

Teaching Sensible Science

Michael D'Aleo



The second week of the most recent cycle of Teaching Sensible Science began under unusual conditions. At 7 PM in Sacramento, California, on Wednesday, February 20th, 2008, a lunar eclipse was taking place as we resumed the work begun in the October 2007 session. The phenomena of the lunar eclipse, its timing early in the evening, and our location at Rudolf Steiner College created conditions whereby it was possible to observe the image of the eclipse both by looking upwards directly into the sky and also by looking down at the surface of a still pond. While we spent a large portion of time observing the eclipse under these different conditions, on the following morning we began to discuss these observations and to penetrate not only the conditions under which an eclipse occurs, but also the similarities and subtle differences seen by comparing the image in the sky with the one in the pond. Each observation, no matter how coarse or subtle, helps to build a picture of not simply a single “answer” but a multiplicity of relationships that can be summed up, even if not fully communicated, in the simple concept of eclipse or reflection.

The theme of reflection constitutes a key element in the physics curriculum of the seventh grade. Reflected images were one of a number of the central phenomena we experienced and made more conscious through keen observation, discussion, and conceptual development. For example, we observed that often the images seen when looking into a reflecting surface are very similar to those seen in the tangible world we experience daily. However, upon closer investigation we find that not only the images of objects are seen in the reflecting space but images of shadows as well. Is the image of a shadow any different from an image of an object? Is a shadow visible without seeing “it” on an object? Do we really see a shadow, or is this a concept used to convey that one part of an image is dark and another part is brighter? While at first these questions may

appear to be semantic, over the course of the week, even the most solid object, matter itself, was discovered to be more than just simply the given “stuff” of the universe. Most interesting is the fact that when we really take the time and care to investigate phenomena fully, both observationally and conceptually, our experience of the world becomes more intense, more acute, and we ourselves become an integral part of the experience. We also find that the phenomena and new technologies of modern science and engineering also take on a new relevance when investigated more thoroughly. They begin to appear as partial expressions of a new understanding of the world that is slowly bringing consciousness to those who take the time to pay attention.

The flow of the day in the Teaching Sensible Science course is central to helping teachers experience, understand, and embody the experience and concepts that they will later present to the students. The morning sessions, led by Michael D'Aleo, investigate the nature of our experience through observational exercises, discussions, and presentations. These are aimed at helping each teacher consciously awaken to his/her own inner activities of perception and conceptualization. It isn't new thoughts that are being developed but the activity of thinking that is being encouraged.

The morning sessions are preceded and followed by eurythmy guided by Barbara Richardson. Eurythmy provides an excellent complement to the morning sessions by allowing us to move our physical bodies with much of the same lively consciousness and with similar intentions as those cultivated through the activity of thinking.

After a long break for lunch, the afternoon is devoted fully to developing the experiments, demonstrations, discussions, and activities that are appropriate for the grade students in a Waldorf school. These sessions, led by Lylli Anthon and Gary Banks, are designed to find the age-appropriate means so that the students lay



the foundation for their own experience of the rich phenomena of the world.

The third and final session for the Rudolf Steiner College cycle of Teaching Sensible Science was completed in June of 2008. The next cycle of Teaching Sensible Science is scheduled to begin in February 2009 (with subsequent sessions in June and October of the same year) in Saratoga Springs, NY. Teachers interested in signing up for

the course or seeking further information should contact Michael D'Aleo by email at

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or by phone at

(518) 587-0457.

Report on the Online Waldorf Library

Marianne Alsop

The Online Waldorf Library continues to help facilitate research and answer questions on a wide variety of topics. In recent months these have included:

- Requests for data on Waldorf school graduates in Europe, including the U.K.;
- Requests for statistical information on the effectiveness of foreign language teaching in elementary schools;
- Middle school and high school sports programs;
- Computer use in the middle school;
- Middle school science adapted to charter school use;
- Teaching children with autism and ADD and including them in Waldorf classes;
- Mentoring in early childhood settings;
- School readiness;
- Forming care groups;
- School administration and finances; and
- Parent education.

Also, news that the Steiner Schools Fellowship will sponsor “academy” schools in the U.K., state-sponsored schools based on the Steiner Schools curriculum, has brought several inquiries for information.

Teachers and parents of children in Waldorf schools in New Zealand, Australia, the U.K., Hungary, Mexico, and North America have sought permission to use OWL articles in their respective

homeschools and classrooms. It is wonderful to know that our articles are useful and that, when necessary, they are translated into other languages. There are now more than 350 articles in the OWL database and more are added every week. Articles are easily found by going to the “Focus Search” page and clicking on “article” and the subject of interest.

The number of books in our search database is now well over 400 and we add new titles regularly. Books can be found through the “Focus Search” page by clicking on “book” and the subject of interest. The site visitor will also find information on purchasing these books.

Two more editions of *Pacific Journal* and the *Waldorf Journal Project* are now available for viewing, in addition to past issues of *Gateways* and the *Research Bulletin. Living Education*, published by Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship in the U.K., is available in an online edition through a link on the “Journals” page. The most recent issue of the *Waldorf Science Newsletter*, with all past issues, is also available.

Have a look at OWL! Let us know if there is something you are looking for or a question for which we can help you find an answer.

The Online Waldorf Library (OWL) may be accessed at

www.waldorflibrary.org.