

Parent Participation
in the Life of a
Waldorf School

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A free rendering of the article “Von der Elternmitwirkung
an Waldorfschulen,” by Dr. Manfred Leist, January 1980
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FOREWORD

The following article by Manfred Leist is taken from the January 1980 issue of the monthly magazine *Erziehungskunst (Education as an Art)*, which has been published over many years by the Association of Waldorf Schools and related organizations in Germany. Dr. Leist, the author, is co-editor of the magazine together with Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen.

The American reader must bear in mind that the article is written primarily out of the experience of Waldorf schools in Germany or, in any case, in Central Europe. It is true that there, especially, these schools have seen an extraordinary development in recent years, in number and importance. The role of parents in the founding and supporting of Waldorf schools, out of an understanding and realization of their underlying all-human impulse, has been and continues to be a vital factor. We could say that this is true in the English-speaking world also—but in a different way and to a different degree. (See “The Waldorf School Movement in North America” by L. Francis Edmunds, in the 50th anniversary issue of our *American Education as an Art*, Vol. 37, 1978–79, pp. 5–9.) But it is well to make thoughtful allowances for the fact that situations, emphases and perspectives vary as we pass from one country, let alone from one continent, to another.*

For instance, the aspect discussed in parts V and VI of the article, based on insight into the idea of the threefold social order, is likely to be far more unfamiliar to the American Waldorf school parent than to his or her counterpart in Europe. This in itself poses a problem and a challenge. In any case, the need for responsible insight into the aims and principles that animate Waldorf schools is as great here, in America, as

*See again the anniversary issue referred to, page 2: “Waldorf schools, though rooted in the universal humanity of all peoples, are no less sensitive to the distinct needs and tasks and life styles of the particular country in which they exist.”

anywhere else for a parent who wants to participate meaningfully in the life of a Waldorf school.

The translation of the article is a very free one—I should like to call it a “transposition,” or an attempt at a transposition, from one language to the other. The original author must not be held responsible for possibly false notions or overtones created by too free a rendering. To facilitate reading, please note, in the text:

“Waldorf school”: any school based on Rudolf Steiner’s educational impulse

“Waldorf School”: the original Waldorf school founded in Stuttgart in 1919

“He or she,” to refer to a teacher, has been used once, otherwise only “he.” Please attribute this solely to a desire to avoid awkwardness in style.

Parent-teacher association, or PTA: The use of this American term to correspond to the original may be a little arbitrary.

The following lines, quoted from the article (page 14), are worth noting at once: “... [I]t lies in the very nature of the social-spiritual life of a community, that there cannot be and should not be a prescribed pattern to conform to; and that a broad range of freely unfolding modes of action is both legitimate and possible. General ideas, such as those presented in this article, are by way of reports and suggestions only, nothing more.”

Amos Franceschelli
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Parent Participation in the Life of a Waldorf School

I

The problem of the role of parents in the Waldorf schools has been the concern of every supporter of these schools since their founding in 1919. It continues to be a living issue from generation to generation, and from year to year. One could even claim that the problem has taken on increasing importance and challenge with the passage of time after the memorable opening of the first school. Many have offered answers to it, and there is today an extensive literature on it, dating from Rudolf Steiner's pioneer addresses in the original Waldorf School. All these answers are illuminating and helpful. But the onward flowing stream of life and the social conditions which change with it put the questions anew and recast them; above all, they call for new answers suited to the changing times. It is, in fact, a special hallmark of Rudolf Steiner's educational principles and of all that pertains to the life of Rudolf Steiner schools, that the criterion for present decisions cannot lie simply in tradition and even in successful past experience. No. Only answers which grow out of living in and with a situation, out of the real social context in which one finds oneself, often involving difficult and soul-searching struggles—only these answers will be meaningful as a step towards the attainment of the spirit-rooted human community and of the better future at which we aim.

Therefore, it is not amiss, in this magazine, at the beginning of a new decade, to discuss again the problem of the role of parents in our schools. Or to write about it, not in the sense of giving "the answer," but more as a report and summary of actual school experiences in the last years,¹ more in the form of notes and comments, perhaps, on specific aspects of this problem, including at the same time many new questions. But first, as we see the Waldorf School Movement spreading mightily

while the times grow more difficult all around us,² let us state a primary conviction. Namely, the conviction that this educational movement will prove itself and develop fruitfully only if all who are involved in the Waldorf schools are able to work together more fully, and with greater mutual understanding, than has actually been achieved with all sincere effort so far; only if parents, teachers and (older) students alike are able to combat the inertia of circumstance and the inertia of soul that threaten us at every moment, and feel themselves true champions of a free life of spirit which calls upon us to practice it and stand up for it and be counted.

