Schools of the Future:

Meeting the Needs of the Children in the New Millennium

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A recent leadership council at the Harvard Graduate School of Education addressed "leading and managing the independent school of the future." In an opening keynote address, Patrick Bassett, president of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), commented on the emerging 21st century curriculum compiled by NAIS and a Harvard education research group. He discussed the need for an ethical grounding in our schools. Parents need to shift, for instance, from wanting their children to be happy to wanting them to be good and virtuous.

We live in a hedonistic generation, according to Bassett. The council underscored the importance of a meaningful educational experience and the need for a focus on creativity, empathy, and emotional intelligence. In the next generation we will see use of the right brain rising. Interestingly, it was noted, research shows a correlation of only 4–10% between IQ and professional success.

Drawing upon Daniel Pink's new book *A Whole New Mind*, Bassett went on to discuss six aptitudes that students will need in the 21st century. In order to succeed in the world, our children are going to need to be creators and empathizers. As the saying goes, "the MFA is the new MBA." UCLA's art school, for example, is currently more selective than the Harvard Business School. Independent schools will need to focus on developing imagination and "EQ" or emotional intelligence, something Waldorf schools inherently honor and develop.

Instead of the traditional SAT exam as an entrance metric, a new approach—colloquially called the "anti-SAT"—offers a more qualitative approach to assessment. For example, students are asked to write a sentence based on a title provided (for example, "The Octopus' Sneakers") or they may be asked to suggest a solution to a social problem ("How would you convince your friends to help you move your furniture?"). Students may be told to use Lego blocks to solve a robotics assignment—when I mentioned this to my son as he constructed his Lego airplane, he grinned and asked if they provided the engine and gears—or given a *New Yorker* cartoon and told to supply a caption. Research shows that these qualitative and creative forms of entrance assessments are twice as effective as the traditional SAT in predicting success in college. These university admissions tests are beginning to catch up with essential elements of Waldorf education.

Pink's six aptitudes, a reflection of the changing needs of schools in the next generation, are these:

- Design
- Story
- Empathy
- Play
- Symphony
- Meaning

The first aptitude, design, helps learners transcend the practical to approach the beautiful. Second, the art of story represents a central capacity for leaders in all fields of study. Public speaking skills are a primary skill for learners today. The art of leadership relies on storytelling. Children no longer need to focus on the acquisition of information; rather they need to learn how to think. Gestalt thinking, holistic thinking, systems thinking, and inventiveness constitute the thinking modalities of the future. Third, in the technological age, empathy is becoming a valued asset. Computers cannot replace empathy and emotional intelligence.

Fourth, Pink underscores the value of children's play as a way of fostering creativity, open mindedness, and innovation. Play is a sort of "peak performance" which promotes "flow" and confidence. Fifth, a learner's ability to think symphonically—that is, to think across disciplines, integrate an array of information, and synthesize different thinking styles—will define the successful student and worker. Finally, Pink's sixth aptitude is finding a way to address meaning and spirituality. Students need to see life as a journey. They need to learn how to ask moral and spiritual questions. In his review of Pink's aptitudes, Bassett characterized the adolescent search for meaning as being essentially religious. In this context, hearing moral and spiritual stories at a young age becomes increasingly important.

Following his presentation, in conversation, Bassett commented, "This is the century for Waldorf education." Given trends in education and the needs of children, it is clear that Waldorf education will continue to provide a beacon for our children. Beauty, storytelling, empathy, play, integrated learning, and meaning are pillars of Waldorf education. They are aptitudes and capacities that Waldorf school teachers embody in their lessons and encourage in their students each day.

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