different? 19
Georg Kühlewind

The Hague Circle Report to North American Waldorf Schools 24
James Pewtherer and Monique Grund

Special Section:

The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: Taking a Careful Look 28
Editorial Note:

Moving in Slow Motion 29
Barry Sanders

The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: A Risk Factor in Child Psychopathology 37
Sharna Olfman

The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: Critical Issues and Concerns 41
Nancy Carlsson-Paige

The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: The Loss of Nature 44
William Crain

The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: A View from Europe 46
Christopher Clouder

Book Review:

Reclaiming Childhood: Letting Children Be Children in Our Achievement-Oriented Society. By William Crain 53
Reviewed by Edward Miller.

Correspondence: No Such Thing? 55

The Online Waldorf Library Project—A Progress Report 57
Marianne Alsop

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education — Looking Toward the Future 59
Susan Howard, Director

About the Research Institute for Waldorf Education 63

From the Editor

Douglas Sloan

It is a pleasure to inform the readers of the *Research Bulletin* that, beginning with this issue, Christopher Clouder of Great Britain is joining the work of the Research Institute for Waldorf Education as the new European Editor of the *Bulletin*. Christopher Clouder has for many years been the Editor of *Paideia*, the distinguished English journal for Waldorf education. He is also head of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship for the United Kingdom and Ireland, the director of the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, and a co-founder and facilitator of the Alliance for Childhood. The introduction of this additional editorial role represents a new step in the efforts of the Research Institute to support and report on research in Waldorf education world-wide. With Christopher Clouder's editorial help, the *Research Bulletin* will also reach out to those previously served by *Paideia*. We look forward to working with Christopher Clouder as our new colleague.

The articles in this issue attempt to look at the genuine needs of the young, growing child—social, emotional, and cognitive needs—especially in light of the myriad pressures being brought upon children by a modern culture that seems oblivious of or directly antagonistic to what children truly need. Throughout the modern world pressures grow to "hothouse" young children by imposing abstract, academic subjects on them at an ever-earlier age. This is compounded by demands for standardized testing of all children at every age level and grade—testing that increasingly involves high stakes decisions about an individual student's promotion, graduation, or placement in low-task classes on the basis of a few tests, or often even a single test. The push for academic hot-housing and high-stakes, standardized testing comes from government officials (from presidents on down), corporate leaders, and national and state departments of education, frequently with the complicity of departments and schools of education. To this has been added, again coming from the highest political and educational, bureaucratic levels, a concerted push for the teaching of formal literacy to children at the earliest possible ages.

All of this is being done in spite of extensive research on the early importance of play, body movement, oral story telling, handwork, and the arts for the development of full-fledged social, emotional, and intellectual capacities later on. Much of this research has been done within mainstream education and in many respects represents a remarkable convergence with long-

standing Waldorf theory and practice. Yet, little consideration is given by the pressing interests to the potentially harmful effects of these hot-housing practices on the children's physical and emotional health, to say nothing of their long-range detrimental influence on the development of creative cognitive capacities themselves (ironically the main thing these current emphases are intended to promote). Political pressures and pedagogical ignorance conspire, it seems, to prevent mainstream education from following its own best research. And since Waldorf education is not immune to pressures of political imposition and cultural ignorance, it must remain ever attentive to its own central insights (now increasingly confirmed by much of the best, albeit widely neglected, research stemming from non-Waldorf sources).

The articles in this issue deal almost entirely with various aspects of what is currently being imposed on children and what for their healthy development they genuinely need.

We hope to expand the regular features of the *Research Bulletin*, the book review and correspondence sections in this issue being examples in point.

The Vital Role of Play in Early Childhood Education*

Joan Almon

"The ability to play is one of the principal criteria of mental health."[1]

In over 30 years of working with children, families, and teachers in Waldorf kindergartens all over the world, I have observed one consistent feature of childhood: *creative play is a central activity in the lives of healthy children*. Play helps children weave together all the elements of life as they experience it. It allows them to digest life and make it their own. It is an outlet for the fullness of their creativity, and it is an absolutely critical part of their childhood. With creative play, children blossom and flourish; without it, they suffer a serious decline. I am hardly the first to note this fact. The central importance of creative play in children's healthy development is well supported by decades of research. And yet, children's play, in the creative, open-ended sense in which I use the term, is now seriously endangered. The demise of play will certainly have serious consequences for children and for the future of childhood itself.

Parents, teachers, and mental health professionals alike, are expressing concern about children who do not play. Some seem blocked and unable to play. Others long to play, but policies and practices at home and in school have driven open-ended, self-directed play out of their lives. Children no longer have the freedom to explore woods and fields and find their own special places. Informal neighborhood ball games are a thing of the past, as children are herded into athletic leagues at increasingly younger ages. Add to this mixture the hours spent sitting still in front of screens — television, video game, and computer — absorbing other people's stories and imaginations, and the result is a steady decline in children's play.

Increasingly, preschool and kindergarten children find themselves in school settings which feature scripted teaching, computerized learning, and standardized assessment. Physical education and recess are being eliminated; new schools are built without playgrounds. While allegedly, these approaches are providing "quality education," they trivialize and undermine children's natural capacities for meaningful and focused life lessons through creative play and this leaves many children profoundly alienated from their school experiences.

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* Printed with permission of the author from Sharna Olfman, editor, *All Work and No Play: How Educational Reforms Are Harming Our Preschoolers*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, forthcoming.

I have observed the steady decline of play over the past 30 years, but even I was astonished by a recent call from a counselor in an elementary school in Virginia. She had been talking with a first grade class and used the word "imagination." When they stared blankly at her, she explained its meaning, but the children continued to look puzzled. "You know," she said, "it's when you pretend to be someone you're not," and she gave an example from her own childhood when she loved to play Wonder Woman. She would put on a cape and fly down the hill near her house with arms outstretched, pretending to be aloft. "That's imagination," she explained. "But we don't know how to do that," said one child, and all the others nodded their heads in agreement. Not one child in that first grade seemed to know what imaginative play is.

The Nature of Play

If we are to save play, we must first understand its nature. Creative play is like a spring that bubbles up from deep within a child. It is refreshing and enlivening. It is a *natural part of the make-up of every healthy child*. The child's love of learning is intimately linked with a zest for play. Whether children are working on new physical skills, social relations, or cognitive content, they approach life with a playful spirit. As a friend said of her eight-month-old recently, "It just seems that she's working all the time." But is it work or play? In childhood there is no distinction.

Adults are convinced that we need to "teach" young children. It is certainly true that we need to set an example in all kinds of activities. We also need to create appropriate spaces where children can play and learn, and we need to lend a helping hand — and at times even intervene when things are going wrong. But mostly we need to honor the innate capacity for learning that moves the limbs and fills the souls of every healthy young child.

Nathan at one year came with his parents to the summer house we share as a family. He was delighted to find several staircases in this house, for in his own home there was only one step, and he had long since mastered it. Now he gave full vent to his wish to climb stairs. Over and over he would climb up and down. We took turns standing guard, but he rarely needed our help. He was focused and concentrated, and did not like to be taken away from this activity. He gave every sign of being a happy, playful child while climbing, yet he was also clearly exploring and mastering a new skill and one that was important for his long-term development. Most important, it was a task he set for himself. No one could have told this one-year-old to devote hours to climbing. He did it himself, as will every healthy child whose sense of movement has not been disturbed.

Here is another example of child-initiated play that is also work. Ivana at age four came to kindergarten one Monday morning and proudly announced that she could tie her shoes. I must have looked skeptical, because it is beyond the skill level of most children her age. Ivana — determined to demonstrate her new prowess — promptly sat down on the floor and untied and then retied her shoes into perfect bows, looked at my astonished face, and beamed. Later in the day I asked her mother how Ivana had learned to do this. Her mother laughed and described how over the weekend she had pretended that she was going to a birthday party. She folded scraps of paper into little birthday packages. She then raided her mother's yarn basket and used pieces of yarn to tie the packages with bows. She probably tied 60 or 70 packages during the weekend until she had at last mastered the art of tying bows. She clearly felt ready, and she did her work in the spirit of play. If instead, someone had required Ivana to learn to tie her shoes before she signaled her readiness and interest, and proceeded to give her formal instruction, learning would have been transformed into a tedious and stressful task.

The simple truth is that young children are born with a most wonderful urge to grow and learn. They continually develop new skills and capacities, and if they are allowed to set the pace with a bit of help from the adult world they will work at all this in a playful and tireless way. Rather than respecting this innate drive to learn however, we treat children as if they can learn only what we adults can teach them. We strip them of their innate confidence in directing their own learning,

hurry them along, and often wear them out. It is no wonder that so many teachers complain that by age nine or 10, children seem burned out and uninterested in learning. This is a great tragedy, for the love of learning that Nathan and Ivana displayed can last a lifetime. Furthermore, it is intimately bound to our capacity to be creative and purposeful.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi identified a creative state which he termed "flow," and which I believe is comparable to the state that children enter into, when deeply engaged in play. In their book *Creative Spirit*, Goleman, Kaufman and Ray describe the state of "flow" as the time "when people are at their peak.[2] Flow can happen in any domain or activity — while painting, playing chess, making love, anything. The one requirement is that your skills so perfectly match the demands of the moment that all self-consciousness disappears."[3] Csikszentmihalyi recounted the following vignette to illustrate the nature of "flow."[4] A neurosurgeon was deeply engrossed in a difficult operation. When the procedure was finished, he inquired about a pile of debris in the corner of the operating room. He was informed that part of the ceiling had caved in during the operation. The surgeon had been so engaged in the flow of his work that he had not heard a thing!

Children engaged in healthy play display a depth of concentration that can also be characterized by "flow." I think of five-year-old Peter watching intently as two girls in the kindergarten were creating an especially beautiful play scene on a tabletop. They were deeply engrossed and so was he. It happened that on that day the fire department descended on us, because one of the teachers had called them after noticing an electrical odor in her room. Three fire engines roared up our driveway. Peter's friend Benjamin ran up to him, crying, "Peter, Peter, the fire engines are here!" But Peter was so intent on watching the play scene that he did not respond. Benjamin tried again with the same result. He shrugged and rushed back to the window to watch the firemen arrive. Finally, Peter emerged from his concentration, saw the fire engines, and hurried to the window.

The state of flow experienced by scientists, physicians, artists, and others can be intimidating. Do we want to enter so wholeheartedly into life and learning? It does not fit the contemporary picture of "multi-tasking" where one is doing many things at once, but usually none of them very deeply. Yet it is an important state of being if we want to flex our inner capacities to the fullest and offer our greatest gifts to the world.

The Development of Play

The secret to helping young children thrive is to keep the spirit of creativity and of playful learning alive and active. An important ingredient in this is our own work as adults, for children naturally imitate grown-ups. This inspires their play. Their learning is a combination of their own deep inner drive to grow and learn coupled with their imitation of the adults in their environment. These two elements interweave all through early childhood. They provide the underlying basis for play, yet their outer expression changes year by year as children develop.

An important milestone in play, the capacity for make-believe play — also known as fantasy play — occurs at around two and a half or three years of age. Before that, children are more oriented to the real world: their own bodies, simple household objects like pots, pans, and wooden spoons, and simple toys like dolls, trucks, and balls. Toddlers imitate what they see around them; common play themes include cooking, caring for baby, driving cars or trucks, and other everyday events.

These themes continue and expand after age three, but now children are less dependent on real objects and create what they need from anything that is at hand. Their ability to enter into make-believe allows them to transform a simple object into a play prop. A bowl becomes a ship, a stick becomes a fishing pole, a rock becomes a baby, and much, much more. The three-year-old becomes so engaged in make-believe play that objects seem to be in a constant state of transformation. No play episode is ever finished; it is always in the process of becoming something else. The playful three-year-old often leaves a trail of objects as her play evolves from one theme to the next.

In contrast, four-year-olds are generally more stationary and thematic in their play. They like to have a "house" to play in, which might also be a ship or a shop, and many enter the "pack-rat" stage where they fill their houses with objects so that it seems they cannot freely move around. This does not bother them at all, however. Like three-year-olds, they are inspired in the moment by the objects before them. They are quite spontaneous in their ideas for play.

The fantasy play of the five-year-old is characterized by the ability to have an idea and then play it out rather than being inspired in the moment by the object at hand as is the case with three and four year olds. Often, five-year-olds will announce what they want to play as they enter the kindergarten. Their mothers report that the children wake up in the morning with an idea for play in mind. Although they may play out the same theme for several days or weeks, subtle variations emerge as they gain focus, come in touch with their own ideas, and acquire the will to carry them out in playful detail.

There is one more important aspect to the development of make-believe play that usually does not occur until children are six years old. At this age they will often play out a situation without the use of props. They may build a house or castle but leave it unfurnished, then sit inside it and talk through their play, for now they are able to see the images clearly in their minds' eyes. This stage can be described as imaginative play, for the children now have the capacity to form a well articulated inner image. It is around this time that a child will say something like "I can see Grandma whenever I want. I just have to close my eyes." Or she may set up a play scene with her toys but close her eyes and play it out "inside."[5]

In all of these stages of dramatic play children may play alone or with others. However, the way children engage in social play with others changes over the years. The one-year-old tends to play alone, while social play of two-year-olds is generally called parallel play, for young children play side by side without fully interacting with each other.[6] I would characterize the play of three and four year olds as playmate play. The children enjoy playing with each other (with occasional squabbles as part of the play experience), but generally they are not deeply invested in each other. They enjoy playing together when they are in nursery school, but tend to forget about each other when they are apart. An exception to this, in my experience, occurs among children whose families are friends or who carpool together. In such situations, life thrusts the children together outside the usual play times, and playmates become more like family members who play an important, abiding role in a child's life. Normally, however, children of this age happily play with their playmates in school and forget about them for the rest of the day.

The social play of five and six-year-olds is different. The doors to deeper social relationships are opening for them. They form friendships and talk about their friends at home. They think about their friends when they are apart. They may want to call them on the phone or visit in their homes. Mothers laugh over the social calendars they have to maintain, for suddenly their six-year-olds want to spend much time outside school with their friends. This may sound like a preview of adolescence and this stage is sometimes called "first adolescence." The sociodramatic play of this age group is rich and varied, and it is a great tragedy that so few children in the United States have a chance to fully experience it, for their time in kindergarten or first grade is generally fully devoted to academic subjects with little time left over for play. The absence of play in childhood may have long-lasting repercussions on the child's overall social development.

The Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Benefits of Play

In the 1970s and 80s, Israeli psychologist Sara Smilansky conducted groundbreaking research on the role of *dramatic play* and *sociodramatic play* in cognitive and socio-emotional development.[7] She defines dramatic play as having four elements: the child undertakes a make-believe role; the child uses make-believe to transform objects into things necessary for the play; verbal descriptions or exclamations are used at times in place of actions or situations; and the play scenarios last at least ten minutes. In socio-dramatic play these four elements are present plus two more: at least two players

interact within the play scene, and there is some verbal communication involved with the play.

Observing three to six-year-olds, Smilansky developed a method of assessing children's play in pre-school settings. Using her assessment tools, she and other researchers observed and assessed children from three to six at play in a number of pre-school settings in the U.S. and in Israel, observing children from a variety of socio-economic settings. They also assessed children's ability to organize and communicate thoughts and to engage in social interactions. In one study children were followed and tested in second grade in literacy and numeracy. Children's ability to engage in dramatic and sociodramatic play was found to be directly linked to a wealth of skills all of which are essential for academic success. Smilansky's findings are summarized below:[8]

Gains in Cognitive-Creative Activities

Better verbalization
Richer vocabulary
Higher language comprehension
Higher language level
Better problem-solving strategies
More curiosity
Better ability to take on the perspective of another
Higher intellectual competence
Better peer cooperation
Reduced aggression
More group activity

Gains in Socioemotional Activities

More playing with peers
Better ability to take on the perspective of others
More empathy
Better control of impulsive actions
Better prediction of others' preferences and desires
Better emotional and social adjustment
More innovation
More imaginativeness
Longer attention span
Greater attention ability
Performance of more conservation tasks

Smilansky concludes: Sociodramatic play activates resources that stimulate emotional, social, and intellectual growth in the child, which in turn affects the child's success in school.[9] We saw many similarities between patterns of behavior bringing about successful sociodramatic play experiences and patterns of behavior required for successful integration into the school situation. For example, problem solving in most school subjects requires a great deal of make-believe: visualizing how the Eskimos live, reading stories, imagining a story and writing it down, solving arithmetic problems, and determining what will come next. History, geography, and literature are all make-believe. All of these are conceptual constructions that are never directly experienced by the child.

Smilansky's research points to the fact that imagination is as important a medium for learning in the elementary-school years, as is make-believe for the pre-school child. If a child has been allowed to engage in make-believe play during the nursery-school and kindergarten years and to develop inner imagination before entering first grade, she is then ripe and ready to learn. While one or another may have a learning difficulty, their enthusiasm for learning — and for overcoming difficulties — is enormous. By contrast, when a child has not had rich play opportunities, and/or the curriculum fails to engage the imagination, learning is a dull affair. My own experience has also been that the children who were the most active players in the kindergarten were also the most active learners in elementary school.