II

It is the parents' duty and the parents' right to educate their children. This is a matter of course, reflecting the natural situation in which destiny relates parents and children, and we find it explicitly acknowledged in the laws of the land.³ It is clear, then, that the task of educating devolves to begin with upon the parents. But soon help must come to them in the performance of this task, for, in general, parents could not continue to educate their children beyond the stage of early childhood for many reasons (daily work commitment, lack of proper training, etc.). For this reason society has created *the school* as that institution which makes it possible to put into effect the child's right to be educated.

We shall not discuss here the question of compulsory schooling, or whether and to what extent the state should play a legislative and supervisory role in this regard. It is worth noting, however, that in some countries, countries of a fundamentally democratic character (e.g., Holland), the law does not prescribe compulsory *schooling*, but only compulsory *education* as the parents' responsibility towards their children. That is, parents are not forced to send their children to school at a certain age if they can show that the children are receiving adequate education either through the parents themselves or privately, as it were, through others (e.g., a home tutor). In any case—whether the law prescribes school attendance or leaves parents free to choose alternative modes of education—schooling of some sort will be a major factor in the life of most children today. This leads not only to the question of the

relation between children of various ages and their teachers (a question this article will not discuss), but also to that of the relation between parents and teachers. It is clear that parents cannot turn over their children to be educated by a teacher if they have no *confidence* or *trust* in that teacher. Likewise, a teacher can undertake to educate a child in a meaningful way only if he or she is the recipient of that trust. This factor of trust, as an essential condition for a child's education in school, takes on more weight, of course, where the law allows parents a free choice of schools.

When a child attends a public school, say, that is, one established and administered by state law, the role of trust is often levelled down or veiled. Actually, there, too, the relation between parents and teachers should be the same, and it is that under favorable circumstances. But often enough the matter is given little thought, or else the parents simply and blindly put their trust in the state to find the right teacher for their children. Besides, in such a case the teachers are frequently more concerned in maintaining the trust of the authorities above them than that of parents, who are likely to be little known to them. However, where parents decide to take advantage of their freedom of choice in the schooling of their children, the need for independent schools and their role comes to the fore. And it is here above all that the fundamental relation between parents and teachers—the relation of trust offered and trust received—stands out in its essential character.

And so, from the very beginning, the question of trust between parents and teachers was a central, inseparable element in the life of the Waldorf School. Once the process of education is recognized as belonging essentially to the realm of the life of spirit⁴ (as one of the three realms in Rudolf Steiner's conception of the threefold social order), we see quite clearly that it is all-important for the educator to activate and bring to bear his creative faculties as teacher for his task. For only in this way may he hope for an effective response on the part of the child, that is, for the creative unfolding of the child's own talents. Waldorf pedagogy calls itself an "art of education," and justifiably so; at least it seeks, as well as one may, to practice a primary artistic method in all teaching. If the parents acknowledge the teacher, together with the teacher's task of freely unfolding and applying the creative powers rooted in his

individuality, it follows at once that encroachment from the outside upon the teaching process in the classroom is out of the question. Just so that artist who receives a commission from a patron can do his best only when he works out of his own powers and insights—within the context of the commission, of course. Which means, in brief, that basically the patron must have trust in the artist.

It is true, then, and objectively evident, that trust as described above plays a decisive role in the working of a school. But this cannot be the last word as far as the relationship between parents and teachers is concerned. A school is more than a relation of confidence between parents and teachers—with one party offering trust and the other receiving it—however important and indispensable this aspect may be. If we seek to describe the total life of a school, of a free school, taking experience into account, we quickly discover to begin with that whatever happens in the classroom, however central, is not the whole school. Even when we enlarge our view to include the faculty as a whole and its constitutional role, that is, if we include the various forms of self-administration without principal in a faculty-run school, we are still far from having a complete idea of what the school is.

