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# Da, Valdorvskii!

## Finding an Educational Approach for Children with Disabilities

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Waldorf education came to the Soviet Union in 1991, when the first kindergarten to employ Steiner methodologies opened in Moscow.[1] Slowly, and largely through the work of individual educators dedicated to the cause, the concept of Waldorf education has spread throughout Russia, and a small but growing number of Waldorf institutions has been established in cities and towns across the country. This proliferation has, in part, been possible thanks to the efforts of international volunteer organizations, like the Germany-based Friends of Waldorf Education.[2] In Russia, Waldorf schools are sometimes public but often private, and they are largely sustained on the energies of parents and educators who believe strongly in a system of free education and who go to great lengths to preserve these opportunities for their children.

When I began my research in Russia as an anthropology student in 2005, I did not intend to study Waldorf education. Instead, as an advocate for and ally of peers with disabilities at home, and as a longtime student of the Russian language, I set out to learn about the notion of disability in Russia, and about what—if any—strategies and movements were unfolding in the sphere of disability rights. By chance and circumstance, I visited the small village of Petrushka,[3] a few hundred miles north of Mongolia and two hours from the nearest city in the Russian Republic of Buryatia. There, I spent several weeks as a researcher and participant observer at a tiny local school for children with disabilities, whose educators found their inspiration in the Waldorf school approach. Thus, I came to this topic not as a practitioner or scholar of Waldorf school methods, but as an anthropologist interested in the ways that individuals with disabilities and their advocates were making sense of the uniquely deconstructed social realm in the former Soviet Union, and working to overcome both the social stigma of disability and the real world barriers to living with a disability or caring for a disabled person.

> Waldorf schools' vision implies maximal development of individual talents of every given child.

Here, I describe the problems that a group of women, mothers of children with disabilities, faced, and the answers and support that they found in Waldorf educational philosophies. With the toolbox of Rudolf Steiner's indications at hand, the women established a community-operated school, Chrysalis, to serve young people with special needs in the village of Petrushka.

The Chrysalis School is a small institution serving twenty to twenty five students between kindergarten and high school age, all of whom have special needs. The students represent a broad range of abilities and diagnoses, ranging from cerebral palsy and Down syndrome to unspecified cognitive delays. The school is supported in part by government funds and in large part by the labor and sacrifice of five core staff members, who are themselves, with one exception, parents of children who attend the school. The Director of the School, whom I call Sophia, is herself one of these parents. The school occupies a small, one-story, five-room building nestled among apartments and shops in the 350-person village of Petrushka.

### A Day at the Chrysalis School

The Chrysalis School carries out an educational curriculum that is highly intuitive and based on Waldorf methodologies. Teachers at the school are always eager to learn more and to incorporate aspects of Waldorf techniques; however, language, geography, and financial resources have limited their access to information and formal training.

Perhaps most critically, the educators at the school embrace an emphasis on multiple and var-

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ied types of intelligences. They identify intellect, *myshlenie*, located in the head, feeling, *chuvstvo*, located in the torso, and will, *volya*, located in the limbs, as modes of intelligence to be developed in each child. In keeping with a Waldorf school curriculum, each part of the day at the school is specially targeted to work with one of these types of learning.

During the first half of the day, the children activate their thinking and reasoning. In the afternoon, the students—the teachers refer to their pupils as "our children"—do theater, painting, and music, all of which are considered to be related to feelings and expression of emotions. They also practice basket weaving, beading, clay- and wool- and wood-working, all of which focus on the hands, and the children's capability to use their energy productively.

All of the toys in the school are handmade. Sophia recalls that, at first, they had many toys made from brightly colored plastics (Chinese black market goods are the most readily available merchandise in Ulan Ude, and, as a result, in Petrushka). When a Waldorf educator from Irkutsk visited, she was adamant that they be replaced with natural, handmade, creativity-inspiring toys. Later, on a tour of the school during my visit, Sophia explained to me that she had eagerly implemented this advice, and investigated the underlying philosophy.

The teachers at the Chrysalis School employ these and other aspects of Waldorf philosophy that they have amassed from distant sources to fit their needs.

With the toolbox of Rudolf Steiner's indications at hand, the women established a community-operated school, Chrysalis, to serve young people with special needs in the village of Petrushka.