A study conducted in the 1970s in Germany, at a time when many kindergartens were being transformed into academic rather than play-oriented environments, bears out the relationship between preschool play and elementary school success. The study compared 50 play-oriented kindergartens with 50 academically oriented ones. The children were followed until fourth grade, at which point the children from the play-oriented kindergartens excelled over the others in every area measured — physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. The results were especially striking among lower-income children, who clearly benefited from the play-oriented approach. The overall results were so compelling that Germany switched all its kindergartens back to being play-oriented.[10] They have

continued in this mode until the present time, although during recent visits to Germany I hear more of the rhetoric one hears in this country: that to prepare children for a globalized economy they must get a head start on literacy, numeracy, and other subjects.

The benefits of play-oriented preschool programs were also established in a series of studies that examined early childhood programs in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In one study, 69 low-income three- and four-year-old children, who were at high risk for school failure, were randomly assigned to one of three types of programs: the High/Scope program and a traditional nursery school both encouraged child-initiated play activities, while the Direct Instruction approach did not. I.Q. scores rose in all three programs, but various social indicators showed that the children in the programs encouraging self-initiated activity, including play, were faring significantly better than the children in the more academic, Direct Instruction program. At age 15, the following results were noted:

> Initially, all three curriculum approaches improved young children's intellectual performance substantially, with the average IQs of children in all three groups rising 27 points. By age 15 however, students in the High/Scope group and the Nursery School group …reported only half as much delinquent activity as the students in the Direct Instruction group…[11]

Findings at age 23 continue to support the conclusion that the High/Scope and Nursery School groups are better off than the Direct Instruction group in a variety of ways. Either the High/Scope group, the Nursery School group, or both, show statistically significant advantages over the Direct Instruction group on 17 variables. Most important, compared with the Direct Instruction Group, the High/Scope and Nursery School groups have had significantly fewer felony arrests of various kinds and fewer years of special education for emotional impairment. In addition, compared with the Direct Instruction group, the High/Scope group aspires to complete a higher level of schooling. It thus appears that preschool programs that promote child-initiated play activities contribute to the development of an individual's sense of personal and social responsibility.

A recent study by Rebecca Marcon of the University of North Florida found similar results when children from different pre-school programs were followed through fourth grade. Those who had attended play-oriented programs where child-initiated activities predominated did better academically than those who had attended academic-oriented programs.[12]

The Demise of Play in Early Childhood Education

Given the compelling evidence for the importance of self-initiated creative play for social, emotional, and intellectual growth, it is alarming that play has lost so much ground in young children's lives during the past 30 years. Since the 1970s, it has become common for public kindergartens in the United States to focus so strongly on academic achievement that there is little or no time devoted to self-directed play.

Kindergarten teachers in Pennsylvania told me that in their school district the kindergarten curriculum had been prescribed by the state legislature. Each morning children were to spend 20 minutes each on reading, writing, arithmetic, social studies, science, and so on. One teacher looked nervously over her shoulder and whispered, "I break the law every day and let my children play for fifteen minutes." The other kindergarten teacher sadly admitted that she only managed to bring in play twice a week for short periods.

That was in the mid-1980s. Since then the situation has become even more grim. The first-grade curriculum has become entrenched in the kindergarten. With standardized testing starting ever earlier — for five-year-olds in some districts — an atmosphere of hurry and pressure pervades the kindergarten. To ease the pressure a bit many states have raised the entrance age for kindergarten so that the youngest children are usually five when they enter rather than four years and nine months,

as was the case when I was a child. On the other hand, there is such concern about five-year-olds learning enough that many school districts are switching to full-day kindergartens. One might hope that half the day would be devoted to play and the arts, but I have not heard any reports of that being the case.

Even when opportunities for play are made available to children in the classroom, chronic media exposure has a direct negative effect on their ability to make use of these opportunities. As a kindergarten teacher it became easy for me to recognize which children were "television children," that is, children for whom TV was a steady influence in their lives. Such children often had difficulty finding their own ideas in play and were prone to acting out the ideas they had seen on the screen. In severe cases, these media children could *only* play out roles they had seen and became very upset if other children wanted to change the play scenario.

In *What Happened to Recess and Why Are Our Children Struggling in Kindergarten?* Susan Ohanian takes a hard look at what is happening to young children in school today. She refers to New York Public School 9, which is bucking the trend by providing kindergarten children with recess: "In a seven-hour day, they get 25 minutes free from academics."[13] Anyone who has had experience with five-year-olds will know that 25 minutes of free time in a seven-hour day will not suffice.

Ohanian also describes the situation in Chicago's public kindergartens, referring to a report in the *New York Times* by Jacques Steinberg:

> The teacher knows it's the 53d day because "Day:053" is printed at the top of the recommended lesson plan open on her desk, a thick white binder crammed with goals for each day and step-by-step questions given to her and the city's 26,000 other teachers by the school system's administrators at the start of the school year. The page also identifies the section of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to which that day's entry corresponds …. Every teacher in Chicago gets this day-by-day outline of what should be taught in language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. The *New York Times* reporter notes that some see this as the logical outcome of the standards movement, providing "an almost ironclad guarantee that all students will be exposed to the same material and that all teachers, regardless of qualification, will know exactly how to present it."[14]

In the face of such demands on five-year-olds and their teachers, to speak of play seems almost frivolous. Yet five-year-olds are young children. Where did we ever get the idea that they should be on the fast track to high scores and global careers? We are on a slippery slope heading downhill, and the pace is accelerating. Must we find our children broken on the rocks of our fears and ambitions before we call a halt?

And we're not at the bottom yet. In the name of early literacy, plans are being developed to refocus nursery-school children away from play and toward early reading. There are aspects of early literacy that young children need: a rich experience of language spoken by caring adults, nursery rhymes and verses, storytelling and puppetry, and books read aloud. All these lay a vital foundation for a lifetime love of language and reading. But the term "early literacy" is coming to imply something much narrower than that.

As this is being written in the winter of 2003, Head Start is scheduled for reauthorization by Congress during this year. On January 17, 2003, the *Washington Post* described the President's intention to have all four-year-olds in Head Start assessed as to how much they learned in terms of early literacy and early numeracy. The purpose is to evaluate the success of Head Start programs. As always, there is something positive to be said about assessment, but when the stakes are too high and the means of measuring too narrow, serious abuses enter the system, and it is the children who bear the brunt of the problem. Many Head Start teachers are already feeling considerable pressure to give up play time and focus on early literacy, and this situation will only grow worse.[15]

Even before the new plan for assessment was announced Susan Ohanian wrote about the growing stress on early literacy in Head Start in this way:

> With all good intentions the current Bush administration is advocating a rigorous skill model for Head Start preschool programs across the country. Three- and four-year-olds are drilled about letters, dividing words into syllables and spelling. The plan is that this will prepare poor children to learn to read when they go to kindergarten. The Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees Head Start, is developing a curriculum that every Head Start teacher will be expected to follow.[16]

It is not just the 900,000 children in Head Start that are being targeted for early literacy programs, however, it is all young children in the U.S. In spring 2002, legislation was introduced by the Senate H.E.L.P. Committee, then chaired by Senator Ted Kennedy, to make more funds available to early education programs in each state. A total of one billion dollars per year was anticipated. The legislation, initially called S.2566, Early Care and Education Act, addresses the importance of physical, social, and emotional development as well as early literacy.[17]

While in theory, this is a positive development, in practice, the legislation calls for bonuses to be given to states that can show gains in children's school preparedness. This will almost certainly result in a sharpened focus on early literacy activities for three- and four-year-olds. Much more time will be spent on learning the alphabet, breaking words into parts, basic reading skills, and the like. We have seen this pattern before in kindergarten: soon there will be no time left for play in preschool literacy.

Children are not machines. You cannot simply add more fuel and speed them up. They are governed by internal processes that are sometimes called the laws of child development. We cannot ignore these natural developmental timetables without doing serious harm to children. This harm touches many areas of their lives — physical, emotional, social, and intellectual.

The Alliance for Childhood, of which I am the U.S. coordinator, submitted a position statement to the Senate committee that was drafting the Early Care and Education Act mentioned above. The statement was endorsed by some of the leading experts on child development in the U.S., including T. Berry Brazelton, David Elkind, Jane Healy, Stanley Greenspan, and Alvin Poussaint. It read, in part:

> The key to developing literacy –- and all other skills –- is to pace the learning so that it is consistent with the child's development, enabling him or her to succeed at the early stages. Ensure this initial success and the child's natural love of learning blooms. Doom him to failure in the beginning by making inappropriate demands and he may well be unable to overcome the resulting sense of inadequacy. This is especially true of children whose families are already under social and economic stress.[18]

There are many individuals and organizations committed to restoring play to young children's lives. One reason it is difficult to make progress, however, is that many parents misguidedly prefer that their young children focus on academics. Their concern about their children's future easily turns to fear. They then place considerable pressure on nursery and kindergarten teachers. An October, 1995, report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) entitled *Readiness for Kindergarten: Parent and Teacher Beliefs* found that

> Parents of a majority of preschoolers believe that knowing the letters of the alphabet, being able to count to 20 or more, and using pencils and paint brushes are very important or essential for a child to be ready for kindergarten, while few kindergarten teachers share these beliefs…[C]ompared with teachers, parents place greater importance on academic skills (e.g., counting, writing, and reading) and prefer classroom practices that are more academically oriented. One reason for this

may be that parents perceive that there are specific activities they can do to teach their children school-related basic skills, whereas ways of changing the social maturity or temperamental characteristics of their children are less apparent.[19]

If there is one piece of advice I would offer parents regarding play and early academics, it would be to relax and stop hurrying their children. Children have such deep resources for growth and learning that with good nurture and reasonable help, most will succeed wonderfully. Some will need special help and can be given it. This is a hard message to convey however, especially in America, where we are committed to growing our children faster and better than anyone else. There is a story that Piaget, the great Swiss psychologist, did not like to speak to American audiences. After he had described the natural pattern of children's development, Americans would invariably ask, "Yes, but how can we get them to do things faster?" Compared to the young of other mammals, our children take much longer to mature. Our children deserve the right to grow and ripen at a human pace. A major part of this is allowing time for play.

The Demise of Play and Children's Health

The absence of play is generally a sign of illness in children. Parents, for instance, will often describe the severity of a child's illness in terms of whether or not the child continued to play. "He had chicken pox," a parent might report, "but it wasn't too serious. He was playing the whole time." Or another mother might say of her child, "She was really sick. She didn't want to play at all."

Parents' instinctive wisdom that links play and health was confirmed by Stuart Brown, a retired psychiatrist who founded the Institute for Play in Carmel, California.[20] As a young doctor in Texas he worked with very ill children, some of whom did not recover. Over time, Brown began to notice a pattern. Occasionally, a very sick child would develop a playful gleam in his eyes. He would check the charts and find that although the child's fever was still high, or the blood tests still worrisome, usually within a day's time the outlook would brighten. He came to realize that the return of a playful spirit was an excellent predictor of recovery in his young charges.

Given the relationship between health and play, what then are the implications of the demise of play for children's mental and physical health? Are there accompanying signs of illness in children today? Research does in fact indicate that this is the case. The growing number of suicides among children and youth is a powerful and tragic indictment of contemporary trends in childhood. Between 1952 and 1996, rates of suicide among adolescents tripled. Suicide is currently the fourth leading cause of death among children between the ages of 10-14.[21]

In recent years, former Surgeon General David Satcher sounded the alarm about children's physical and mental health. In 2001, he issued a "Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity" which stated that in 1999 about 13% of children and adolescents were overweight.[22] Since 1980 this number had doubled for children and tripled for adolescents. Type 2 diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, and closely linked to overweight and obesity, has increased dramatically in children and adolescents.

In 2000, Satcher organized a conference to address the growing crisis in children's mental health. A report on his Web site states the following:

> The nation is facing a public crisis in mental healthcare for infants, children and adolescents. Many children have mental health problems that interfere with normal development and functioning. In the United States, one in 10 children and adolescents suffer from mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment. Recent evidence compiled by the World Health Organization indicates that by the year 2020, childhood neuropsychiatric disorders will rise proportionately by over 50 percent, internationally,

> to become one of the five most common causes of morbidity, mortality, and disability among children.[23]

In the past decade growing numbers of children have been diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and several million receive potent stimulant medication such as Ritalin each year. The Center for Disease Control reports that the American Psychiatric Association estimates 3 to 7% of children suffer from ADHD and that some studies show an even higher percentage.[24]

Diagnoses of Autistic Spectrum Disorders in children (Asperger's Disorder in particular) have also increased dramatically. In the State of California for example, cases of autism grew from 3,864 to 11,995 between 1987 and 1998, an increase of 210%,[25] and the median age of the patients dropped from 15 to nine years of age.[26]

A striking feature of these health trends is that, unlike the traditional illnesses of childhood that are especially prevalent among poor children in developing nations, the health concerns I refer to are affecting children across the socio-economic spectrum in technologically advanced nations, often beginning in the United States, and then slowly "spreading" to other technologically advanced nations.

It is crucial that we ask ourselves the difficult question, What is it about our contemporary lifestyle that is causing or contributing to so much illness in children? I wish I could report on one single cause, for then we could turn our full attention to it and eradicate the source as we have done with small pox and other illnesses. Rather, children's lives have changed significantly in myriad ways during the past 50 years and many of these changes are stressful. Healthy children can cope with one or two stressors — and one can even argue that they grow stronger through some adversity. Yet few children can cope well with five or six unhealthy factors that are constant and permeate their lives.

This is especially true when the most basic of all human needs is not being met — the need for consistent love and care of devoted parents and other adults. Thus, when the home life is stressed or too hurried, when childcare is of mediocre quality with little possibility for lasting bonds with loving caregivers, when pre-school demands "too much too soon" in the areas of literacy and numeracy, when hours are spent each day sitting still in front of screens, and the diet is frequently filled with too much sugar, fat and food additives, we have a situation that is bound to wreak havoc on a young child's health. Stressors affect each of us differently depending on our underlying temperament and constitution, and so we see a range of stress related illnesses in our children. This is a health picture in urgent need of further investigation, and it would be excellent if the Surgeon General along with national health organizations could work together to define the scope of the problem and the contributing factors. We may not like their conclusions, however, for it is a hard truth to swallow that our current lifestyle is harming our children even as it is harming our environment and our global relations with others. The decline in play appears not only to be a serious problem in itself, but it may also be the canary in the mineshaft that is pointing us toward much more serious, lasting problems in children's lives.

Fostering Healthy Play in the Preschool and Kindergarten Classroom

The Physical Environment

In order to foster healthy play in the classroom, it is important to create an optimal environment. To a large extent, any space will do if the right mood and orientation for play exists. I once taught in a summer program for young children that took place on a large college campus. There was no fenced area for the children or other obvious safe space for their play. There were, however, two mounds of earth left from a construction project. Knowing that young children love to play on hills, we adopted these mounds as our playground. My co-teacher would seat herself on the grass between the mounds and weave wonderful grass nests or make other

simple toys from the grass. The children happily played on the mounds for at least an hour a day for the three weeks of the program. They also went for walks across the campus but were always very content to come back to their small and simple play area. This was an unusual situation and certainly not one to normally recommend, but it was a wonderful lesson in how little space and equipment children actually need to be engaged players. It also echoes the experience of children in poor countries playing on the garbage heaps that litter their landscape. Their toys are the objects of the trash heap, such as tin cans. Their surroundings may be unhygienic and even dangerous, but in many cases their lives are rich in play.

By contrast, many children today are bombarded with an overabundance of toys and other play objects as well as by an overload of sense impressions. These can actually interfere with their play. The newborn's cradle, for instance, is often so festooned with patterns and prints, mobiles and toys that one wonders how the poor baby will find peace for sleeping. It used to be that an infant's cradle was protected by draped cloths that kept the world a bit away and created a sense of peace. This is no longer the case.

By the time the child is in nursery school or kindergarten, he is surrounded on every side by walls covered with pictures and charts with bright colors, words and numbers. There is often not a square foot of peaceful wall space where a child can safely rest his gaze and daydream. Everything is designed to wake the child up. Stimulation is the call of the day, but in truth it amounts to massive overstimulation of the young child's nervous system. Few adults would choose to work in such an environment, for they would find it impossible to concentrate; yet we subject children to it daily.

It is also true that you can create environments that are under-stimulating for children, and I have been in such environments in some of the township Educare programs in South Africa where the rooms are bleak and there is nothing adorning the walls. There are also few toys or other play materials. I have seen 50 or more children in such a room and to keep order the teachers insist that the children stay in their chairs most of the time. That is clearly an unhealthy situation with far too little activity or sense stimulation of any kind for the children. But we need to realize that over-stimulation can be just as much of a problem as under-stimulation and pay more attention to our excesses.