We must, in fact, seek to see the school as a larger community, to see the school community as a whole. This includes the parents. And a little thought will lead us to recognize that the parents' contribution to the school cannot be restricted to the fact that at some point they wanted this school or chose it for their children, and then let it take care of itself, as it were, in the sunshine of their trust—demonstrating further the continuing, warming presence of this sunshine from outside by the regular payment of tuition fees or perhaps by an appreciable contribution to the building fund. No, we can see that there is more involved than this for parents who opt for an independent school.

In the realm of the life of spirit, characterized by freedom and by a responsible maturity intellectually and legally speaking, the adult individual looks for initiatives and meaningful opportunities to act. To restrict the role of parents to passive outside support, as it were, would not correspond to this freedom and maturity. It is true that trust and financial support, rightly understood, are anything but a matter of

mere passive allegiance. Confidence in the school, as described here, means much more than just personal sympathy or a fellow-feeling based perhaps on a common world outlook—it actually demands a constant effort at inner clarifying insight quite the opposite of passive acceptance. Nevertheless, we want to explore here in what cases and in what areas parents can participate in the life of the school in other, significant ways besides those described.

III

There are many ways of looking at the idea of a school, and two of them are central and, at first blush, contradictory. One of these two ways is to see the school as a joint undertaking initiated and carried by a larger group of people. In this case we are dealing with an all-embracing idea of school which we could also call a “school community.” Here the common commitment of parents and teachers would have to be emphasized. Both parties want the school and both parties are there to work resolutely for it within the limits of their capacities. Considering this common resolve, and the existence of the school as a common endeavor, it would follow that, in principle, all have an equal right to participate in the responsible functioning of the school, each in a different way, of course, depending on personal and objective factors. This, again, would mean the right of all to participate (say, through representatives) in whatever meetings and decisions are necessary.

The situation is different if we look at the school in the second way, namely, in its more specific function as the scene where teaching itself takes place. Here we find the teacher carrying out his work within the context of a well-defined task. The vocation of teaching has its own inherent laws and forms which must be preserved and respected if good is to come of it. After all, the output we ask of a school—in contrast, say, to a bicycle factory—is precisely the act of teaching and the effective success we hope will come of it.

This means that there is an area here where the teacher and the teacher alone (or the body of teachers as a whole, the faculty) will be responsible for his actions. The fewer the regulations and standards imposed from

the outside, the greater the possibility of an effective educational output. This requires, then, an unintruded space for freedom of action, that is, in practical terms, of self-determination and self-administration. This means, further, that parents cannot intervene to tell teachers what and how to teach, just as little as the state, or some other authority not rooted in the life of the school, has the right to do so. And just as, conversely, it is not for the teacher to impose procedures in matters of home education upon the parents, apart from suggestions and advice.

It is not only educational practices in general that belong to the teacher's realm of self-administration; there are also matters here with considerable social repercussions: the admission and rejection of children, and the hiring and firing of teachers. At once we face certain questions. Imagine a teacher who refuses for whatever reasons (say, good ones) to accept more pupils in his class than a certain number that is appreciably lower than the usual class size in a Waldorf school.⁵ Or think of the opposite case, also conceivable, where a teacher allows the size of his class to increase abnormally by admitting more and more children, some of them perhaps quite difficult to manage. What next? It is up to the council of teachers, that is, to the faculty, to judge these situations. There is no theoretical way of deciding how the problem will be solved; it will depend on the written or unwritten "laws and principles" inherent in the makeup of a (particular) faculty. Of course, the teacher, with all due respect for his individual freedom, cannot just act singly in arbitrary fashion; there are matters in a school which require objective (that is, supra-personal) judgment, for which say—in the hypothetical cases under discussion—an admissions committee might be responsible. Finally, our schools have the so-called "internal" faculty meetings, or, better, "business" meetings (as the effective administrative arm) whose function it is to make binding decisions.

The difficulty of reaching decisions within a context of self-administration by the faculty is obvious. There are no headmaster directives, and there is no convenient alternative by means of a majority ruling. By a joint weighing and balancing of all factors at a meeting, a right way has to be found to reach unanimous decisions. Clearly, this presupposes the capacity of renouncing at proper times an insistence

upon one's own personal wishes and convictions. It calls for a practicing of "productive resignation."