## The Locale

Petrushka is a tiny village along the Trans-Siberian railroad, somewhere north of Mongolia, just east of Lake Baikal (that long sliver of water a blip on the globe, halfway between the Baltic Sea and the Pacific Ocean). Six hours by train from the nearest major airport in Irkutsk, and an hour and a half by train from the regional capital of Ulan Ude, Petrushka is little more than a dwindling settlement.

Once a factory town established during the mid-20th century as the Soviet Union pushed to settle and develop its Eastern Territories, the people of Petrushka were supported by government-run steel and concrete factories that manufactured building supplies and railroad parts to be moved by train to outposts eastward. Like the factories, everything in the town—from the apartments people lived in to the grocery stores, schools, and land—was state property, and all business was administered from above.

Then, in the 1980s, the Soviet experiment began to fall apart. Food shipments to the village grew increasingly insufficient, environmental hazards (from mining, oil transport, and nuclear energy endeavors) increased, there wasn't enough housing, and, bit by bit, paychecks from a floundering central government became fewer and more sporadic.[4]

Chaos descended on the town; with no money and no supplies, the already limited possibilities available to the residents grew even slimmer. Because goods and farm products were distributed via centralized channels, the work performed had no market value, and the products had no consumer base. Life came to a stop during these years. The factory paid its workers, if it paid them at all, in flour; whole families survived on the potatoes they could grow; the collective farms which raised pigs and cattle were without the infrastructure needed for continued production. Many residents turned to alcohol. Today, women of the village will state matter-of-factly that during that period, many men, faced with insurmountable odds, committed suicide or simply abandoned their wives, children, and aging parents.

Society deteriorated to the extent that, when I arrived in the village in 2005, numerous buildings on the outskirts had been abandoned and fallen into disrepair, running water was considered a luxury, and hot water had ceased to flow through the pipes in the apartment buildings. Petrushka was a lesson in survival—of what people do when they have nowhere else to go.

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At the time of my fieldwork the town had little that hadn't existed in the 1980s: three small stores that sold groceries, one with practical homegoods and clothing; a bread factory; a chicken farm; the railroad repair dispatch; one public school housing grades one through twelve; a pharmacy; a post office; a three-room medical clinic; and not much else.

The Chrysalis School itself is located in a building that was once a music school. When that project was abandoned, the building became property of the state. The Chrysalis School staff petitioned the local government and gained permission to restore and use the building in 2001.

For mothers of children with disabilities in this town, a number of challenges emerged that left them with few options; this changed when they learned of and began to implement Waldorf methods. While the mothers themselves had always felt that their children were beautiful, valuable individuals, authority figures and cultural mores all pointed to the contrary. In stories that the mothers working at the Chrysalis School told me, several specific barriers to inclusion arose repeatedly.

First, they were faced with the economic and social challenges of *perestroika* and the early post-Soviet period, described above.[5] Second, the primary medical response to the birth of a child with a disability and the inadequate resources and insulting attitudes of many of the doctors, were frustrating, to say the least. Third, they faced the difficulties of educating a child with disabilities in Russia. These were, chiefly, limited or inadequate special education options, and the economically critical conflict between childcare and work that a parent faced when her child could not attend school.

All of these issues worked together to render disability a comprehensive crisis in the lives of these families. Sofia, the director of the school, told me many stories of the difficulties she encountered raising her son, Vova, who was born developmentally delayed. He was often ill as an infant and was eventually diagnosed with DTsP.[6] Thus, Sofia recalled feeling immense relief and a sense of revelation when, in attending a seminar on the principles of Steiner education, she heard, for the first time, a stranger say that a child like her son could be educated and could become a contributing member of a community. Vova is now a healthy and rambunctious, if still highly vulnerable, young adult.

## Medicalization and Stigma in Infancy and Early Childhood

The care in post-Soviet hospitals, for any individual, is so sparse that family members are expected to care for the ill, preparing their meals and washing their bed linens; the bulk of personal care and attendance, in the West assumed by nursing staff, is, in the Russian Federation, borne by the family. Sophia's recollections of her son's early childhood frequently included the phrase, "One time, we were lying in the hospital…" and went on to detail a particularly harsh episode of sickness, or an altercation that Sophia had had with a nurse or doctor. Russians regularly use the idiomatic expression of literally lying in the hospital, but Sophia's use of the plural ("we were lying") is unusual, and indicative of the degree to which she shared in her son's experience of hospitalization.