In my early years of teaching I experimented with different play environments. I gradually found that the children were most relaxed and played best if the space was fairly simple but pleasing to the senses. It should be calming and lovely, but not so beautiful and complete that the children hesitate to move anything or disturb the order. Play is a messy business in the best sense of the word, for it is hard to create without making a mess. A good play environment invites you to come in and change it — but it is orderly enough that it is easy to clean it up again. There's a place for everything and it becomes fun for the children to know where each object lives and put it back at the end of play time. When clean-up is handled through imitation of adults who enjoy it and do it in a cheerful mood, most of the children participate as wholeheartedly as in play itself.

For pre-school children, the simpler the play materials the more effective they are for stimulating creative play. A variety of plain cloths, for instance, can be used in dozens of ways — from capes and gowns to the roofs and walls of houses. Simple logs and stumps serve as building materials. For a few years I had both wooden "unit" blocks and wooden logs in my kindergarten for building. I observed that with the unit blocks, the standard wooden blocks that are cut along mathematical principles to represent one square "unit" or multiples of that, the children tended to use small cars and other man-made materials. With the logs the children gravitated more to natural materials such as shells and stones and to simple handmade dolls and animals for their play. The children also became more inventive with their play materials, making or finding what they needed to complete their play. Gradually I disposed of the unit blocks (this is practically a heresy for an American pre-school teacher to admit) and just gave the children logs for building. They never complained and their play grew stronger and more creative.

The presence of natural materials such as wool, cotton and silk, stones, wood and metals also filled the environment with life. These provide a healthy stimulus for the senses and the children quickly learn that things feel different and have different aromas and qualities, such as being cool or warm to the touch. Most kindergartens today are filled with plastic that is cool to the touch and does not warm up as children handle it. In addition, everything ends up feeling much the same whether it is a truck or a doll.

Boys, in particular, are strongly drawn to wheeled vehicles and will often play with nothing else if a car is at hand. I wanted the children in my kindergarten to explore the full range of play materials and after a while I eliminated all wheeled vehicles from my kindergarten. The children created their own cars from logs and boards when they wanted one. A side blessing was that with the absence of cars most of the machine noises that the children made to accompany their car play also disappeared. Eventually the only wheels we had were on our carpet sweeper which may account for why the boys especially loved to clean the carpet.

Generally within 15 minutes of the children's arrival, the kindergarten would be completely transformed with almost everything in use. A group of 20 children could easily create six or seven play areas for themselves. There was a fair amount of negotiation that took place as they sorted out who was going to use what and in which area. Occasionally they needed help with this process especially in the beginning of the school year, but they soon developed their own techniques for dividing up the materials. Adjustments were sometimes made as the play time progressed, especially if one group had clearly taken more than they needed while others were undersupplied.

The Role of the Adult in a Play Oriented Classroom

The role of the adult in a play oriented preschool or kindergarten is critical but subtle. A teacher can easily dominate the play situation, overriding the children's own initiative, or through frequent questions and conversation, can force children to become too conscious and purposeful in their play. The latter is a common situation in play programs today.

Offering Children Suggestions: Sara Smilansky researched the impact of adult intervention on children's play and demonstrated that when adults encouraged children to role play, enact fairy tales etc., there were significant gains in children's ability to play. Yet through questionnaires given to 120 preschool teachers, half in the U.S. and half in Israel, she found the following:

All reported that there was a playhouse corner in their room and that children could play in it for at least 30 minutes each day; however, most thought play was only good for developing personality and furthering social and emotional development. 90% said they did not feel it prepared children for future success in school.

They assumed children would learn to play by watching other children and that they did not need to do very much to help children play.

None of the teachers had been trained in the use of play. They did not remember a university course on the importance of play or on how to help facilitate play.[27]

Smilansky concludes that, "Basic attitudes clearly need changing… It is clear that play expresses the child's ongoing intellectual, social and emotional development and growth. This growth, like any other, can be aided by teachers with sensitivity to the child's needs, wishes, and current status."[28]

***Modeling Healthy Work*:** Decades of classroom experience, and observation of Waldorf kindergarten teachers both in the United States and Europe have convinced me of the central importance of imitation for stimulating healthy play. Young children are physically active, and have a strong but usually unfocused will, which contributes to the turbulence of their behavior. Young children are inspired by the sense of purpose that adults bring to their work. When the teacher spends time each day engaged in the practical household

work of the kindergarten such as cooking, sewing, gardening and woodworking, the children use this as a model for their own focused play, and the more deeply focused the teacher is in her work, the more focused the children are in their play. In addition, young children have a strong desire to imitate the teacher and will work alongside her for a period of time which draws the children into a closer relationship with her, while acquiring new skills.

A recent experience in Tanzania helps illustrate the relationship between adult work and children's play. During a recent visit to a Waldorf school in Dar es Salaam, I was scheduled to spend a couple of hours with a new kindergarten teacher who had been specially trained to work creatively with small groups of children. It was a wonderful experience to watch her playfully interact with one or two children, but a class of 25 active children was rather overwhelming for her. Each time I passed her kindergarten I could hear the sounds of chaos. I felt great sympathy for her because it reminded me of my own early kindergartens, but I was perplexed as to how to best help her in such a short period of time. On the morning of my visit to her kindergarten, I arrived early and asked the teacher if there was some work I could do. She looked rather blank and said she did all her work for the kindergarten at home in the evenings and there was no work to be done. "No, no" I declared without much tact, "in the kindergarten we do the work in front of the children. That inspires their play."

I looked around her rather sparse kindergarten for some sort of work materials such as sandpaper or furniture polish. Any meaningful work would do, but all I could find was a basket of yarn scraps from a project that was underway. The tangle of yarn pieces, each perhaps 18 inches long, was not too inspiring but better than nothing. As the children entered, they found me at a table untangling the yarn and winding tiny balls of yarn while singing a little song. The children were fascinated and soon all 25 were gathered around the table watching intently. When the last little ball was rolled, the whole class turned, like a flock of birds, and spread into every corner of the room, rearranging the furniture and props into play structures including houses, shops, a bus made of chairs and a plane made of a table. For the next hour they played with all the focus and vigor one could ever hope for from a group of three to six year olds.

The Art of Intervention: It is critical that the teacher has her ears wide open to all the sounds of the kindergarten so that she knows when intervention is necessary. Some children get over-excited or upset in play but can work this out themselves. In other cases the teacher needs to intervene quickly before chaos results and a child gets hurt. Gradually the teacher comes to know the sounds of her kindergarten as a mother knows the sounds of her child's cries. She knows when to help a particular child and when to sit still.

Direct adult intervention is needed if a child is about to hurt himself, another person or an object. Sometimes it suffices to simply redirect a young child. For children age five and under one can teach a great deal about appropriate behavior through the "royal we" as in "We don't take other children's toys, hit children, etc." By age six children generally welcome a quiet but more direct "no" and clear indications as to what is possible.

If a child needs to be removed from a turbulent play situation, bringing her to the teacher's work table or providing her with a quiet space and a basket of smaller play things, such as little logs, polished stones, dolls and animals helps her to reengage in play albeit in a more quiet and focused way. After a short while, the child is sufficiently calm and centered to play with others.

Supporting Healthy Play at Home

Parents today feel tremendous pressure from many directions, including from government agencies and corporate advertisers, to stimulate their children and promote their intellectual development at ever younger ages. While some children do need additional stimulation, there are many who are being over-stimulated. It is important that parents seek the right balance for their own children, a balance that allows for growth and development without stress and ample time for play each day.

There are a number of things parents can do at home to support healthy play. One is to develop a deep appreciation of their child's play, and the ways in which the child reveals his own unique nature through play. Through simple observation and quiet appreciation, parents communicate the message that play is good. Giving space and time for play is vital, especially in our over-filled lives, as is offering simple play materials, often drawn from household objects. For example, babies and toddlers love playing with pots and pans, wooden spoons and other commonly used objects. Children engaged in imaginative play love having a sheet draped over furniture and creating tents, houses and ships.

Including purposeful, physical work in the daily routine of the home is a great help in inspiring children's play. It is important for parents or caregivers to spend time each day working with their hands at comprehensible tasks, in the presence of their child, whether it is raking leaves, baking, or hammering a nail. The old adage of "whistle while you work" has meaning here, for although one does not need to actually whistle, a happy mood while doing work draws children near and motivates them in their play, while a grumbling, unhappy attitude on the part of the adult keeps children away.

A growing problem for young children today is the amount of time they spend in front of screens — television, video, and computer. TV Turn-off Network cites figures from the Nielson Media report of 2000 which indicate that children from 2 to 17 spend on average 19 hours and 40 minutes per week (or nearly three hours per day) watching television. Combining videos and computers, children spend a total of nearly five hours per day in front of screens.[29]

In addition, many children are profoundly influenced by the often violent, fast paced and sexual content of television, films and computer games that they are routinely subjected to. This precocious exposure to the world around them can engender fear and mistrust, rendering it difficult for them to relax and imitate their caregivers and teachers. In imitation there is a breathing in and out of one another, which requires a relaxed state and a trustful outlook. In addition, when children observe their parents at home, they are often sitting in front of a computer screen performing an abstract task that does not offer the raw materials and physical gestures necessary to inspire focused, creative play.

The weakening of imitation makes it far more difficult for children to play, but it also makes it hard for them to relate to other human beings in the simple, relaxed way that children normally have. This can have long-lasting implications for their social and psychological development. For all these reasons, it is of the utmost importance that parents both minimize and supervise their children's exposure to screen based media or, better yet, eliminate it altogether from their children's daily routines. Most children show wonderful signs of recovery within a week or two after the removal of screen time from their lives, especially if there is an increase in human interaction.

As a kindergarten teacher committed to helping children with creative play, I was struck by how quickly one could see the difference in children's play according to whether their media viewing at home was growing or declining. Research could be done on this that could help parents and educators understand the direct negative relationship between media engagement and self-directed, creative play on the part of young children.

Launching a National Effort to Restore Play

As play disappears from the landscape of childhood, we need to recognize that its demise will have a lasting impact. Decades of compelling research have shown that without play, children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development is compromised. They will develop without much imagination and creativity. Their capacity for communication will be diminished and their tendency towards aggressiveness and violence will increase. In short, human nature as we have known it will be profoundly altered, intensifying many of the problems that are already afflicting children and society. If we do not invest in play, we will find ourselves invest-

ing much more in prisons and hospitals, as the incidence of physical, and mental illness, as well as aggressive and violent behavior escalates.

It is not too late, however, to commit ourselves to reestablishing play in children's lives. Here are some suggestions:

- **Study the importance of play in children's lives**. Appoint a blue ribbon commission of respected individuals with expertise in child development, play and education, including those representing national organizations that focus on these areas, to thoroughly investigate the importance of play and its essential nature in early childhood, underscoring, as appropriate, the message that it cannot be displaced without doing serious harm to children.

- **Assess early literacy and numeracy**. An honest assessment is needed of the success or failure of direct instruction and other early academic approaches in kindergartens and nursery programs. We must stop politicizing education and instead focus on the question of what children need for their long-term healthy development.

- **Clarify the health picture of children today, including the increase in mental illnesses.** Appoint a blue ribbon commission with the Surgeon General and other prominent health care professionals from the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Health and Human Services, and national organizations such as the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the American Academy of Pediatrics to elucidate and draw attention to the dramatic increase in psychological disturbance among children.

- **Organize a massive public education campaign about play**. Before it is too late and play has completely slipped out of the lives of young children, we need to organize public awareness campaigns about play's importance, directed at parents, teachers and policy makers. How to fund such a campaign? Perhaps we should imitate California in this regard; through Proposition 10 the State has levied new cigarette taxes with all the funds raised being earmarked for early childhood programs.

These are major national efforts, and they will take much focus and energy, but the old adage still holds that where there's a will there's a way. If we want to help today's children, we will need to move quickly. It is hard, although not impossible, to reawaken the spirit of play in an adolescent or an adult through story telling, the arts and other means if they did not experience play in childhood. It is important that we bring play to those who missed it, but even more important that we protect children's right to play through a concerted effort in homes, schools and communities. In light of the concerted effort of corporations and government agencies to banish open-ended creative play and replace it with much narrower, defined play or focused learning of letters and numbers at ever earlier ages, it has become imperative that we band together and create a protective circle around childhood and the child's need and right to play.

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In What Respect Are Star Children Different?

Studies concerning the extension of childhood*

Georg Kühlewind

People from different cultures often experience difficulties understanding one another; they are often intolerant or hostile toward one another. We can hardly stand it when people are different. Many exterminated groups of people were not inferior to their executioners, just different and, above all — less egotistical.

This is not new. In the New Testament (John 15: 25) we find the Lord saying, "they hated me without a cause," which is a quote from two Psalms (69: 4 and 35: 19). "Without cause," but not without ground. For what the Lord represented was true humanity, true nondogmatic wisdom and goodness of the kind which is not based in texts but intuitively finds the moral, creative thing to do in each situation. He reminds His fellow human beings of what they could be; but being faced with the challenge to change in accordance with one's own ideal picture easily tends to call forth hatred against the one who represents this picture. Christ purposely mentions the young child in the New Testament as a kind of ideal for humanity (Matt. 18: 2; 18: 10; 19: 13; Mark 9: 33; 10: 13; Luke 9: 46; 18: 15). And even among His disciples we see a failure to understand the essence of childhood (Matt. 19: 13; Mark 10: 13; Luke 18: 15).

Then, as now, the world of the grown-ups was different from the world of children. The difference only increased with time. What exactly is the difference?

The different, unnoticed...

Little children experience the world as one with themselves; they identify with it. Grown-ups, on the other hand, experience the world dualistically, in a subject-object relationship. A non-dualistic experience means that there is no distance; a relationship is not established through thinking, but in a dreaming "clairfeelance." The adult, too, makes an immediate connection through feeling; feeling bridges the gap because of the immediate identification which takes place, as is the case in an emotion or in an artistic experience. The "separation" from the world is caused by the antipathy forces[1], or, put in different words, it is

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brought about by the building up of the "me-feeling."[2]

The new generation can be broadly characterized as lacking this built-up "me-feeling" in many children. The separation from the world — spiritual from physical — is in many cases less pronounced than used to be the case with children of the same age in an earlier generation; as a result, the separating forces take effect later or slower. In this respect, these children are late compared to "normal" children; due to this lateness in development these children are fundamentally different in nature. Sympathy forces predominate, resulting in numerous "deviations" from the usual capacities and achievements required at school, in the kindergarten, or at home.

These new children live in a picture-like[3] or feeling "thinking" instead of a linear, conceptual thinking (we can feel the meaning of a picture; it speaks to us aesthetically). Being strongly connected with things, also with their own inner gestures of consciousness, they have difficulties forming concepts, which is the central aim of education in most schools. Forming concepts always demands a selective narrowing of attention. For example, when we try to awaken a sense for the concept "smooth," we will show the child several objects with a smooth surface; in the process, the child has to disregard form, size, substance and function of the object and focus instead on the intended concept, namely "smoothness." As long as the child still relates to things by identifying, this "disregarding" cannot be carried out; such a child will stay behind when asked to form concepts, because it still experiences "world-inclusively." This is the case with many children who have symptoms variously labeled as ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, or Asperger syndrome — and also with Star children.[4] They have difficultly adapting to the world of the grown-ups. When this difference in constitution is not understood by the parents and teachers, these children will quickly be labeled as "retarded," "challenged" or in similar terms. In reality, these children are simply different; they have different capacities that often go unnoticed. Going unnoticed, they are neither valued nor nurtured. Instead, these children are usually blamed for their weak "achievements," and judged and treated as inferior. This often leads to depressions, inferiority complexes, or a lack of self-esteem, all of which are compensated for by resistance, recalcitrance, aggression or a turning inward. A child who is really different in constitution thus becomes a "difficult" child. Then come psychological tests (in which such children often cut a bad figure because they refuse to cooperate); they are given extra tutoring or sent to special schools where too little is demanded of them; they are treated with special drugs, and so on. This descent will easily lead to a collapse: many children end up in the hands of psychiatrists. A child who feels misunderstood will find no sense in life, will give up and withdraw completely, which is another form of being different.

Hyperactivity, too, can be seen as a continuation of the way toddlers live. Almost all healthy little children are very active until the time they begin to speak in sentences; people around them can hardly keep up. We experience this enormous thirst for knowledge and experience as "normal." When this behavior continues into school age, we speak of "hyperactivity."

… and endangered world of the child.

If the sense of self in a bodily sense (the me-feeling) is not built up strongly enough, the functioning of the senses will also be more like the earlier orientation of the little child. Physical perception, based on the physiological functioning of the sense organs, is reinforced by feeling components. As a result, both over-functioning and under-functioning will occur, mostly in the realm of hearing; certain frequencies and noises are heard by these children with painful intensity. Asymmetrical distribution of hearing in the two ears can also cause dyslexia, ADHD, and learning difficulties.[5] Strangely enough, this abnormal hearing often goes together with abnormalities in the function of other senses. Examples are: excessive seeing,[6] smelling, tasting and various irregularities in the sense of touch and warmth.