And what of the voice of the parents in all this? Given a faculty decision about a child, could the parents of that child appeal to some authority within the school that might then call for a reversal of that decision? Or that might "force" a decision by the faculty in a case where the faculty has persistently avoided intervening, that is, deciding? Should such appeals be directed to the central school committee, say, or to some other ad hoc organ of school life? The answer to the question, as I see it, is clearly no. The faculty should not be subject, in such cases, to alien pressure. This follows clearly from an understanding of the free life of spirit. At the same time, it is far from being a satisfying answer when things really "aren't functioning right"—which happens at times, especially in cases where the faculty takes no action. Here we see where a faculty-run school is prone to dangerous shortcomings, for various reasons, such as a blurred delegation of responsibilities, or lack of courage in confronting difficulties, which is often the result of the desire to avoid clashes with colleagues, or of false deference to friendships, etc.

We see the problem. How shall we resolve it? I see only one direction in which to find the possible answer: When a faculty continually fails to muster whatever strength is needed to act and decide (be it also about or against one of its own members), it thereby invalidates the very idea of a free, faculty-run school. Does this mean that we should have built-in authorities in the school, especially assigned to take over in case of failure to act (as in the hypothetical case we are considering)? This, too, it seems to me, violates the idea of a free, faculty-run school. This type of school is and must be a continuing quest, a bold venture always, it is in a certain sense "a balancing feat on a tightrope, without a safety net"—it is a path and process which entail the possibility of error. Withal this, we have grounds to put our trust in the strength and efficacy of ideas, in the positive influence of reasoned arguments when they are expressed in faculty discussions (which could well include the voice of experienced friends called in for the occasion)—for this again and again will exert a corrective, ordering influence upon the life of the school in times of need.

What is possible, perhaps, is the creation of “ombudsman” or “recourse” committees, which could also include parents (e.g., some or all officers of the PTA), and to whom one could come with questions of special concern. The authority of such a committee, however, would and should extend no further than to meet with the faculty with a view of bringing about a review of decisions that remain, after all, the faculty’s responsibility.

Still, in any school community, “life” will find ways to act as needed even without formal channels and committees. Someone troubled by a real problem, or who learns of one in connection with the school, will not hesitate in the end to bring it to the attention of the proper quarters (member or members of the faculty). When this happens, the very spirit of a Waldorf school should preclude pedantry and petty insistence on formalities and spheres of action. What it does call for is the courage to speak out, to stand up in public—and to accept correction if necessary. What is further needed, on the other side, is openness of mind and heart, flexibility in seeing many sides of the question, and the power to overcome pride and touchiness.

A situation which involves the expulsion of a child from school is difficult. One should resort to this only in very special, exceptional cases. The problem would really require a thorough, pedagogical analysis. For our purpose we shall limit ourselves to one aspect only. Quite apart from the careful observance of legal issues (involved in the cancellation of contract between school and parents), a faculty is well-advised to have been in touch with parent representatives or PTA officers before the final decision. Nor should the school refuse to benefit from the advice of friends of experience and trust; especially since, in the case of a follow-up in court (should the parents resort to a lawsuit), the faculty chairman or other authorized faculty member would have to function as legal representative of the school.

Similar considerations hold for the hiring and firing of teachers. Here, too, there is no question of limiting the fundamental right to self-determination by the teachers (now taken as a body). But again it is highly recommended, in cases of special importance, that the school should not fail to include the thoughts of experienced friends from

among the parent body. Many a school would have saved itself much time and trouble if it had obtained such advice before a final decision. But whether to go so far as to prescribe consultations of this kind in the bylaws of the constitution of the PTA, in the school statutes, or in the procedural rules of a personnel committee, must be left to the decision of each particular school community in its concrete reality, out of its own individual needs.

There are other questions, to be sure, of a more general nature, questions of pedagogical import on the one hand, while on the other hand they affect the interests of the whole school community and hence, in particular, of the parent body. This might include more procedural matters, such as, when shall the school day begin? (which may touch on traffic problems and other social conditions). Or it could involve more directly pedagogical matters, such as the introduction of Russian, say, instead of French. We see at once that parent rights are involved. For—think of the teaching of foreign languages in particular—the parent chose the school originally as it presented itself, with the particular curriculum it offered. And if new developments are introduced, if certain kinds of changes are made, the parents should be drawn into the process. It should be a matter of course here not to present the parents simply with a *fait accompli*. The only way to come to a binding decision in such cases, I would certainly say, is by deliberative agreement of the respective parties involved, which would include faculty and PTA officers, perhaps also a special parent committee, or even a general meeting of all members.