Sophia recalled a particularly soul-crushing experience from this period. She had requested a referral from a doctor for Vova to visit a physical therapy center, but the doctor's response was, "Your son is too disabled. Why should the state spend money on a child that will never be rehabilitated?" Embedded in this statement is a notion of rehabilitation that implies the goal of total normalization of difference or impairment. The goal of medical and educational treatment as provided by the state is to restore individuals to a level of social normalcy and functionality that renders them indistinguishable from the larger population; such a model leaves no room for difference, or for social integration of individuals with special needs. It also indicates that for a mother of a child like Vova, giving up the child to state care is the only course of action supported by the professionals around her. Raising a child with special needs as part of her family and community was simply not an option offered to Sophia.

The horrid conditions in many Russian children's homes (where both special needs children and orphans are housed) are well documented. Sophia later wrote, "How could I possibly have put my child into a home for invalids, knowing what went on there? Even now they are not sweet

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to the children there. It is like sentencing a child to a long, slow death." But, in seeking to raise Vova in the community, Sophia found herself with sparse resources and little guidance.

The Russian sociologist Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova has conducted research with mothers of disabled children in the city of Saratov, and writes, "Sources of help for families raising children with disabilities that are well established in the West—such as books and other reading materials about raising a child with a disability, parent support groups, and education for parents—are absent in Russian women's narratives."[7] Her research reinforces the pervasiveness of stories like Sophia's in Russia today.

## Barriers to Education for Young Children

Sophia's story began in the early 1980s, when she learned that her newborn son was "sick." By the age of one, Vova had been diagnosed with DTsP. During the difficult years of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Sophia was lucky to be employed as an assistant teacher in the local preschool; likewise, her husband was lucky to be employed in the factory, which continued to function in bankruptcy, unlike the collective farms surrounding the settlement.

By the time Vova was seven, Sophia's husband had died, leaving her a single parent struggling to provide for her two children. When she worked at the local preschool, she brought her children to work with her. She was constantly negotiating daily problems. When Vova was still unable to walk steadily at the age of six, she found him a tricycle, which became his self-propelled wheelchair. When Vova was denied entry into the first grade at the local school, which had no special education facilities, she noted a policy clause that allowed Vova to stay at the preschool until the age of nine.

Most important, the necessity of earning income often came second to caring for children. Her position at the preschool was as an aide, rather than as a head teacher, and the school often could not pay her. So, for years at a time, Sophia lived off meager state benefits and the kindness of neighbors in order to stay at home with Vova. She was often hungry, and she struggled to feed her two children.

Sophia told me, "There is not yet any developed system of special education in public schools in Russia." After a moment, she added, "Well, maybe somewhere, but not here." Generally, an attitude persists that there is no space for children with special needs in an already under-funded public school system. Teachers are not trained or expected to include children with special needs in their classes. Some children may attend classes with their peers and receive a certificate in place of the regular diploma. Two instances of this approach in Petrushka known to me both yielded poor results. Although the children sat in classes beside their peers, they were largely ignored by already overwhelmed teachers and learned little.

The parent-educators at the Chrysalis School all had stories of failed educational attempts. Like Sophia, Tanya, whose daughter has learning disabilities and speaks little, addressed her lack of childcare by working in a kindergarten herself. After kindergarten, at age seven, the children were eligible to apply to a state-run specialized boarding school, called an *internat*. By all reports this institution was as terrible as the name sounds. One mother, Maria, told me that while her daughter Anya was living at the *internat*, during her visits home she would hide bits of bread under her mattress. When, after nine months in the *internat*, Anya had forgotten the alphabet, which she had previously known, Maria quit her job and brought her daughter home again. "No, I don't like to be a stay-at-home mom," she told me, "but there weren't really any other options." This sentiment was a common refrain among the mothers whom I interviewed.