When the child's consciousness is insufficiently independent, being over-immersed in the surroundings, the child will be unable to focus (on the teacher for example), and will be distracted from everything which happens around her (in the classroom for example). Something will be happening all the time: the noises of the turning of pages, the movements of children, street noises, and so on. In fact, these children do not have a lack, but rather an excess of attention. The "butterfly-children" pick up much more in a short time (by means of their feelings) than the so-called normal children during a much longer period of observation.[7]

All these irregularities can be traced back to a weakness in self perception (sense of their own bodies, sense of self). At the same time unusual capacities can be observed, especially wordless communication without signals ("mind reading"), and the capacity to perceive the essence of other human beings and look through them, be they peers or adults. In society and in school, this can also have its drawbacks. It is striking how many creative people (in many realms) were dyslexic or even autistic, in any case not "normal."[8]

The insufficient "separation" from the world means being less strongly incarnated — with all the advantages (talents) and disadvantages (not living properly on the earth) that come with it. We know of the many attempts to compensate for this, such as self-destructiveness, aggression, compulsiveness, blind rage, fixations, inflexible holding on to habits, obsession with order, and other symptoms.[9] All these serve to replace the missing center, the everyday ego. The right solution would be to build up the real I or self, which the Star children seem to have to begin with, something which shows itself in the self-assured and penetrating gaze, present immediately after birth. The phenomena, showing themselves with increasing intensity in the new generation of children, can be summarized in the following insight. These children retain the capacities of small children, and with it the childlike relationship to the spiritual and physical world, longer, often much longer than grown-ups do. In this sense one can speak of a slowing down or retardation.[10] On the one hand this means a more spiritual soul structure,[11] on the other hand an adaptation to the world of the grown-ups which is initially slower or more measured. By making the wrong judgment and taking inappropriate measures, the former can be destroyed, the latter made impossible.

A different way of being human: what to do?

It is no surprise that many parents, teachers and special education teachers do not see, or maybe do not want to see the change sketched above. This change is visible not only in the spirit and soul configuration of many children, but even extends into the biological realm with increased allergies and susceptibility of life forces, various symptoms of which occur more and more. It is hardly possible to understand these fundamental differences without a spiritually oriented psychology; we must also grant that it is difficult to imagine such rapid changes occurring in the development of humanity. We will leave developmental and scientific parallels in the history of mankind out of the present considerations. One shouldn't blame specialists for misinterpreting these developments, yet it becomes more and more difficult to explain the increasing difficulties occurring in the schools and preschools as stemming from environmental influences, not to mention genetic explanations. Rather than discriminating against children who deviate from the norm, prejudices have to be put aside, for the time has come for a systematic scientific study of these children.[12]

Couldn't it be that we, who are older, have a feeling towards these children which is similar to the feeling the contemporaries of the Lord felt arising in themselves towards Him? The children hold up a mirror to us, in which next to the ideal picture of the human being our real picture also appears, and it is hard for us to stand the difference. These children say to us, "We show you a different way of being human, of living together; do you want to accept it? If so, you would have to do many things differently, and above all you would have to recognize what we bring and stop measuring us with outmoded yardsticks. Look at us, before we become "difficult", because

afterwards we are always found lacking in many respects."

At the end of this contribution, please allow me a personal note. I would like to reassure all grown-ups who are confronted with the difficulties sketched above: they couldn't have known what comes to meet them. On the other hand I will never give up the hope that increasing numbers of contemporaries, especially among those who are familiar with Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science — despite its inherent special challenges — will get a glimpse of what is happening now between the spiritual world and the earth; will in fact gain insights allowing a better understanding of Steiner. I beg you, dear parents, dear teachers: please give a chance to the perspective which I have tried to stimulate with the considerations above! Perhaps it will offer you helpful truths.

References

[1] Rudolf Steiner in GA 306, lecture 2.

[2] Georg Kühlewind,*Das Goetheanum*, 2001: numbers 19–22, and Kühlewind, *Aufmerksamkeit und Hingabe* (Attentiveness and Devotion) (Stuttgart: 1998), chapter 6 to 8.

[3] In the third chapter of GA 306, Rudolf Steiner describes this way of thinking as typical for children age 7-14; nowadays it is considered delayed because of the general acceleration.

[4] Georg Kühlewind, *Sternkinder* (Star children) (Stuttgart: 2001).

[5] Guy Bérard, *Hearing Equals Behavior* (Chicago: 1993).

[6] Ron Davis, *The Gift of Dyslexia* (New York: 1994, 1997).

[7] Georg Kühlewind, see footnote 2.

[8] See footnote 6 and also Cornelia Janzen, *Rätsel der Legasthenie* [Riddles of Dyslexia] (Stuttgart: 2000).

[9] So also Walter Holtzapfel, *Der frühkindliche Autismus als Entwicklungsstörung* [Autism in the Young Child As a Hampering to Development]. (Stuttgart: 1981).

[10] In the works of Henning Köhler concerning the problems of these different children this conception is sometimes expressed, but always in the background, as in his books *Schwierige Kinder Gibt Es Nicht* [There Are No Difficult Children], 1997; *Was haben wir nur falsch gemacht?* [What Have We Done Wrong?], 2000; *War Michel Aus Lönneberga Entwicklungsgestört?* [Was Michael from Lonneberga Developmentally Retarded?], 2002.

[11] Rudolf Steiner describes this more spiritual soul structure in GA 317, 4th lecture, in which he focuses on "crazy" and handicapped children.

[12] We cannot fail to mention that an astonishing conservatism is to be observed in this area on the part of the experts. There is a long list of healing methods and procedures to help affected children, highly individual in nature and to a large degree also dependent on those who extend help. Thus, for example for people who do not speak, supported communication ("Facilitated Communication"—FC) is the only way to communicate and this method has been in existence for about 14 years. Several books and papers have been published about autism, for example by Dietmar Zöllner, a veritable scientist of autism, who recently published his third book, next to numerous other contributions, titled *Autismus und Körpersprache* [Autism and Body Language]. Then there are children who learn to write completely independently, without "support." There are effective therapies for hearing (AIT, which stands for Auditory Integrational Training; see footnote 5, and also Annabel Stehli's books *The Sound of a Miracle*, 1991, and *Dancing in the Rain*, 1995. The latter contains 22 case histories with highly interesting observations). In the area of the visual therapy Melvin Kaplan (New York) should be mentioned, who has essentially turned around the whole way autistic (and "difficult") children are diagnosed. Attempts have been made to treat the various symptoms with vitamins and nutrition. Holding therapy and learning to reach by means of pictures belong in this category. (Irina Prekop, *Hättest Du Mich Festgehalten . . .* [If Only You Had Held Me . . .], 1999; Glenn Doman, *How to Teach Your Baby to Read).*

Georg Kuhlewind is the author of over 20 books on themes of linguistics, psychology, and epistemology. A professor of chemistry in Budapest, Hungary, for many years, he now teaches spiritual development internationally. He is the founder of the Logos Foundation, an international institute for the promotion of developmentally appropriate child rearing and education.

Hague Circle Report to North American Waldorf Schools

James Pewtherer and Monique Grund

Twice yearly, a group of twenty or more Waldorf educators from around the world meets under the auspices of the Pedagogical Section of the Anthroposophical Society to consider the state of Waldorf education worldwide. Over three days, we share observations, questions and implications of some of the experiences from Waldorf school communities so that we can anticipate the needs of children in the time to come. The North American school movement is represented by Monique Grund of the San Francisco Waldorf School and James Pewtherer of AWSNA and the Pedagogical Section Council. The following is a report on some of the issues and ensuing thoughts raised in the meetings of November 2002 in Stuttgart, Germany.

Strengthening our Teaching — Deepening our Work

What is it that makes the Waldorf school different from other schools?

We have main lesson books which the children make themselves. We have class teachers who lead a class for eight years. We have a diverse curriculum that is built on arts and practical work along with appropriate academics. We offer eurythmy, unique among the arts in pedagogical work.

If we go somewhat deeper, we can point to our conception of child development, with its focus on the stages of learning according to the prevalence of the physical, etheric or astral body. We can point to the focus which a teacher puts on each child, learning to read him or her, and in this reading, developing an educational plan that will be uniquely suited to this child.

We can also cite the teacherly commitment to build a partnership with the parents in order to recognize and support the children's pre-earthly intentions as they develop in the school years. We can note our commitment to an active meditative life as teachers, to keep ourselves open to perceive, understand and act out of insight which is bigger than any one of us. Yet as important as all of the above are, we are called especially to one of the biggest tasks in education: the development and cultivation of imagination, of fantasy in the children.

In our report of May 2002, I mentioned the Hague Circle's work on the next World Teachers' Conference in 2004. The theme will be "The Forces of Imagination in the Work of the Teacher," and the

conference will take place in Dornach, Switzerland, from the 12th to the 17th of April, 2004. Our discussions took us more deeply into the topic, exploring it not only from the point of view of work with the children, but from that of teacher education as well. If the teachers do not actively work with imagination themselves, how can they help to support it in the students?

Developing imagination is one of the most difficult capacities to learn and to work with. It dies if you form it too much, yet it stimulates excitement, involvement, creativity and cutting-edge work when you have it. We might even say that it is one of the best measures of your success as a teacher just by its mere presence in a classroom. Working with imagination can feel as though you have grasped an idea by the tail, but an idea that is still becoming. You and the class have to be fleet of foot to stay up with it and to work with it. Teachers and students create a unique learning environment in every classroom where this kind of work exists. Yet it would be erroneous to see it as ordinary academic work. Imagination calls for a capacity which exists between the sometime polarity of work and play. It means being willing to take an educated risk to let go of the security of the known in exchange for what may come to be. Just as the good teacher nurtures the children with his/her imaginative capacity, the children feed the teacher with their imaginative wisdom.

How can the teacher hope to develop and work with imagination? The substance of this question is clearly a subject for an entire conference, but we would like to share a few of the gems that emerged in our conversation on this theme.

- Imagination ("Phantasie" in German) is a crucial tool in freeing us from the materialism that permeates our society today.

- Meditating on the teaching year just passed, the teacher must decide whether to make judgments on the coming year immediately or to wait to meet the students at the beginning of the new year. The latter allows for the kind of cross-fertilization between teacher and class noted above.

- Sharing your own research and discoveries with your colleagues as an integral part of your faculty meeting is a crucial stimulus to imagination and creativity for both the individual and the faculty.

- Rudolf Steiner entreats us to work with the "Menschenkunde" (*Foundations of Human Experience/Study of Man*) as the source of this imagination and creativity in the classroom. Explaining this, he names three steps which must be taken for success in working with these ideas:

  1. receive the "Menschenkunde" into yourself;
  2. comprehend the "Menschenkunde" through meditating on it;
  3. remember the "Menschenkunde".

- He makes a strong connection between steps two and three: "It is not just common memory, but rather one that puts forth new inner impulses … meditative comprehension is followed by active, creative … remembering which is at the same time a receiving of what emanates from the spiritual world."[1] How do you as a teacher understand this?

- We should have the feeling in our work with the "Menschenkunde" that we can never get to the bottom of it, because the creativity of the individual is never exhausted.

- It is healthy to experience a kind of fear or uncertainty at the beginning of each new block, because it will bring something unknown. What is important is to accept this as a stimulant for new ideas and a flow between children and teacher.

The Hague Circle would like to invite each school's faculty to focus on this central aspect of our work in the school. While we hope that some of the fruits of such work will be shared at the World Teachers' Conference in 2004, we especially wish to have each school reflect on its own work in this regard. How does your faculty work to foster this capacity in your school? What have you discovered?

For the Waldorf school, these are the kinds of "standards" that *we* need to meet.

State of the Waldorf School Movement Worldwide

- School growth around the world has stabilized overall; our growth phase has reached a plateau.

- Relations between teacher training institutions and schools are often not very close; the need for closer collaboration becomes increasingly apparent.

- In Germany, the growth in the number of schools has stopped for the moment but curative schools continue to grow.

- Full-time trainings in Germany and Switzerland are down in enrollment; Scandinavia does not have enough EC teachers, but the Dutch trainings are full.

- The call by schools for the establishment of at least one teacher education center in each state in Germany stems from a recognition that having a teacher education center nearby strengthens the work in a school. The Teacher Seminar in Stuttgart, as the main center in all of Germany, is trying to find a way to do this without unduly weakening the existing centers.

- Germany now has the first certified professor of eurythmy in the world at Alanus University near Cologne.

- The European Waldorf schools are finding that fewer teachers in the schools see teaching as a lifetime career. Some additional phenomena regarding teacher training at different places around the world include the fact that 85 percent of Waldorf teachers in Holland are women, and the fact that there is an apparent overall decline in spiritual substance in the cooperative work of teachers. On the other hand, Austria reports that some university-trained education graduates have rediscovered a wish to teach after spending a year in a Waldorf education course.

- Living conditions are very difficult in Venezuela due to the economic crisis gripping the country. Teachers and parents often barter to support the schools since no one has currency available. As difficult as living conditions are, the hard times have helped to bring people together.

- President Bush's reading and testing program ("No Child Left Behind") is influencing countries around the world to consider requiring their four-year-olds to meet similar standards. Increasing numbers of educators in these countries are objecting to the premises behind this early instruction in conceptual learning.

The task of Waldorf educators and parents is a growing one. We need to both protect children and educate the public as to what education can and should be. The materialism of our times cannot be allowed to swamp the human values that Waldorf schools embody. Each of us must commit to deepening our understanding of what we do, and then finding ways to share these views and work with others. There are many people who are allies seeking the same goals.

As teachers, our task is not to allow ourselves to fall asleep to the needs of the times. Rather, our responsibility is to help to address these needs through the way we teach and the model of human life and relationships that we present to the children and the world.

References

[1] Rudolf Steiner, *Balance in Teaching* (Spring Valley, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1982), 42-43.

James Pewtherer is currently the Eastern Regional Chairperson for AWSNA. He was one of the founding teachers of Hawthorne Valley School in Harlemville, New York. He has been a class teacher and high school teacher for 30 years.

Monique Grund has been a class teacher and an early childhood educator since she began teaching in Chatou, France, in 1959. She grew up in Dornach, Switzerland, and is a graduate of the Rudolf Steiner School in Basel, Switzerland.

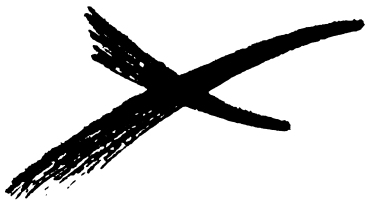
Special Section: The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: Taking a Careful Look

Editorial Note

This special section of the *Research Bulletin* carries some of the main proceedings from a research consultation held this past October (2002) at Teachers College, Columbia University. The topic of the consultation was "The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: Taking a Careful Look." Its concern was to identify central issues raised by the current pressures in American education—coming from all quarters of our culture—to teach literacy skills to young children at an ever-earlier age. The consultation involved about twenty persons representing deep experience and knowledge in a variety of related areas, including among them, education, child development, psychology, and literature. As the reflections of the participants presented here indicate, the consultation attempted to explore what is required for full and healthy child development in itself, as well as for the emergence of powerful, reading, writing, and thinking capacities in the growing child—and to become aware of serious threats to both posed by much of the early childhood literacy emphasis now being enthusiastically championed by politicians and many educators alike.

The consultation was sponsored by the Center for the Study of the Spiritual Foundations of Education at Teachers College, which is supported by the Fetzer Institute, in collaboration with the Alliance for Childhood. This was the culmination of several such consultations on related topics held by the Center at Teachers College over the past several years in cooperation variously with the Alliance for Childhood, Sunbridge College, and the Research Institute for Waldorf Education.

The keynote presentation at this consultation was given by Barry Sanders, Peter and Gloria Gold Professor of English at Pitzer College, author of *A is for Ox: Violence, Electronic Media, and the Silencing of the Written Word* and of *The Private Death of Public Discourse*. Barry and his wife Grace also helped to found the Pasadena Waldorf School. Barry Sanders has been a much-valued participant in most of the Center's earlier research consultations, which he refers to in his talk, including the one at which the Alliance for Childhood was first formally established. His keynote address is published here in the form it was given in order to convey something of the immediacy of the consultation discussions and to set a rich context for the further reflections that follow.



Moving in Slow Motion

Barry Sanders

I want to start with three anecdotes, and then move into the more formal part of this presentation. Douglas has asked me to launch our discussion and so with that in mind I have tried to construct some rather broad comments, and to cover just a few of the concerns that have interested me since we last met. They all involve some idea of motion.

Rodin and Motion. Rodin makes his comments in the midst of the invention of motion pictures, in France, in the last part of the nineteenth century. I like his comments not just because they run counter to the common-sense notions of motion pictures and what makes them move. But more than that, Rodin himself is so wonderfully spiritual in his work—witness an entire exhibition in 2002 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art on Rodin's bronzes, titled "God's Hands."