## Particular Challenges

Like any other identity, disability is very much a reflection of the cultural values of the broader society. Thus, while there are many similarities between the stigma and hurdles that people with disabilities and their caretakers face in Russia and the United States, there are also many differences. Two key issues are these: 1) The (lack of) development of a tradition of civil rights legislation, and 2) The (lack of) development of a broad-based sense of the desirability of diversity.

In the United States, a tradition of civil rights legislation in answer to popular movements has been developed through struggles such as those for racial equality, gender equality, same-sex mar-

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riage equality, and, with the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1992, disability rights. There is no equivalent civil legal tradition in Russia, and the Constitution of the Russian Federation is a recent document with little history of being upheld in court; likewise, the judicial system itself is sorely undeveloped, and the very professions of lawyer and judge continue to be held in low esteem in Russian society. The Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees equal education for all. With no system of special education, already under-resourced schools, and slimly paid teachers, however, few schools and parents have even been made aware of this right. Likewise, with no history of education-related legislation, it will be a slow process to bring this standard into practice. (One group that has been fighting for advances in this realm is the Mental Disability Advocacy Center, or MDAC.[8] )

There has also been little success in building a tolerant, inclusive public sector in Russia, whether in regard to racism, sexism, or ablism ("able-ism" discrimination against those disabled in some way). These "isms" remain powerful forces. In the United States much effort has been exerted over the past thirty years to include tolerance lessons in the everyday curricula of schools and to value these rights in hiring decisions and work-place communications, but in many forums of Russian public life, similar efforts have only recently attained even a precarious foothold in the Russian Federation. (This has occurred primarily as international business has taken root in Moscow, implementing Western human resource policies. For example, cosmopolitan values have led journalists and other media professionals to introduce politically correct language.)

This was the first time … that [Sophia] had heard people talking about disability as a fact rather than a curse, the first time that she had found a context in which her son could be valued.

The majority of people with whom I spoke about disability continued to use what, in translation, amounts to outdated and derogatory language, i.e., "invalids," "mental retards," and so forth. In the past years, there has been an observable increase in the use of mindful phrasing (e.g., "people with special needs," in Russian, *lyudi s ogranichyenimi vozmozjnoctyami*) in journalism and general audience publications. While advocates adopt these phrases as they look to international disability rights movements for guidance, they are beginning now to become a part of the broader lexicon.

## The Irkutsk Model

"By the dictates of the culture, in American education, everyone must do better than everyone else. Of course, this is both logically and social structurally impossible," write educational anthropologists Ray McDermott and Hervé Varenne.[9] In Russia, however, that is not the case. Rather, the system has been established to differentiate between talented, high achieving students and those who do not excel. Unlike American schools, which encourage students to pursue numerous fields (i.e., perform in school theater productions, play on the soccer team, study trumpet, and perform academically) at their whim, Russian students are encouraged to pursue one field in which they are deemed to be particularly talented. Most Russian school children receive the equivalent of C and D grades in some subjects, which is not seen as a failure, but simply as an indication that they are not leading their peers in this area. Unfortunately, by extension, those students who are considered to be low achievers are left unassisted, and children with special needs that require additional support are not included in mainstream education at all.

In Russia, as in the United States, a Waldorf approach to education offers a radically different student and parent experience from the public school system. A Russian education journal explained in 2000:

> What is the difference between Rudolf Steiner's and the traditional approach to children's education? First, Waldorf schools' vision implies maximal development of individual talents of every given child. While at a regular school a teacher plays the role of the all-knowing strict

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> master ruling his absolute knowledge into his students' brains, at a Waldorf school a teacher is the wise tutor who helps children find answers to the world around them. A Waldorf school eliminates the distance between the teacher and the scholar. No marks to evaluate the quality of knowledge. Therefore, students are never classified by grade. No "good boys" and "bad boys," no "successes" and "failures"—which are, in fact, stamps that sometimes stick to children for the rest of their days. As the result, children feel more liberated; and they are free to express their emotions.[10]

Unemployed for two years during Vova's childhood, Sophia used this time to invest in her son's development. Although he was not enrolled in school, she insisted that he learn. She set up special tutoring sessions for Vova after-hours with an elementary school teacher. She sat with him for hours until he solved simple arithmetic problems. Gradually, other mothers began to bring their children to Sophia's apartment for "school" in the early afternoon. Sophia recalls sitting for hours with three or four kids, going through the alphabet over and over again.