The sculptor Paul Gsell questions Rodin about his "Age of Bronze" and "St. John the Baptist." Gsell asks: "I am still left wondering how those great lumps of bronze or stone actually seem to move, how obviously immobile figures appear to act and even to be making pretty strenuous efforts… ."

Rodin answers: "Have you ever looked closely at instantaneous photographs of men in motion? Well then, what have you noticed?"

"That they never seem to be making headway. Generally, they seem to be standing still on one leg, or hopping."

"Exactly! Take my 'St. John,' for example. I've shown him with both feet on the ground, whereas an instantaneous photograph taken of a model performing the same movement would most likely show the back foot already raised and moving forward. Or else the reverse — the front foot would not yet be on the ground if the back leg in the photograph were in the same position as in my statue. That is precisely why the model in the photograph would have the bizarre look of a man suddenly struck with paralysis. Which confirms what I was just saying about movement in art. People in photographs suddenly seem frozen in mid-air, despite being caught in full swing: This is because every part of their body is reproduced at exactly the same twentieth or fortieth of a second, so there is no gradual unfolding of a gesture, as there is in art."

Gsell counters: "So, when art interprets movement and finds itself completely at loggerheads with photography, which is an unimpeachable mechanical witness, art obviously distorts the truth."

"No. It is art that tells the truth and photography that lies. For in reality, time does not stand still, and if the artist manages to give the impression that a gesture is being executed over several seconds, their work is certainly much less conventional than the scientific image in which time is abruptly suspended."

The End of Nature. An acquaintance, Bill McKibben, who writes about nature, tells the following story. By the way, McKibben is the person who wrote the book about watching television for one month solid, some eighteen hours a day, and what effect that had on him and on his family, on his sense of looking once he ventured outside again. His reaction is in some ways incorporated in his story about taking a group of eight or nine elementary school children from Maine out on a nature walk.

After about thirty minutes on their outing, the students started complaining and wanted to go back home. McKibben wanted to know why. They told him that they were bored. There was nothing to do, they whined, nothing was happening. McKibben then asked them to sit down on the ground, and to get very still. He then made them look between the leaves of grass. Look, he said, everything is happening. There, hidden in the tufts of grass, all kinds of creatures were moving about. But the students had gotten their nature from the Nature Channel, where movement involved a mongoose doing battle with some monster snake, or four tigers fighting over a game animal. They needed gross examples of action.

Hitchcock's Actors. This third anecdote is about as unscientific as anyone could imagine, since it comes from me. I teach a class on the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Most of the films I show come from the fifties — "Strangers on a Train," "Rear Window," "Vertigo," "North by Northwest," and so on. Many of them are in black and white. They have very little action. The sound is sometimes brittle. While my students gradually come to like these films, especially as final examination time approaches, they all agree that they would bomb today. They lacked any real action — that was their almost universal complaint. They even asked me if people moved more slowly back then, if they walked and talked more slowly. My students had to learn to have patience and to look — steadily and deliberately — for an extended period of time at images. They had to learn to listen more intently.

Now, let me move to the more formal part of my presentation; and naturally I hope to make a connection with my three anecdotes. I begin with two notes of warning. First, there are many things we might discuss this morning. At our last consultation, some three or four years ago, we took up the very pressing and very shocking question: Can childhood survive? (We even tried to define the characteristics of childhood by listing them on the blackboard, to find out if there still was such a thing called childhood.) We had the inclination, no, the luxury to ask that question, without thinking of it as ironic or the slightest bit amusing. Since that time, terrorism and war, a perpetual state of war, has gobbled up our time and placed our imaginations, as if in some kind of Guantanamo Bay, under arrest. Since we last met, the stock market has plummeted, a number of CEOs have been indicted or jailed for financial indiscretions, ditto certain priests for sexual indiscretions, unemployment rates are up, basic civil rights have been curtailed, the government budget surplus has disappeared, retirement accounts for many have gone up in a cloud of greed. It's war with Iraq, no, with North Korea. It's terrorism every time we turn around: explosions, snipers, suicide bombers. In the midst of all this current tumult and angst, how laughable, how refreshingly innocent, Y2K seems. As the twenty-first century nears the end of its second year, people seem fatigued — even exhausted.

A ray of hope for me: The other day on my Pacifica radio station, I heard that young woman, Julia Butterfly Hill, who took up residence 200 feet above the ground in a giant Sequoia tree to oppose clear-cut logging in the state of Washington. She was telling an audience of college students about her impulse. Look, she said, we can't drink the water,

we can't eat the food, we can't swim in a whole lot of the oceans, or eat much of the fish. Bio-tech has even ruined the soybeans. Bush will not do anything about the poor and the homeless, or about logging, she went on, or about our total dependence on fossil fuels. You want change? We have to do it ourselves. There must be a revolution of young people, she charged, who take the reins of power and help to steer the world from a land of aggression to a place of peace. She is young, she can be easily written off; but there she is, at the end of the second year of the twenty-first century, tired but far from being bushed, exhorting her young friends to "read" the world anew. Sitting perfectly *still* in a tree, she helped start a small *movement*.

I ask you to imagine just how many tablets of Ritalin have been consumed by youngsters in elementary schools since we last met, designed to keep them sitting still; how many doses of Ecstasy have been ingested, how much alcohol downed, and how many attempts at suicide since our last meeting. How many young people have been diagnosed with ADD, ADHD, or some other learning disability. The numbers must be colossal. I don't have the exact figures. Not that it would much matter. I can tell you that since we last met, for the first time in our nation's history, more young black males sit behind prison bars than behind college desks. America has over five million young adult offenders — black and white and Chicano — either in jail, in probation camps, detention centers, or prisons. Add to that list those awaiting sentencing, or those who are out on probation or parole, and the number reaches almost 9 million. The average reading level for those incarcerated young people, whose ages range anywhere from fourteen to 22, is about the fourth grade. The recidivism rate hovers around 70% nationally. (The more education, by the way, the lower the rate.)

I started a literacy program in one of those probation camps; I teach in one of those camps, and let me tell you it is not a pretty picture, and those young people know it. They feel on the whole quite helpless. According to a 2002 Harvard study, completed fifty years after *Brown v. the Board of Education,* which purportedly put an end to "separate but equal," the majority of black youngsters in this country still attend segregated schools. The study found the most severe de facto segregation in schools in New York City.

In this country, prevention is the rule, incarceration is the way. Parents, out of fear, I believe, out of a desperate fear that the world will pass their children by, want their sons and daughters to take up residence behind a screen in kindergarten, if not before (after all, computer technology falls from the top of the line to the bottom of the heap in a matter of a few short months). Reading problems? Put those kids on a computer. Learning disabilities? Our college utilizes some five or six programs to fix the students' problems. Maybe they work. I have not seen any positive results.

Given the state of the world, of this nation, parents can care about their children only in what they perceive as the most protective, safest ways possible. Who can blame them? Parents are on perpetual red alert. Safety, no matter where we locate it — at an airport, at schools, around office buildings, the Pentagon — is defined by the experts through technology: metal detectors, retinal identification, PIN numbers, X-ray photos, magnometers, card keys, scanners, and on and on. Technology saved us in the nineties in the stock market; it certainly can hold those terrorists at bay, and it sure as hell will keep guns and knives out of our schools. I cannot fault parents for reaching for what appears to be the least porous solution to any problem. But I can doubt its efficacy. Like most institutional solutions, at some point they become counterproductive, leading me to wonder if young people do not actually experience a rush of adrenalin entering school these days; if they do not actually thrill to the danger of crossing the threshold, in passing through the metal detector — who will get caught this morning; who will beat the system?

My second warning: I am an historian, an historian of a peculiar kind. What interests me, as some of you know, is the strange career that ideas trace over broad swaths of time. I think of myself as an historian of "mental spaces." How does cognition within orality, for instance, differ from that within literacy? This morning, in our consultation about chil-

dren, about reading, about early reading, I want to take up what at first glance may not seem related to our subject. I think it is absolutely germane. In the context of this weekend's subject, and keeping my three anecdotes in mind, I am interested in looking at the extreme edge of movement, a contemporary brand of movement that technology has whipped into a frenzy, and that the media choose — love — to call excitement.

Let me first say something about the oddity of the word, and why I have settled on it. "Excite" derives from the Latin *excitare*, to awaken, to call forth, instigate, set in motion. The word has no antecedent in Anglo-Saxon, appearing in English for the first time in the fourteenth century as a decidedly religious term expressed in a grammar of mystical proportions: "The singing of the psalms excites the angels to our help." The angels get sung into being. They wing our way on a melody of our making. From that early use of the word, as a verb, "excite" gets taken over by the scientific revolution and turned into a noun, "excitation," to describe a state of electrical or magnetic alertness (as in phrases like "the air was downright electric," or "excitement is in the air").

Through analogy, the word moves, in the seventeenth century, to physiology. First used by Shakespeare, "excitement" carries overtones of a vibrating, aberrant behavior. It is Hamlet who first utters the word in this new sense, in Act IV, Scene 4 of his play: "A father killed, a mother stained. Excitements of my reason, and my blood."

That line complements (in the sense of completing) his famous "to be or not to be" speech — the soliloquy in which Hamlet tries to decide what it means to be human, what it means to act. Or, perhaps more precisely, how to act. In his madness, or feigned madness, things visit him, events bombard him; he has visitations, perhaps from angels, perhaps from demons. They may be the same — that's his fear. He is frightened, desperately aware of needing to do something, but awkwardly frozen in place. He cannot move, but he is fully ready to move. Hamlet, like a filament in a light bulb, has passed into a state of excitation: to be and not to be at the very same time. He is still, in the dual sense of that word: no movement, quiet — and all movement: "are you still doing that?"

The "to be or not to be" speech, for me, is less an exploration of suicide and more an exquisite rendering of a state of pure potential, where anything (or everything) is continually possible. It's neither action nor inaction, but the sheer tingling excitement of being alive — with all of its attendant problems and possibilities, fears and failures — a twinning of the character into Hamlet and Hamlet's self. But that moment in the word's history fades fast. Who can sustain such demanding excitement? By the nineteenth century, physicians use "excitement" to denote a state of abnormal activity, a pathology, in any organ.

In the modern sense, Hamlet is turned on, just as excitement promises to turn us all on. We are not passive agents in the face of it. We invoke it. Does Hamlet like the state of excitement? I do not know. Clearly, he helps to bring it on. He certainly *feels* alive, so alive, so electrically charged, that he cannot stand it. Contrary to most interpretations that Hamlet feels dead and emasculated, I say he feels too much alive. He lives in that liminal state suspended between being and non-being, alive at an emotional midnight hour. I know that at least some of us in the room have experienced that state, reading a great writer's sentences and having to drop the book, not out of regret or repulsion, but because the pages just take our breath away and we need for the moment to stop.

The soliloquy suggests a Hamlet beside himself, one who stands outside himself talking to his self. Hamlet more than feels. In his immobilized state, he is finding his deepest emotion. I do not say this to make cute etymological distinctions. "Emotion" had not even entered the language when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*; it came as late as 1692, in a book by the political philosopher John Locke, entitled *On Education*.

It is a curious word, "emotion," distant cousin to excitement. Feelings need proximity; the idea inheres in the word itself ("I'm feeling bad; I'm feeling badly"). But emotions need no such intimacy to set them spinning and churning. I can be

touched from great distances. I can be moved without being physically touched. Emotion grows out of an internal motion. Likewise, emotion causes motion, it moves me to action. To be touched carries two meanings; to be moved carries two meanings. None of this can happen without a highly active imagination, a rich, deep, interior life.

Excitement operates differently from emotion. Excitement arrives as both stimulation and emotion — one undifferentiated charge, a loud "wow" — a "rush," young people call it. It comes in such a powerful, massive way, it's difficult for a person, especially a young person, to have any nuanced emotional response. When we are young, emotion requires absolute motion. Learning to stand up, to walk, literally turns into a trip. Slightly later for young people, excitement means going somewhere, some amusement park, for instance, where, because of the rides, parks become perpetual-motion machines.

Again, I am sorry for the long drawn-out prologue. I wanted to show something of the journey that excitement took from its earliest religious incarnation, to its disturbing enfleshment in the seventeenth century, to all forms of contemporary entertainment — fast action, nastily violent entertainment. These days, judging from popular entertainment, killing, car chases, boat and plane crashes, mayhem and torture are all exciting. Fear Factor, Survivor, Extreme Games —anything is fair game that brings people to the brink, to the clear expectation that something gruesome and bloody just might, with a little luck, fill the totality of whatever screen they happen to be watching — and perhaps spill over into so-called real life. The titillation of disaster (how many times an hour did the Twin Towers collapse the day and evening of September 11, 2001?) — triggers in us an excitation. Of course the Twin Towers and even the White House had already been blown into smithereens long before 9/11 in high-powered films like "Independence Day." "High-powered" is a phrase used to describe a wide range of things: rifles, cars, alcohol, armaments, football teams, espresso, and hot sauce.

In the Middle Ages people invoked excitement — they called it forward, controlled it — by singing the psalms. Nowadays, we push a button, flip a switch, swallow a pill, inject a needle, to have it pay a visit — and the age of the user seems to matter less and less. The images come flying relentlessly by the hundreds and thousands. The imagination becomes a warehouse for storing, rather than an instrument for conjuring. One has to shake off the rush of stimulated reality. It's hard to return to a world washed clean of special effects. The images linger from the electronic realm, the emotions still stirred, demanding some discharge.

Elsewhere, I have argued for the imagination as the ultimate prophylaxis against the relentlessness of electronic technology. At a certain moment, a young person must put down the mouse and pick up his own judgment. He or she must start thinking. Even with the most sophisticated programs, one must ask, "What do *I* want to do?" Not "What can the machine accomplish?" but "What do *I* want?"

I have also argued that the best, most strenuous exercise of the imagination comes through reading. But reading is slow and cumbersome; it lacks the pizzazz of thrill rides, extreme sports and video games. Open a page: everything's flat and utterly still. The words do not move. If anything moves, it's the reader. Just watch kids fidget when they read; they read and rock, like Hassidic Jews praying in shul. Anthropologists call it a psycho-motor response to the written word. Kids love to move; they need to. It's in their bodies that they find the rhythm of prose. After all, the music's called rock'n'roll, hip hop. (The meter of poetry is divided into feet, and those feet derive their names from dance steps.)

But the great, important movement remains out of view, invisible, acted out in the mind's eye, or played out in the mind's living room, rumpus room or gymnasium. The reason so many novels, poems and fairy tales involve pilgrimages, voyages and road trips — from Chaucer to Kerouac — is that movement means that time has passed and elapsed time implies change, emotional change, one of the hardest things to dramatize. We see Huck as a different boy at the end of his drift down the Mississippi — he thinks differently, he feels dif-

ferent. He knows it. He wants more. He cannot get any bigger without lighting out for the territory. Immensity is all. America's the place to grow. It always has been.

Listen to the metaphors we use to capture the nature of thought: I came to this decision, I arrived at this conclusion, let me walk you through this argument. They all circumscribe space. In the Renaissance, people devised mnemonic tricks as memory aids. The favorite one involved making the inside of one's head into a house, dividing it into rooms, and placing objects from a list that one wished to memorize in those rooms. To recall the list, one merely walked through each room and recollected the objects. Three hundred years ago, people played with interior space. They felt so familiar with it they used it as a form of entertainment.

When a thirteen-year-old girl with the code name Genie arrived at the DPSS Office (Department of Social Services) in Monrovia, California, in 1977, she walked with her hands in front of her face. Her father had kept her locked in her room twenty-four hours a day, strapped to her potty seat during the day, and to her bed at night. She had no language; she had no depth perception. Kasper Hauser, too, without language, experienced the world in two dimensions. The world, he said, looked like someone had tossed buckets of colored paint against a wall. Think about diagramming sentences — grammar suspends sentences in space. A distance separates subject from verb from object. Farther out there, barely visible from where we stand at the subject end of the sentence, waits the lonely, dependent object.

In that space, thoughts move. In that space, ideas work themselves out. That mentalized, interiorized space gets generated in the act of silent reading. "Silent" of course misstates the case, because internalized vocalization excites images in just the way psalms excite angels. Why not think of angels and images as similar: messengers from another world. I set my ideas in motion through excitement. Excitement gets me going.

Excitement is movement. Movement, motion, emotion requires an excitation. For me, this occurs most powerfully in reading. As a preparation for entertaining an entire range of emotions, young people get their training in stories that they hear out loud, in making them up themselves, in being read to out loud, in reading aloud to themselves, in reading silently, and finally in writing their own stories. Wordsworth's walking, talking ramble with his sister Dorothy in his poem "The Prelude" has the same spatial, mobile, emotional charge as Dante's circular stroll on his way to Paradise. Emerson walks his talk in his famous essay "Walking." One space — interior — maps on to another — exterior.

Against a backdrop of moving pictures, pulsing pixels, and streaming videos, the word "reading" sounds terribly old-fashioned and creaky. The book moves in the way Rodin wants his sculptures to move. We, as readers, make the letters dance. But try to explain that to a youngster. What to do? For it's in reading that I'm convinced young people learn not just to exert some control over their world, but to reshape it, as well. I want to conjure something better, more hopeful, than "The Terminator." I want to imagine something better than terror versus anti-terror. The world is not good guys versus bad guys.

Manufactured, packaged and processed, technologically-driven excitement is corrosive to lived experience. It has helped to eradicate the wonderful possibilities of the everyday and the mundane — the ordinary objects and events of daily life. Now more than ever, we need poets to show us the charge of the quotidian, the everyday, as Richard Wilbur does so magnificently in his poem, "Love Calls Us To The Things Of This World." Wilbur is writing about the sudden explosion of beauty in, of all things, a clothesline with the morning wash flapping in the wind. It is the excitation of love — the sheer thrill of being alive — that interests Wilbur and transforms the most mundane of activities into the most magical of moments:

> The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,
> And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul
> Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple
> As false dawn.

Outside the open window
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,
Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.
Now they are rising together in calm swells
Of halcyon feeling, filling whatever they wear
With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

Now they are flying in place, conveying
The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving
And staying like white water; and now of a sudden
They swoon down into so rapt a quiet
That nobody seems to be there.
The soul shrinks.

From all that it is about to remember,
From the punctual rape of every blessed day,
And cries,
"Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven."

Yet, as the sun acknowledges
With a warm look the world's hunks and colors,
The soul descends once more in bitter love
To accept the waking body, saying now
In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,

"Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;
Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,
And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating
Of dark habits,
Keeping their difficult balance."

The new velocity of narration, story-telling as a triple-X, extreme event, is not only wiping out the everyday, it has kidnapped the world of orality. Young people are sleepwalking —deprived of the regularity of breathing and the phenomenology of seeing which orality so powerfully promotes. Speaking, conversation, storytelling, creep at a petty pace; events repeat themselves, double back on themselves. Events exist and do not exist, they're true and not true —they troop about in a dreamy state. Young people now expect the world to resemble in sight and sound a game of Doom or Sniper; or, perhaps, knowing that it cannot, find this world a pale facsimile compared with the special-effects versions that the media offer. The world and its copy have traded places — the simulation more powerful than the actual.

Excitement has replaced the richness of interior space. Excitement is an internalized thrill ride and works best when the self has been weakened. Coleridge's use of the supernatural demanded, he said, the willing suspension of disbelief; excitement requires no act so deliberate —willingness and suspension both beside the point.

In the past, I have argued that young people, neither oral nor literate, must be taken out of their illiterate limbos and brought back to orality to start all over from the beginning. Now, I believe it's important to pull young people away from their world of virtual movement and bring them back into that interior space where motion and emotion begin their journey. I did not ask, near the beginning of this morning's talk, how many Big Macs, Biggie Fries, and Super-Size Cokes youngsters have gobbled and gulped since we last met. The amount has to be staggering, not just in number, but in calorie counts, as well. How can they not grow fatter and fatter, consuming huge amounts of calories with the impression, the illusion, that they have gone through great activity and movement by watching it happen on the screen. While the movement may be virtual, the obesity is shockingly real. Is it possible that living in the virtual, electronic world of heavy-duty excitement, creates the illusion that one needs more fuel?

Let us substitute one kind of orality — consuming — for another kind, one where youngsters practice their sense of timing, their sense of humor, where they can learn to love the power of a few words, a quip, a couple of well-turned sentences, an image — where they come face to face with the thrill of language; all this oral activity in anticipation, in preparation, for reading and writing. (It's in that oral state that interior space gets nurtured, before young people come into a fuller and more mature state in literacy.)

This is dangerous stuff, this culture of excitement. It may even have eroded some important elements in adult life. For we seem to have lost the ability to understand or comprehend any more the most aggressive and all-consuming form of action and movement: war itself. It's too remote, too highly technologized, and, for the most part, too clean. We know war best when something goes wrong, and then only for a flash. And only as an adjunct — something called collateral damage. But more than that, I fear, the declaration of war may be just another one of those things, among scores of others, like wild movies, super-fast cars, high octane fuel, that keeps the air electric with excitement.

Books cannot compete with B-52 bombers or the box office. But taking our students, no matter their age, back to a state of orality, to the free and easy, sheer pleasurable dance of words, as Ezra Pound calls it — *logopoeia* — can open the door to one of the most exciting realms any person can enter. For literacy always begins with orality. What a strange state of affairs, that the perfect, fortified defense against outright attacks of virtual, exciting violence should find its match in the most basic, evanescent, precious, most invisible and, at the same time, most actual stuff — human breath.

The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: A Risk Factor in Child Psychopathology

Sharna Olfman

Over the past decade, there has been an alarming increase in the incidence and prevalence rates of child psychopathology across a wide range of diagnostic categories, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Disorders (Asperger's Disorder in particular), and Bipolar Disorder.[1] Advances in genetic research and brain imaging techniques have led to a wealth of insights into the genetic and neurochemical substrates of a number of psychiatric illnesses, facilitating more precise interventions for scores of children who might otherwise have been misunderstood as lazy, moody, immature, unintelligent, or the victims of bad parenting.

While medical research has advanced our understanding of specific mental illnesses, it fails to explain the increase in the number of children being labeled as psychiatrically disturbed across diagnostic categories. Some researchers suggest that the percentage of children who suffer from psychiatric illness has not actually changed but, rather, increasingly sophisticated assessment tools enable us to identify more children who might not have been correctly diagnosed at an earlier time. However, given the sheer number of children who are purported to have gene- and brain-based psychiatric illnesses (and are ingesting daily doses of powerful psychotropic drugs), and given the exquisite sensitivity of the brain and of gene activation to environmental influence during infancy and early childhood, we must also consider the role of the environment.

Young children in the United States are being challenged by a confluence of factors that include widespread poverty,[2] the disintegration of the family,[3] inadequate access to medical care,[4] unregulated and substandard daycare facilities,[5] and trends in education that are profoundly insensitive to children's developmental needs and to variations in their learning styles and intelligences.[6] These trends include the premature introduction of formal academic subjects with the aid of computer software that privilege cognitive development over social and emotional development, and increasingly uniform curricula and outcome measures.[7] Vulnerable children may well be succumbing to psychiatric illnesses which they might have otherwise avoided in healthier and more supportive environments. In addition, as young children are required to function under constraining conditions at school, in daycare and at home, and as caregivers and teachers become more stressed themselves, they may be

quicker to label children under their care as disturbed whose personalities, profile of talents, or developmental timetables are not an ideal fit with the environment.

Pathogenic Trends in Early Childhood Education

The Need for Play: Early childhood literacy programs that usurp time for play are at odds with what and how children are designed to learn. In the words of Lev Vygotsky, "children stand a head taller when they play" as they learn to symbolize objects and events, delay gratification, practice self-regulation, assimilate adult roles, exercise imagination, practice motor skills, and develop emotional, social and verbal literacy.[8]

The Interdependence of Emotional, Social and Intellectual Growth: As Stanley Greenspan and Stuart Shanker's[9] compelling research demonstrates, emotion is not merely a form of intelligence, but rather the cornerstone of all aspects of intellectual development. Children who are not emotionally engaged with the material they are learning and by the teachers who instruct them, cannot grow intellectually. Teachers who facilitate healthy play provide an ideal means of integrating social, emotional and intellectual growth in a stage-appropriate way. Teaching preschoolers to read is an example of a prevailing attitude that cognitive development is the purview of educators and social/emotional development is a personal matter. This attitude is in keeping with the information-processing model of learning which conceptualizes the brain as a computer and cognition as the processing of information.[10]

"High Stakes Testing": It goes without saying that setting standards for preschool education is essential, and that assessing children's readiness for kindergarten not only exposes programs that aren't working but also highlights the urgent need to improve social policies that support the family, such as family leave, subsidized daycare and housing, universal health insurance, and raising the minimum wage to a living wage.[11]

Unfortunately, initial efforts to create and assess standards have been used punitively, so that schools that don't perform well because they are in need of resources are denied aid. As a result, many teachers feel pressured to get results and "teach to the test," but the tests themselves are insensitive barometers of what and how children should be learning. We are now seeing the mindset of "high stakes testing" filtering down to preschools, as their test scores also become tied to funding. As our understanding of the rich and varied ways in which children learn and their intelligence increases, we are requiring them to perform in increasingly prescribed ways, and those who don't fit the model may suffer enormously[12].

Trends in American Society

Thus far, I have suggested that certain trends in education are insensitive to children's psychological well-being and may be contributing to the significant increase in psychiatric disturbance in children. This begs the question: What underlying currents in American culture are fomenting these changes? Why have so many policymakers, parents and educators become obsessed with teaching three-year-olds to read in increasingly uniform, high-tech settings? Two features of American culture that are influencing how we educate children are 1) our uncritical embrace of technologies, and 2) privileging the rights of individuals over responsibility to community.

Screen Nation: Children who are exposed to screens for several hours each day, often from infancy, while their brains are rapidly developing, will be profoundly affected by both the content (e.g. violence, rapid-fire stimuli) and the process of watching screens (e.g. passively absorbing images and fantasies rather than actively creating their own, stimulating the visual centers of the brain at the expense of the language centers, and interacting with machines rather than humans).[13] As a consequence, children's ability to play, pay attention, use language, and engage in emotionally and socially appropriate ways is undermined. It may be no coincidence that educators at the elementary, secondary and college level are decrying their students' inability to read, pay attention and think critically or creatively.[14] Teaching preschoolers to read can be understood as a desperate effort to compensate,

having created the conditions for academic failure in older children. It is particularly ironic that efforts to teach preschoolers to read often utilize computer programs with entertaining graphics that undermine literacy.

Advances in computer technology were the catalyst for the development of the information processing model of learning with the computer as its metaphor. This model overlooks the central role of emotion, intuition, morality, and experiential learning in cognitive development.[15] Computer and internet technologies are also big business, and as baby laptops and preschool software become *de rigeur* and anxious parents become convinced that their children will fall behind unless they furnish them with state-of-the-art computers, corporate executives (who in turn fund political campaigns) have much to gain.[16]

The Cult of Individualism: Rugged individualism and the right to privacy have served American pioneers and successive waves of immigrants fleeing oppression very well. Individualism, which shifted the unit of personal membership from the community at large to the family, has also had the effect of undermining the development of humane social policies that support family life.[17] As television and the internet promote shameless consumerism and immediate gratification, and successive administrations continue to impoverish aid to struggling families, parents are increasingly less able or willing to take responsibility for their children. And so, without the safety net of community or family, many children are fending for themselves: children are becoming miniature adults and adults are becoming more childlike.[18]

Conclusion

It is a striking paradox that as adults feel increasingly entitled to place their individual needs first, we are creating educational environments that do not respect children's individuality or their special status as children. We introduce concepts long before children are ready to master them, deny their need for play, subject them to uniform curricula and assessment, and label and drug the children who do not fit in. Our preoccupation with understanding the genetic and neurological bases of illness, while ignoring the power of the environment, also speaks to our increasingly mechanized conceptualization of human nature.

I would recommend the following research efforts:

In recent years, stage theories have fallen out of favor, and yet they retain face validity in teachers' and caregivers' awareness of when children under their care have achieved developmental milestones such as kindergarten or grade one readiness. A synthesis of the work of Piaget, Erikson, Greenspan, and Vygotsky, with a focus on the role of play in early childhood, would be timely.

In her book *Failure to Connect*, Jane Healy articulates a number of concerns about how early and excessive computer time is impacting on children's social, emotional, moral, intellectual, and neurological development. Research on how children are affected by both the content and process of computer use is urgently needed.

We need to create a better tracking system of incidence and prevalence rates of children's psychopathologies, cross-culturally, nationally, and regionally, and correlate these with risk factors such as poverty, access to health care, stability of family life, quality of daycare, quality of early childhood education, and opportunities for play. We also need more systematic information about patterns of drug prescription among children.

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The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: Critical Issues and Concerns

Nancy Carlsson-Paige

Several issues and concerns relating to early childhood literacy in the current political climate seem very important and worthy of discussion.

First, the age-old reading debate over whether code-first or meaning-first instruction works best has become more politicized than ever. The 2000 Republican national platform endorsed phonics, and the Bush administration promotes the teaching of phonics in America's classrooms and is tying funds to programs that explicitly teach phonics. The National Reading Panel mandated by Congress, which promotes systematic phonics instruction, was produced largely by McGraw-Hill authors who write phonics-based materials and has been criticized as an extremely flawed research effort. But the report by this panel is having widespread influence over classroom instruction nationwide. This politicization of the longtime reading debate is undermining the progress that has been made in the literacy field toward better integration of these two opposing views. What serves children best is for research and theory to point educators toward the best practices that can support children's optimal literacy development. This path is available to educators now, but is being undermined by the current administration's bias.

A related issue of concern is that political leaders are not turning to the experts in the fields of literacy and early childhood education for guidance in developing policy. The report of the National Research Council, headed by Catherine Snow of Harvard University, entitled *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* calls for a balanced approach to literacy and spells out in great detail what kinds of language and literacy experiences children need in preschool and child care settings.[1] Two committees of scholars in the literacy field have recently produced large works which spell out the wide range of specific experiences in oral and written language that young children need in order to become proficient readers and writers. These two books, *Speaking and Listening for Preschool through Third Grade* and *Reading and Writing Grade by Grade*, also present practical standards for early literacy achievement beginning in kindergarten and standards in speaking and listening that begin with preschool.[2] These standards put into practice the best of what is known in the field of literacy today, but they are not the standards on which federal policies and funding are currently based.

The federal government has also not relied on the knowledge base which guides practice in the field

of early childhood education. In its widely used book *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8*, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has identified teaching practices in early literacy that best support young children's literacy development.[3] These include the frequent reading of books, activities of drawing, painting and writing, play with open-ended materials, and unstructured, make-believe play. Emergent reading skills, such as knowing that a story is the same with each reading and beginning to know that meaning is conveyed in print, develop in settings that offer these kinds of activities. In such settings, children also begin to learn basic concepts about writing — print awareness, functions of print, and phonological awareness — as they experiment making marks and letters on paper with encouragement from their teachers. These emergent skills are developmental and occur differently in every child. NAEYC is opposed to the imposition of uniform standards and timetables on young children, and to standardized tests in the early years.

Another concern is that children today are having fewer of the kinds of experiences they need in order to build a strong foundation for early literacy. Even children ages two to four spend almost three hours a day in front of a screen. The hours lost in play and interactions with materials and peers puts children at increased risk for difficulty in learning to read and write. The erosion of play is of special concern because it is a main vehicle used by children to make sense of the world. It is through the reordering of experience through play that children actively make meaning of their experience, begin to use symbols that represent their ideas, and build the foundation for comprehension of print. Children are getting fewer positive precursor experiences for literacy in school as the emphasis on phonics and standardized tests bears down on teachers, narrowing even the preschool curriculum. The negative impact on children of hours of screen time spent outside of school is far more damaging when key experiences needed for learning are disappearing from the school curriculum.

Young children gradually build their understanding of symbols and begin to use a variety of symbol systems in the early years: language, play with materials, socio-dramatic play, movement, drawing and art. At the root of all symbol use is the effort by the child to make meaning. Very gradually, children begin to notice the symbols used in the world around them and begin to experiment with these, integrating them with other symbol systems they use. But for young children whose use of symbols is still highly subjective, conventional letters are too abstract to be of optimal use for conveying ideas and feelings. Children move in a gradual, developmental progression toward the use of conventional symbols, but ideally this happens in a way that maintains meaning and a sense of ownership over symbols.

The development of early literacy skills is a gradual and slow process. Children experiment with the creation of symbols from a young age, learning how to make marks that represent their meaning. Symbolic play with three-dimensional materials supports this process, as does drawing and making marks on paper. Over a long period of time, the marks children make will come closer to the conventional symbols used in reading and writing. But if this developmental process is rushed, children can become confused and can develop problems in making sense of the print system. Also, their command of symbols as within their control and as a vehicle for expression is undermined.

Another concern is with the false dichotomy of the phonics approach versus whole language that pervades all of the discussions and works against finding the best programs and practices for children. This current emphasis on school preparedness threatens to undermine the health and well-being of children by eliminating the very experiences they need in order to establish the foundation for early literacy during this critical period.

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The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: The Loss of Nature

William Crain

Influential research by Hart and Risley indicates that when parents talk a lot to their young children, the children have higher vocabularies. The children also have higher IQ scores (which is hardly surprising because vocabulary scores are strongly associated with overall IQs). High vocabulary also is associated with high school performance. Numerous psychologists therefore recommend that parents talk a lot to children. In September (2002) the American Academy of Pediatrics endorsed Bright Beginnings books that show parents how to increase conversations with their young children and how to encourage their children to read picture books. The Academy of Pediatrics has sent the Bright Beginnings promotional material to thousands of pediatricians.