Eventually, Sophia's commitment to her role as teacher led her to take correspondence courses and attend conferences in the city of Irkutsk. When Vova was about twelve, Sophia attended a conference at which she learned of a school and living community for people with disabilities outside the city of Irkutsk that seemed to answer her unanswered questions. The school, Talisman, which is internationally and privately funded, has adapted a Waldorf approach to the needs of children such as hers.

This was the first time, she told me, that she had heard people talking about disability as a fact rather than a curse, the first time that she had found a context in which her son could be valued. Sophia set out to create such a school in her own town.

The very notion of a place in the community specifically for their children was radically new. The local preschool tolerated and allowed their presence, while the *internat* kept these children separate from the rest of the world and did not nurture the children as individuals. The idea offered a powerful change of perspective and a potentially dramatic improvement in quality of life for children and parents alike. With about five local families on board, and more expressing tentative interested, Sophia set out to find funding for the venture.

## Founding Chrysalis

The settlement of Petrushka has a small local administration. By discussing her plan with the single town social worker (who was chiefly responsible for disbursing social security payments to veterans, the elderly, and the disabled in the town), Sofia began to spread the word. Eventually, her plan gained the ear of another government employee in the regional administration office, an hour's journey from the village. "I helped her out, and she helped me out," Sofia explained to me. "She needed a new program on her list of accomplishments for the year. I needed money." And so, Sofia obtained money enough, with intense frugality, to pay herself, to hire three teachers, and to serve one meal a day to the children. They claimed the small, empty building, renovated the rooms, scavenged for furniture from their own apartments and from friends, and collected toys and other supplies in a similar way.

The teachers at the Chrysalis School employ … aspects of Waldorf philosophy that they have amassed from distant sources to fit their needs.

Though Sophia's vision was of a school, her funding came from an administrative branch not involved in education called the "Department for the Protection of Women and Children." Thus, in the eyes of the state, Chrysalis is considered not a school, but a "Center for Rehabilitation of Disabled Children," with all the links to medical and social services that this title implies.

To Sophia, her peers, and the children, however, the space is patently a school. Despite the implications of its funding, the reality of the distance between the administration and Chrysalis, as well as Sophia's status as Director, allowed the daily workings of Chrysalis to be entirely based on the needs of the partici-

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pants, rather than the dictates of rehabilitation models promulgated by the state.[11] Points of contest do arise around the permitted age of enrolled children (officially children may be six to eighteen years of age). This results in "hiding" overage and underage students in school records and when regional administrators visit. Similar contests may arise regarding the structure of the day and the educational philosophy employed in lessons.

I was awed by the determination of this group of women who looked beyond the possibilities offered to them in order to build, in the Chrysalis School, an exemplary community and learning environment.

At Chrysalis, children may attend the school with permission of Sofia, usually as a result of their mothers requesting that their child be enrolled, although occasionally a relative or a teacher at another school may make this request. Once enrolled in Chrysalis, children may attend as long as they or their family members wish. Some children attend for a summer or a year, while others have never known any other school.

The space has increasingly served as a resource for women who have given birth to children with special needs, as the older women working there take on mentoring roles. Often women with infant or toddler children who have been identified with special needs visit the school, which, despite the limitations of its funding, is very much aligned with the broad mission that drives Sophia and the other educators.

As Chrysalis has become increasingly stable, its funding renewed year after year and its ties with educators and the Waldorf School in Irkutsk strengthened, it has begun to be recognized as an institution in the broader community. Neighbors notice that Chrysalis has brought jobs, and thus increased stability and commercial opportunity to the town, and that the social network that has grown around the school provides an important safety net. One neighbor, the English teacher at the town school, told me, "Sofia has done a lot over there. Not only has she made a place for those kids to go, but she has helped out the mothers a lot—jobs, support." Neighbors also turn to Chrysalis with problems. For instance, they asked Sophia to take on two children, three and four years old, who, neglected by alcoholic parents, were roaming the town hungry and mistrustful of people. After six months at the school, the children appeared healthy and functional; Sophia planned to continue working with them (off the books) indefinitely or until they moved to the town school for first grade.