My concern is that we are drawing young children into a purely verbal world at the expense of their sensory exploration of the environment. On a walk in a park or along a sidewalk, young children will stop and investigate objects for long stretches of time—an insect, a leaf, a puddle of water. But today's parents are so busy moving them along (often in strollers) and talking to them that the children have little time to explore.

I recently saw a girl of about two years, walking with her mother, who stopped and stared in fascination at two dogs. After a while, the child said, "Two dogs," and kept staring, totally absorbed. The mother, however, saw this as a teachable moment and coaxed her daughter into a "Two's song" — "Two dogs, two cows, two horses...." The child reluctantly joined in, as the mother pulled her along. The mother may have increased her child's vocabulary, but we will never know what the child missed in the experience that had fascinated her.

At a store, I recently saw a baby, about a year and a half, point enthusiastically and say, "Oooh," at a toy animal. He then tried to touch it. But the father said, "Use your words," and pulled his hand back.

Young childhood, from about 1 to 7 years, is probably a sensitive or critical period for the development of language. But the Chomsky revolution has made it pretty clear that vocabulary growth is minor in comparison to the remarkable acquisition of deep and abstract syntax during these years—and that children develop syntax spontaneously, without adult instruction.

Along with the language development, children also form bonds with the natural world. Growing evidence suggests that childhood is the period when this most readily occurs. (The evidence isn't as strong as in the case of language, but it is gradually accumulating). But children cannot form bonds with nature unless they have unhurried opportunities to investigate it. They need opportunities to just sit and watch insects and birds, explore weedy waysides and vacant lots, touch and smell leaves, poke around in puddles, climb trees, build model structures in loose dirt, and build hideouts in tall grass. Today's society is not providing these rich physical and sensory experiences. Instead, we are obsessed with increasing children's vocabularies and promoting their achievement in a purely human world in which language skills are paramount.

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William Crain is a developmental psychologist, author, and social activist. He is Professor of Psychology at the City College of New York, and author of a major textbook in the field, *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*. He is also editor of the journal *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*. His most recent book, *Reclaiming Childhood: Letting Children Be Children in Our Achievement Oriented Society* is reviewed in this issue of the *Research Bulletin*.

The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: A View from Europe

Christopher Clouder

"Can you do Addition?" the White Queen asked. "What's one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one?"

"I don't know," said Alice. "I lost count."

"She can't do Addition," the Red Queen interrupted. "Can you do Subtraction? Take nine from eight."

"Nine from eight I can't, you know," Alice replied readily: "but –"

"She can't do Subtraction," said the White Queen. "Can you do Division? Divide a loaf by a knife – what's the answer to that?" [1]

In this passage from *Through the Looking Glass,* neither queen shows particular pedagogical aptitude, or an approach of at least patiently encouraging Alice to find the correct answers. Although it would be unfair to use the above to satirize policymakers and educators who are sincerely concerned with improving children's learning, the current tendency to promote early formal learning and its concomitant league table mentality also presents dangers that are amusingly encapsulated in this imaginary discourse.

In December 2000, Britain's House of Commons Education Select Committee issued a report[2] which concluded that children under five years of age should learn mainly through creative play in classes of no more than 15 for each teacher. It also concluded that there was no conclusive evidence that children gained from being taught the "3 R's" before the age of six. After a thorough investigation of papers and witnesses, the chairman, Barry Sherman MP, forthrightly stated, "If you start formal learning early on, you can actually damage formal learning later on." He went on, "Some people believe that the earlier you start children reading and writing and doing formal instruction the better. All the evidence we took, from every side, goes against that argument." Tricia David of the Professional Association of Nursery Nurses commented, "Over-emphasis on formal education and abstract concepts of literacy and numeracy before the age of five can result in a sense of failure. Early failure can lead to long-term underachievement, disaffection and even truancy.... We could learn from some of our European neighbors, where children start school later than in the UK but still achieve better academic results."[3] The memoranda submitted to the committee from the British Association for Early Childhood Education underscored this point of view:

> Comparison with other countries suggests there is no benefit in starting formal instruction before six. The majority of other European countries admit children to school at six or seven following a three-year period of preschool education which focuses on social and physical development. Yet standards in literacy and numeracy are generally higher in those countries than in the UK, despite our earlier starting age.

The committee recommended keeping the school entry age at five, but that young children should receive the style of education appropriate to their stage of development. The report then goes on to highlight concerns given in evidence in this area:

> the current focus on targets for older children in reading and writing inevitably tends to limit the vision and confidence of early childhood educators. Such downward pressure risks undermining children's motivation and their disposition to learn, thus lowering rather than raising levels of achievement in the long term. . . . Inappropriate formalised assessment of children at an early age currently results in too many children being labelled as failures, when the failure, in fact, lies with the system.[4]

This is one contemporary phase in a struggle that has been waged since the beginning of the 19th century. At its heart is our conception of childhood. The manner in which we receive our children into this world influences who they eventually become, and whether or not nature or nurture proves the short-term victor in any conceptual battles, the fact remains that the early years are vitally important. The basic assumption is that the child should be welcomed, but how that welcome is expressed can vary according to the times and the social fabric around the child. A report from the Swedish Aid Commission touches elements that confront us as citizens of the world's affluent minority:

> Basic to a good society is that children are welcome, are given a good environment during childhood and are the concern of the whole society. Children have a right to secure living conditions that enhance their development. Preschool has an important function in children's lives. It offers a comprehensive programme and is the source of stimulation in the children's development. It gives them a chance to meet other children and adults and to be part of an experience of fellowship and friendship. It is a complement to the upbringing a child gets at home.[5]

In other words, children are born into a culture which, with all its assumptions, history and aspirations, will have a profound effect on how they experience childhood and indeed their adult lives as well. Human cultures vary enormously in their approaches to the rearing of children, and one culture cannot claim to be the template of good practice for all.

Yet there is the factor of our common humanity and something that can be recognized as universal childhood. In the present roller-coaster plethora of advice, research and increasing polarization of views, we must look for deeper aspects of childhood so that as parents, carers and educators we do not become restricted to a particular one-sided approach or dogma. The interests of young children are the interests of the whole of society, and their importance should be of primary concern if we are to find solutions to the many social and ethical challenges facing us.

> How quality in early childhood education and care is defined and evaluated will be a concern not only for politicians, experts, administrators and professionals, but will also be a matter for a broader citizenry.... it becomes important to create forums or arenas for discussion and reflection where people can engage with devotion and vision…. Within these arenas a lively dialogue can take place in which early childhood education and care are placed within larger societal context and where questions concerning children's position are made vivid.[6]

Being concerned about the early years of human life also has the capability to draw out what is best in us as adults. If we wish to help our children

develop devotion and vision we must also strive for them ourselves, as in our world they are no longer just a given fact of life. So we should welcome the fact that the role and content of early years education is a matter of such a wide and intense debate, as evidence that its seriousness is unquestioned.

Of all the countries in Europe, only Northern Ireland starts compulsory schooling at age four; five countries (the Netherlands, Malta, England, Scotland and Wales) begin at age five; nineteen countries begin at age six, and eight at age seven. Interestingly, one of the latter, namely Finland, scored very well in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (2001 PISA) study which assessed a quarter of a million children in 32 countries. In this survey by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on skills in literacy, numeracy and scientific understanding, Finland scored significantly better than any other European country. There may be other imponderables at work here, but what this does show is that starting later need not necessarily be a disadvantage. A few years ago there was a national debate in Finland about reducing the school starting age from the traditional age of seven. However, in light of both commonsense arguments and scientific evidence regarding children's neurological development, it was decided not to proceed with this.

The countries that scored less well are less likely to follow this aspect of Finnish educational policy. Germany's low ranking has been claimed in that country to be analogous to "sputnik shock" in the USA, and one result of this is growing pressure to start formal learning earlier. In spite of anecdotal evidence of numerous discreet summer pilgrimages by officials and policymakers to Finland, it seems they are rather inclined to adopt what Lillian Katz calls the "push-down phenomenon." In her Royal Society of Arts lecture in London she pointed out that there is evidence of short-term advantage if three-, four- and five-year-olds are put in formal instruction, but that there is also evidence of some noticeable disadvantages in the long term. "There are two important points to note here," she writes. "First, it's only in the long term that you can see the disadvantages of early formal instruction. Second, early formal instruction is particularly damaging to boys…. My favorite theory is that, on the whole, early learning damages the disposition to learn."[7]

In fact, a 1992 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study of reading literacy in 32 countries showed that the age at which children began reading was associated with a gender gap in literacy. The ten top-scoring countries had a later starting age, with an average of 6.3. The study concludes, "It is clearly a plausible hypothesis that boys are too immature to begin reading formally at the age of five, and that their difficulties are represented in low achievement, relative to girls, at both the ages of nine and fourteen." The as yet unpublished reworking of the IEA data for 27 of these countries has also showed that in only four countries did children start reading before the age of five, and that in all four countries (and only these) there was a distinct gender gap at the age of nine.[8]

Caroline Sharp's paper "School Starting Age: European Policy and Recent Research,"[9] produced for the National Foundation for Educational Research, gives a very balanced view of the whole issue of whether teaching literacy and numeracy can cause damage to young children's development. She mentions that the early schoolstarting age in the UK was not established for any particular educational criteria; it was enacted into law in 1870 partly out of concern for the protection of young children from exploitation, partly to appease employers in consequently enabling an early school leaving age. In any case, six is the most common starting age worldwide. Sharp's conclusions regarding academic achievement are that there is no conclusive evidence concerning starting school at different ages. The best available evidence suggests that beginning to teach more formal skills early gives children an initial academic advantage, but that this advantage is not sustained in the long term. There are some suggestions that an early introduction of formal curriculum may increase anxiety and have a negative impact on children's self-esteem and motivation to learn. Top-performing countries in the Third International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS 1996) survey had a school starting age of six, although the factors for this need further

research. "What we can say," the survey concluded, "is that a later start does not appear to hold back children's progress.... Certainly, there would appear to be no compelling educational rationale for a statutary school age of five or for the practice of admitting four-year-olds to school reception classes."

In June 2001 the OECD issued its long-anticipated and highly regarded thematic review of early childhood education and care policy (ECEC) for twelve countries. It is significant that for the OECD, early childhood extends until the age of eight, and that "education" and "care" are conjoined. It is explicitly stated in the report that flexible curricula, built on the inputs of children, teachers and parents, are more suitable in early childhood than detailed, expert-driven curricula: "Contemporary research suggests... that the curricula should be broad and holistic with greater emphasis on developmental outcomes rather than subject outcomes... more process-related and co-constructive... defined by the vital interests and needs of the children, families and communities... and more in tune with socio-cultural contexts"[10] This was an international call for flexible frameworks that leave freedom for adaptation, experimentation and cultural inputs.

The testing regime that accompanies the pressure for early learning is also under scrutiny. The London University Institute of Education's systematic review of the available evidence made a wide-ranging search of studies of assessment for summative purposes in schools for students between the ages of four and eighteen. After searching through 183 studies, nineteen of which they identified as providing sound and valid empirical evidence, the researchers concluded, "What emerges is strong evidence of negative impact of testing on pupils' motivation, though this varied in degree with the pupils' characteristics and with the conditions of their learning.... Lower achieving pupils are doubly disadvantaged by the tests. Being labeled as failures has an impact on how they feel about their ability to learn."[11]

The researchers' suggestion is, therefore, that new forms of testing be developed that make it possible to assess all valued outcomes of education including, for example, creativity and problem-solving, not just literacy and numeracy, and that, furthermore, such assessments be only one element in a more broadly based judgment. However, the researchers also found that "When passing tests in high stakes, teachers adopt a teaching style which emphasizes transmission teaching of knowledge, thereby favoring those students who prefer to learn in this way and disadvantaging and lowering the self-esteem of those who prefer more active and creative learning experiences." Although this paper is more concerned with older students' reactions, we should not overlook the fact that four-year-olds can feel themselves failures too, and the sense that they are letting their parents down can be devastating and lasting. It also begs the question of what is developmentally appropriate for young children's learning that is in harmony with their natural need for "active and creative leaning experiences" as expressed in play.

Play is vital to human learning. It can consolidate and support learning in an infinite variety of situations. It assists the development of cognitive and social skills, encourages problem-solving skills, supports language development and the expression of emotions, and provides opportunities for exercise and coordination. It also needs space and time, which are the very factors the "hurried curriculum" threatens to efface. "We know that we can teach children to read at four if we wanted to, but we wanted them to spend those years playing. Here you teach them to give the right answers. We want them to solve problems, cooperate with others and cope with life"[12] It could be argued that children have a fundamental right to be prepared for school in such a way that the impact of their individuality does not become a handicap. The Hungarian educational sociologist, József Nagy, found enormous differentiation in children's capabilities. "Children with a calendar age of six," he writes, "can demonstrate a biological difference of plus or minus one year, a difference in mental development of plus or minus two and a half years, and a difference of plus or minus three years in social development." In the 1980s, after researching school-based attempts to overcome this variation, he concluded that schools were incapable of doing so: "The result is that the school career of those entering is predetermined by

their stage of development at entry."[13] As such a wide variation of capacities and personal development is unsuitable for a setting in which formal learning can successfully take place for all children, the view that the purpose of preschool is to prepare children for formal learning gains greater credence. Whole class teaching requires the children to be capable of receiving and benefiting from it and ensuring a certain stage of readiness. This is, in fact, the child's right.

Perhaps at this point we should turn to the evidence of the poets, who have an instinctive, rather than analytical, approach to childhood that should not be disregarded just on account of its lack of academic rigor. Poets are often able to retain their closeness to the qualities of childhood that the rest of us lose. Miroslav Holub, himself a distinguished biologist, remembers his own Czech childhood and the need to inwardly breathe:[14]

> Ten million years
> from the Miocene
> to the primary school in Jecnà Street.
>
> We know everything
> from a to z.
>
> But sometimes the finger stops
> in the empty space between a and b,
> empty as the prairie at night,
>
> between g and h,
> deep as the eyes of the sea,
>
> between m and n,
> long as man's birth,
>
> sometimes it stops
> in the galactic cold
> after the letter z,
> at the beginning and the end,
>
> trembling a little
> like some strange bird.
>
> Not from despair.
> Just like that.

If this space is so vital, where is the evidence that there is a greater good in losing it? What do we destroy if we fill up all the space in a child's imaginative and emotional life? Lowering the age at which children start formal learning is, in fact, a small revolution with little debate or serious consideration of the consequences. "The precise educational rationale for the school environment being offered to four-year-old children has either been given inadequate attention or overlooked altogether."[15] A change of such significance and consequence surely needs careful and deep consideration, especially as its effects impinge on everyone and could be lifelong.

Beginning in the 19th century, preschool education in Europe had humanitarian roots in catering to children from working-class families. It was said of Margaret McMillan (1860-1931), a great pioneer in this work, that "Her anger burned at the violation of the lives of little children. She fought as one inspired to prevent their misuse."[16] A similar romantic notion was shared by Ellen Key, the Swedish educational reformer, whose influential book *The Century of the Child* was published in 1900. "The next century will be the century of the child just as the last century has been the woman's century. When the child gets his rights, morality will be perfect." Perhaps we do not have to be so romantically inclined or so passionately engaged to notice that children and the quality of childhood face new threats in the 21st century. We should take to heart such warnings as this:

> What has become clear from this short analysis of international educational research is that the drive of successive English governments to introduce formal scholastic teaching at ever earlier ages serves merely to create the failure it seeks to avoid. Until our first phase of education – for our three-, four- and five-year-olds – has goals, curriculum content and appropriate teaching strategies to prepare children for formal schooling… our educational "beginnings" will not be as "sound" as we might hope.[17]

We should also applaud when a brave politician, such as Jane Davidson, the new Minister of Educa-

tion for Wales, stands up to the prevailing trend and ends the formal educational testing of seven-year-olds so that Wales can be a place "where our children get the best start in life"[18] in favor of a curriculum that is less formal and more child-centered, or when the Swedish government takes pride in its Early Years curriculum because it is the shortest and least prescriptive in Europe.

We live in our world,
A world that is too small
For you to enter
Even on hands and knees,
The adult subterfuge.
And though you probe and pry
With analytic eye,
And eavesdrop all our talk
With an amused look,
You cannot find our centre
Where we dance, where we play,
Where life is still asleep
Under the closed flower,
Under the smooth shell
Of eggs in the cupped nest
That mock the faded blue
Of your remoter heaven.[19]

Our analytical approach has its limitations. Because we are working and caring for children, we should allow our feelings to participate in this debate. Children have the gift of "becoming" in the sense used by Walt Whitman:

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon, that object he became
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.[20]

In this gift of "becoming" we can find the roots of our humanity, our compassion, empathy and tolerance. Do we really need to squander these because of short-term goals and a lack of foresight and due attention? Listening to the children themselves would be a good start.

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Book Review

Reclaiming Childhood: Letting Children Be Children in Our Achievement-Oriented Society, by William Crain (New York: Times Books, 2003).