The Chrysalis School has also begun to bring the language and fundamental concepts of equality and sensitivity concerning disability to the remote region. Local newspaper coverage has identified the strong contribution that the school makes to the lives of its students, against all odds. The articles are a valuable source of publicity for the school and a significant step toward spreading compassion and acceptance of people with disabilities in the region.

## Challenges Today

Despite the growth of Chrysalis since its establishment in 2000, there is still a gap between what the school provides and what the community needs. The limitations of state funding, the problem of a growing number of students older than eighteen, the lack of support for the students' future lives as adults, and the constant negotiations with funders have led Sophia and the others to begin seeking other models.

"This time, we will not use government money," Sofia told me. Instead, the women hope to build a self-sufficient community. They envisage a workshop, farm, craft center that will become a home and place of employment for Chrysalis graduates. In many ways what Sofia and her colleagues seek to build is a Camphill community,[12] an inclusive and self-sufficient collective with its roots in Steiner philosophy. There is already one such community in Russia, Camphill Svetlana,[13] located outside of St. Petersburg, which is officially allied with the international Camphill movement. The Chrysalis collective's plans, however, are based on the model of Talisman,[14] a similar but unaffiliated community outside of Irkutsk. The Chrysalis women plan to grow much of the food that they will consume

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both at the school and at the new center; in addition they plan to sell handicrafts and hope eventually to own a cow and a horse.

The Chrysalis collective will face significant challenges in establishing such a community in Petrushka. For their plan to be realized, they will have to implement a successful entrepreneurial enterprise and garner income through farming and selling handicrafts and baked goods. This is a difficult goal to accomplish considering the level of poverty facing the general community in Petrushka; whether their neighbors will have money to spend and goods to barter remains to be seen. Likewise, they are far from the only ones seeking to supplement their income by selling milk, cheese, baskets, and so forth, a common practice in many post-Soviet communities,[15] and these micro-enterprises often fail to reach sustainable levels.

A further possibility for bolstering the sustainability and supporting the start-up cost of their so-called Butterfly Garden would be to secure funding through an NGO. Chrysalis, however, like many rural grassroots organizations in Russia, has few connections to such resources. With neither Internet access nor English language skills, and no knowledge of grant writing or the workings of non-governmental service organizations, this possibility remains out of reach. They are not alone in this problem. Scholars have noted, "The population at large has little if any idea of the why and how of international assistance for NGOs work. It would be in the interest of both of those giving and those receiving grant money if this situation were tackled."[16] It should be added that the domestic non-profit sphere in Russia has only just begun to develop, even in major cities, and the concept of philanthropy in general is largely absent. At present, plans for the Butterfly Garden will continue without support from non-governmental sponsors.

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When I was last in Petrushka, I saw that a building had been reclaimed on the outskirts of town and was being renovated as a new community center. The building was in horrid disrepair. A former kindergarten building abandoned for lack of children during the darkest days of *perestroika*, it had long sat empty as an ad hoc barn for roaming cows and a gathering place for local drunks. But it was large, had a solid foundation, a sizeable area of adjacent farmable land, and—most important— it didn't belong to anyone else. A team of parents and teachers began scheduling group workdays to clean up the land and to repair the roof, the windows (which had long ago been knocked out and broken at the sills), and the floor (which had fallen through to the foundation). The team began petitioning the regional administration for rights to the building and land. And, as a collective, they planted their first crop of potatoes, which, I am told, they harvested the next fall.

## Conclusion

As a young anthropologist encountering courage in the face of severe poverty, I was awed by the determination of this group of women who looked beyond the possibilities offered to them in order to build, in the Chrysalis School, an exemplary community and learning environment.

The parent-educators' integration of Waldorf methodologies is remarkable on several levels. First, it demonstrates their relentlessness in reaching across geographical and cultural boundaries to find solutions to the challenges they encountered as parents of special needs children. Second, it speaks to the deep resonance of the Steiner philosophy. Finally, it highlights the need for international contribution to local concerns in rural Russia (despite legislation that has severely limited the activity of foreign NGOs within the Russian Federation). Were it not for the efforts of the Friends of Waldorf Education that brought Waldorf-based school communities to Irkutsk, the Chrysalis School might never have come into being.

After my first visit to the school—a brief two days with a delegation of three Waldorf educators from Switzerland and Britain—I found myself on a train, rushing through the Siberian dusk back toward the city of Irkutsk. After a moment of silence reflecting on our visit, my travel compan-

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ions turned to one another. "What do you think?" I remember asking, "Can they do it? Will they be able to build a more permanent community?" On the one hand, it seemed impossible that a group of women with such limited resources could build, with little guidance, a self-sustaining Steiner-based community. But, had we visited ten years earlier, we would have viewed it far beyond their reach to build a functioning school on nothing more than their own sweat, hope, and volition.

During my subsequent stay in the village, for three weeks in May of 2005, the mothers who work in the school gave me their own answer to my question. Nothing in Petrushka is easy; there will always be more work than hours in the day. But there is nothing to do but keep on working. There is nothing else worth fighting for. I am, in turn, overwhelmed by the scope of work that remains to be done, and enormously inspired by their story. Where the Soviet Union failed, these women stand together, moving forward, armed with a powerful guiding philosophy and an iron will.

## Endnotes

1. International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education, "Russia, Ukraine, Kirgistan, http://www.iaswece.org/country_projects/around_the_world/former_soviet_union.aspx.
2. Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners, "Friends of Waldorf Education," http://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/the-friends/.
3. I have used pseudonyms for the names of the town, the school, and individuals, following the precedent of my longer ethnography on this topic, a thesis from which portions of this article emerged [Cassandra S. Hartblay. "An Absolutely Different Life: locating disability, motherhood, and local power in rural Siberia" (Undergraduate honors thesis, Macalester College, 2006), in Digital Commons @ Macalester, http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/anth_honors/1/]. I also presented a paper on this research at the 2006 conference of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Vancouver. Although much material is shared between these various texts, this article is unique in its focus on Waldorf methodologies and in a general, rather than anthropological, orientation.
4. For more on the deterioration of Siberian settlements in the 1980s, see: "*The Bam Zone: Permanent Residents*" The Glasnost Film Festival: Video Four, 1986.
5. For a further discussion of the economies of *perestroika* and early post-Soviet period in Buryatia, see: Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.
6. This diagnosis is often translated into English as "cerebral palsy," but the reality of diagnosis in the Soviet medical system is actually limited by an insufficient range of terminology, and "DTsP" refers to a broad range of diagnoses that includes cerebral palsy. Sofia told me of one doctor, considered the best in the region, yet everyone says, and everyone knows, that he almost always diagnoses DTsP. "Just look at Vova and Lyuba, and then look at Tolya and Sasha," she told me, indicating children with very different symptoms, all of whom have been diagnosed with DTsP.
7. Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova. "'What the Future Will Bring I Do Not Know': Mothering Children with Disabilities in Russia and the Politics of Exclusion," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 2 (1999), 58–86.

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8. Mental Disability Advocacy Center, http://www.mdac.info/.
9. McDermott, Ray and Hervé Varenne. "Culture as Disability," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 323–348, no. 26 (1995), available at http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_cult/culturedisability.html.
10. Anna Vasilyeva. "Waldorf Schools: A New World in Education," *Woman Plus Social-Educational Magazine*, no. 3 (2000), http://www.owl.ru/eng/womplus/2000/valdor.htm.
11. For a discussion of these methodologies see McCagg, William O. and Lewis Siegelbaum, eds. *The Disabled in the Soviet Union: Past and Present, Theory and Practice*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989; and Sutton, Andrew. "Backward Children in the USSR: An Unfamiliar Approach to a Familiar Problem." In Brine, Jenny, Maureen Perrie and Andrew Sutton, eds. *Home School and Leisure in the Soviet Union*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980.
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13. http://www.camphillsvetlana.org.
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15. Crate, Susan A. "The gendered nature of Viliui Sakha post-Soviet adaptation." in *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, ed. Kuehnast, Kathleen and Carol Nechemias. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, pp. 127–145.
16. Rebecca Kay. *Russian Women and Their Organizations: Gender, Discrimination, and Grassroots Organizations*, 1991–1996. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2004, p. 257.

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