Edward Miller

In his new book, *Reclaiming Childhood,* developmental psychologist William Crain tells the story of a four-year-old girl in New York City whose parents are determined to make sure she is accepted at a certain highly selective preschool. For a year leading up to the critical admissions interview, the parents make her practice answering questions from the Stanford Binet intelligence test — which the school uses to sort out truly exceptional preschool applicants from their less promising peers.

On the day of the interview, the little girl is led into a room where the psychologist who will administer the test is waiting for her. The psychologist asks the girl's name. "Amanda," she replies. But her name is not Amanda. Amanda is the name of the family cat. For the rest of the session, the girl answers every question by saying simply, "Meow."

This anecdote neatly illustrates the combination of gentle wisdom and stark social commentary that strikingly sets *Reclaiming Childhood* apart from much of what is written in the field of child development. Crain's argument in this book is both radical and stunningly simple: that the nearly universal assumption that the purpose of education is to "prepare children for the future" is fundamentally flawed, and that, for young children especially, it leads to practices and policies that are harmful. "Maybe it's time to question our emphasis on the future," he writes. "Maybe we need to start paying attention to children's present feelings and interests."

The absurd competitiveness that leads some modern parents to believe that acceptance at a prestigious preschool is the only way to ensure their child's eventual admission to Harvard is only one manifestation of the enormous pressure that children increasingly feel in our culture. Standardized testing as the sole measure of school achievement and the enforcement of "standards" has transformed the educational landscape in recent years, and with the passage of President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" Act mandatory testing has proliferated at every level, including the early grades. The kindergarten and now the preschool curriculum has changed dramatically, emphasizing early academics in response to parental and government concern that children are not learning fast enough and will fall behind. As a result, open-ended play and artistic exploration, once the mainstays of the early childhood curriculum, are disappearing from the classroom and from children's lives. In a very real sense, childhood itself is endangered.

Crain notes that one side effect of this change is that many children have lost much of their enthusiasm for learning by the second or third grade. He reports the worried comment of one parent: "My children are signed up for so many lessons that I sometimes wonder, What's wrong with just playing? But I have to think of the future. With everyone else starting their kids in this competition for the best colleges, I have to do it, too."

In *Reclaiming Childhood* Crain makes a compelling argument that this view of children is exactly what they don't need. "I believe," he writes, "that we are so obsessed with preparing children for the future that we are depriving them of the chance to develop their artistic orientation, ties to nature, and other distinctive traits of the childhood years. I am suggesting that we are, in effect, stunting their growth, and future research may show that the effects show up in increased depression, suicidal ideation, restlessness, and other symptoms of unfulfilled lives."

His method is to combine clear, nonacademic summaries of the most important threads in research on child development with direct observations of the nature of real children — as in the story of "Amanda," the preschooler. In successive chapters Crain illuminates the natural creativity, intelligence, and sheer delight in experiencing the world that characterize all healthy children. Young children, he argues, are natural dramatists, naturalists, artists, poets, and linguists. (His explanation of Noam Chomsky's theories of linguistic development is the most accessible I have ever read.)

His chapter titled "The Child as an Artist" is particularly fascinating in its analysis of the development of children's drawing, from the "primordial circle" to sunbursts, mandalas, tadpoles (human figures with no trunks, where the legs extend directly from the head), and finally the "golden period" between the ages of five and eight. It is impossible to come away from this chapter and its striking illustrations without a profound appreciation for the beauty and mystery of children's art.

Throughout, Crain adds his own uncommonly wise advice on how to maintain a child-centered approach to caring for the young, as in this simple but moving observation:

> The psychologist Louise Ames once noted that often it isn't parents, but grandparents, who best exemplify the child-centered attitude. Grandparents derive endless pleasure from just watching their grandchildren go about the business of being children. Whether a child is trying out her first steps, trying to balance one block on another, making up a song while playing with a truck, or watching an insect, a grandparent may sit and watch, smiling, as if something quite wonderful is occurring. Grandparents do not rush in to teach and correct the child — they just enjoy observing. And children often feel good about being in the presence of grandparents. Many parents think children like grandparents because the grandparents spoil their grandchildren. Some parents say, "Of course my son likes his grandparents; they let him get away with murder." But I suspect the real reason is that grandparents have a broader sense of the life cycle. They recognize the special qualities of the childhood years and the child's own efforts to discover what is important to her.

Reclaiming Childhood deserves the widest possible audience of educators, policymakers, and parents. Among its greatest strengths is Crain's direct and unaffected style, which perfectly reflects the message he hopes to convey: that the simple reality of childhood — children's inborn talents and their timeless innate rhythms of growth and development — is nothing less than miraculous and awe-inspiring, if only adults can have the wisdom, patience, and humility to see it.

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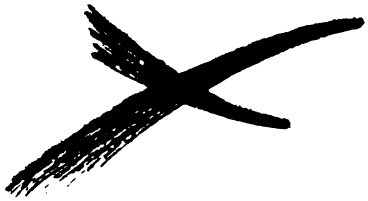

Correspondence: No Such Thing?

To the Editor:

In response to S. Sagarin's essay about Waldorf Education ("No Such Thing: Recovering the Quality of Rudolf Steiner's Educational Work," *Research Bulletin*, January 2003):

With intellectual finesse, and an abundance of examples and references, Sagarin tried hard to convince the reader in the course of nine pages that Waldorf education is a phantom, that there is no such thing. Perhaps this is why he wrote: "I cannot describe Waldorf education well, but I can investigate how others have defined or described it," and thereafter spends almost the entire article on a journey that depicts different facets of how people have dealt with this question before. After reading through excerpts by Barnes, Oberman, Schwartz, Sloan and others, I found myself curiously waiting for a final statement. Then he ends with a "Conclusion" that said: Slice the word Waldorf from your "Waldorf Education" bumper sticker, and you will understand that education is left as the all-demanding essence.

Sagarin's point is well taken that Waldorf is not a thing, a commodity that can be traded, sold, packaged or implemented by recipes. I also believe that the core of Waldorf is neither found in its name derived from a German cigarette factory, nor hidden in a box of beeswax crayons.

Where I do differ, is that Sagarin "eats the fruit" (education) and tosses away the "pip" (Waldorf) as useless prey. Isn't it the pip that bears the potential for reproduction and not the flesh? Does not the seed called Anthroposophy, if nourished well, grow into a strong enough tree to bear the fruit we call Waldorf education?

Sagarin further states: "There is no characteristic nor quality that is unique to what we call Waldorf education that cannot potentially be found somewhere else…," and then parallels certain writings of Emerson with Steiner. What is obviously missing is what I just called the "tree": Anthroposophy itself and how it relates to Waldorf education. The truth of the matter is, Waldorf education would be nothing without it. It is the inner understanding of a teacher working out of Anthroposophy that gives him or her the unique opportunity and perspective to see a child as having descended from the spiritual world, a child that perhaps has gone through many previous incarnations, a child that perhaps in its spiritual being even carries more wisdom than the teacher himself. Now that is a humbling thought!

There could be much more said as to how teacher/child relationships in Waldorf schools are unique compared to other schooling concepts or humanistic philosophies; it includes the whole understanding of human development based on Spiritual Science.

If Sagarin's purpose was to conduct a mental exercise in reduction, it might be suited for a doctorate paper at a university, but it seems less suitable in a Waldorf research publication. There I could expect him to show consequences for other Anthroposophical endeavors to make his point: Reduce Bio-Dynamic farming to farming, Eurythmy to dance — and so on. That at least would have given each reader ample opportunity for thought.

I am not concerned about name preferences (Waldorf Schools or Rudolf Steiner Schools) as long as one is willing to give them a name. Without a name we let the "Wesen" (being) go, that is willing to be part of each individual school. It would be a tragedy if we can no longer permit this to happen.

Lukas Zay

Lukas Zay coaches woodwork teachers in various U.S. Waldorf schools and teaches clay modeling and woodwork at Sunbridge College. For seven years he was the woodwork teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

The Online Waldorf Library – An Update

www.waldorflibrary.org
Marianne Aslop

The Online Waldorf Library (OWL) has been a live web site for nearly 18 months. To date we have had over 34,000 visitors looking for resources, in English, about Waldorf education. Each month, information about new books and articles is added to the site. The search data base feature allows visitors to find all the available books currently in print dealing with aspects of the Waldorf curriculum. The site now includes the complete text of articles appearing in the *Research Bulletin and Gateways*, as well as selected articles from the archives of *Education as an Art* and other journals.

The Online Library is attracting attention far and wide. We have had visitors to the site from all states in the U.S. as well as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the U.K. and every country in Western Europe. Of note are the many hits from the Baltic countries and Russia as well as countries in the Far East and Africa.

One goal of this web site is to provide free access to articles that may be of help to Waldorf class and specialty teachers in countries where Waldorf educational resources are scarce or expensive to obtain. Another goal of the OWL is to create open access to Waldorf educational materials, in a sense demystifying an education that is sometimes criticized for being mysterious.

There are now many parents in the United States and in the United Kingdom who opt to teach their children at home using "Waldorf methods." The OWL does not intend to create or offer lessons, but does want to make available the pedagogical information for parents to plan their own lessons.

Future plans include posting newly translated articles (from German), and adding curriculum resource pages and dissertations. The OWL will continue to add newly published books about Waldorf education and articles from the major Waldorf educational journals, and expand on archival articles from out-of-print journals.

If you have suggestions or comments, or know of something that should be included on the site, please contact Marianne Alsop, owlibrary@sbcglobal.net.

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education — Looking Toward the Future

Susan Howard, Director

This year, Douglas Sloan and I, original founders in 1994 of what was then called the Waldorf Education Research Institute (WERI), have once again taken on active roles in the Research Institute. Douglas is the editor of the *Research Bulletin* and I have taken on the position of Director of the Research Institute. Roberto Trostli, who was Director from 2000 to August, 2002, continues to oversee the development of the Online Waldorf Library and is working on a curriculum resource project called Themes in Waldorf Education. Douglas and I are pleased to be working in active partnership once more and look forward to the future development of the Institute. We are also pleased to be working with Marianne Alsop, who has taken on responsibility for the Online Waldorf Library. Her report on the OWL project is included in this issue of the *Bulletin*.

Board Development

We are pleased to announce the appointment of two new members to the Board of Directors.

Douglas Gerwin, Director of the High School Teacher Training at the Center for Anthroposophy in New Hampshire, has joined the board as an appointee from the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA), replacing David Alsop, who moved on to new work in development after launching the Online Waldorf Library site for the Research Institute last year.

Ann Stahl, recently retired from the Rudolf Steiner Foundation office in Spring Valley, New York, has also accepted an invitation to join the board. She brings decades of experience in the Waldorf movement and in banking and foundation work. Douglas and Ann join other board members Douglas Sloan (president), Susan Howard (secretary), Roberto Trostli (treasurer) and David Mitchell. Our current board membership includes individuals active in AWSNA, the Pedagogical Section, and Waldorf early childhood, lower school, and high school education, as well teacher training, higher education and publications.

Research Priorities for the Future

We are currently in conversation with AWSNA leadership, the Pedagogical Section Council, Rudolf Steiner Foundation, and colleagues in the European Council for Waldorf Education about research priorities for the future. You can read about current and past activities of the Research Institute at the end of this *Research Bulletin*. Our vision for

the future also includes the following projects, for which we are currently seeking funding:

1. Research Fellowships and Collaborative Research Groups

These are research studies undertaken by individual Waldorf educators and by collaborative research groups, modeled on the High School Research Project and groups such as the Pedagogical Advisors Colloquium. Research groups meet in small retreats on specific themes in early childhood, lower school, middle school and high school education, and teacher education. The work of these groups would lead to colloquia, larger conferences and publications. We see such individual and collaborative research projects as making a significant to the deepening and renewal of Waldorf education.

Areas of study and exploration include the following:

Curriculum Studies and Resources:

- The middle school curriculum
- Waldorf science teaching and the development of perception and thinking
- Waldorf arts and crafts and the development of feeling and will
- Rhythms of learning: daily, weekly and block schedules
- Birth to Seven: the renewal of Waldorf early childhood education

Child Development and Learning:

- The role of movement in learning
- Developing social and emotional health
- Multiple intelligences and anthroposophical typologies
- The insights of Rudolf Steiner and contemporary research findings
- The role of play in child and human development
- The physiological basis of education

Social, Philosophical and Spiritual Foundations of Waldorf Education

- What makes Waldorf education "Waldorf"?
- The self-administration of the Waldorf school
- Developing the individuality of the teacher and the child
- The Christ Being, Christianity and Waldorf education

2. Waldorf Graduate Survey

The Research Institute is currently developing a proposal and seeking researchers for a project on the outcomes of Waldorf education. This would involve documentation on Waldorf graduates as well as anecdotal perspectives by college faculty members who have taught Waldorf graduates. This study could serve as the basis for a larger longitudinal study.

3. Consultations and Colloquia: Dialogue with the wider world

Consultations in partnership with the Alliance for Childhood and others such topics as early literacy, assessment, the role of movement in the development of thinking, the standardizing of education, the role of play and imagination, technology and education, etc. These continue the consultancy work developed by Douglas Sloan through the Center for the Study of the Spiritual Foundations of Education at Teachers College, NY. Such consultations would also result in proceedings and other publications.

4. Publications and Resources:

- Continued development of the *Research Bulletin*, broadened for an international readership with addition of a European editor, Christopher Clouder, and links to English-language Education Section newsletters.
- Further development of the Online Waldorf Library to include research studies, theses and dissertations on Waldorf education, translations of journal articles, and other resources from the international Waldorf movement.

- Collections from past issues of the *Research Bulletin* around themes such as Technology and Education, Perspectives on Child Development, etc. to be published in collaboration with AWSNA Publications
- Monographs and brochures on specific research questions or findings, such as Rainer Patzlaff on the loss of speech and language, or Wolfgang Schad/Gottfried Straube on computers in the Waldorf school, etc.
- Support for a book on Waldorf education by a prominent author
- Proceedings from research consultancies and conferences

As we seek funding for these and other projects, our aim is to stimulate collaboration among individuals and groups within the Waldorf movement and dialogue with the wider educational community. In this way, research activity can contribute to a renewal of education within both Waldorf and non-Waldorf schools.

We welcome your suggestions regarding the research priorities for Waldorf education in the coming years. Please contact

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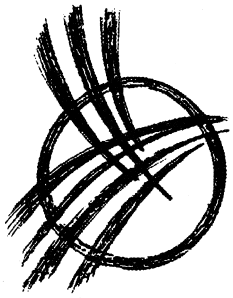
Susan Howard is the Director of the Research Institute for Waldorf Education. She also directs the Part-time Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Sunbridge College and is the Chair/Coordinator of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN). She is also a member of the Pedagogical Section Council of North America.



About the Research Institute for Waldorf Education

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education (formerly WERI) is an initiative on behalf of the Waldorf movement. It has received support and guidance from the Pedagogical Section of the School of Spiritual Science and financial support through the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, the Midwest Shared Gifting Group, and the Waldorf Schools Fund.

The Research Institute was founded in 1996 in order to deepen and enhance the quality of Waldorf education, to engage in serious and sustained dialogue with the wider educational-cultural community, and to support research that would serve educators in all types of schools in their work with children and adolescents.

The Research Institute has responded to the call for research as a top priority of the Waldorf movement by becoming a supporting organization of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America and by co-sponsoring research projects with AWSNA.

During the past six years, we have supported research projects that deal with essential contemporary educational issues such as attention-related disorders, trends in adolescent development and innovations in the high school curriculum, learning expectations and assessment, computers in education, the role of art in education, and new ways to identify and address different learning styles.

The Research Institute has sponsored colloquia and conferences that have brought together educators, psychologists, doctors, and social scientists. We have published a *Research Bulletin* twice a year for the last six years, and we are developing and distributing educational resources to help teachers in all aspects of their work.

Recently incorporated as a supporting organization to AWSNA, The Research Institute is now a 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organization.

Summary of Activities supported by the Research Institute:

Research Projects
Art in Human Development
Attention Related Disorders Research Project
Exploring the Four Polarities in Child Development
Evaluation of the Urban Waldorf School in Milwaukee
Waldorf High School Research Project
Waldorf Learning Expectations and Assessment Project

Colloquia and Conferences
Towards Wholeness in Learning, 1996
Pathways of Healthy Child Development, 1998
Waldorf High School Research Colloquia, 2000-2001

Resource Development
Computers in Education–a handbook for teachers
Being on Earth–a book for scientists and teachers
Online Waldorf Library–a website of resources for Waldorf education
Themes in Waldorf Education–compilation of Rudolf Steiner's indications on teaching language arts and mathematics

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Subscriptions for groups of five or more are available at a discount of $5 per subscription for each person in the group.

Groups, schools, or institutes that wish to become Supporting Members of the Research Institute are entitled to 20 copies of each issue of the *Research Bulletin*. Supporting memberships are $200 per year.

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