There is no reason to fear that the parents will not give a full and positive hearing to the serious, well-founded wishes and proposals of a school faculty—provided the issue is presented early enough at a public meeting. Besides, experience with community life in general warrants the following conclusion: By far the greater number of difficulties that arise in a social context are due to a lack of communication early enough and clear enough, and to the fact that all those affected were not given enough opportunity to come to terms with the issue in all its aspects. This means that a school community should really plan together, and well ahead of time, in preparation for dealing with eventual problems.

It is also true that most Waldorf schools have developed in the direction of allowing more room for the working together of all concerned,⁶ at least in principle. A one-sided dualism—here is the faculty (representing the life of spirit) and there are the parents and friends of the school (responsible for the sphere of rights and of economics)—is no longer dominant. In many places there are regular combined meetings, perhaps every four or eight weeks, of faculty and PTA officers together. One could also imagine trusted honorary members of the board of PTA officers, or active chairmen of the parent group, taking part in certain faculty meetings (or at some point in the meetings). In fact, this is practiced today in various places and in various ways. One can well agree with this—without drawing universally valid generalizations from it. It is well to bear in mind, as already said before, that each and every existing school community must set up a concrete mode of procedure out of its own, special, individual needs and context. In the end, these procedures may well show appreciable differences from one another. But then, it lies in the very nature of the social-spiritual life of a community, that there cannot be and should not be a prescribed pattern to conform to; and that a broad range of freely unfolding modes of action is both legitimate and possible. General ideas, such as those presented in this article, are by way of reports and suggestions only, nothing more.

Consider another situation, where a child is being thoroughly discussed in the presence of the school doctor. This situation, too, demands a careful safeguarding from outside interference. It is an intimate affair, and only those should really be admitted to the discussion who are personally pedagogically involved with the child (in a narrower and in a wide sense). Further, matters pertaining to the use of certain textual material (thoughts, quotations, verses, etc.) available to the Waldorf school teacher as an aid for his practical and inner development as a teacher, is another example where a safeguard is needed from indiscriminate sharing. There is a need for a protected area, as it were, where teachers directly involved in the educational process can work together with that material.

Once we bear this in mind, and make provisions to program a teachers' meeting accordingly (excluding, that is, certain more intimate

agenda items for a time), there is little reason not to allow meetings at which teachers and non-teachers work together on matters of common concern. Especially if the non-teachers who are present are not there simply as “observers,” but as individuals who are co-responsible for the school out of a real life connection with its aims and the aims of the parent-teacher association; and who feel the need of closer association with the teachers and what they are doing in order to achieve a better understanding and the better to work for those aims. At the same time, every participant in a faculty or committee meeting should carefully take thought in himself as to whether he is really qualified to express his views on a particular issue and to keep wisely quiet, as the case may be, in the making of certain decisions.

IV

Advisory parent committees (called by various other names) have proved workable and valuable in all Waldorf schools.⁷ Newly-founded schools are well-advised not to wait too long before setting up such committees. It is sounder policy and more helpful to the school if the requisite organ for advisory parent participation comes about at the beginning as a natural element in the school community, rather than to have it come about at some later date at the instance of angry parents protesting some real or alleged “breakdown” in the school process. In this regard, the setup which has proved most workable is the following: Let the meetings of the advisory committee be open to all parents and teachers who are willing to come together with a purpose, provided they commit themselves to attend regularly for about one year. This makes for a healthy climate in which to work. Many schools have also included adequately chosen class representatives in the makeup of these meetings, in accordance with the principle that each class should be represented. This, for a number of reasons, is not only desirable, but even necessary.

In all parts of the German Federal Republic there are written laws which govern the representation and role of parents in the public schools. Whether the laws also apply to independent schools is controversial. There is no doubt, however, that we need not submit to a formal observance of these rules in our schools, provided that here also

we introduce equivalent processes conforming to our special character, in accord with the provisions which give legal sanction to different, individual types in the pedagogical structure of such schools. But even where there is no intention of applying the state regulations in a school, or where the law itself may make it impossible to apply, it is still necessary to introduce parent participation in some official way. Within the social context of a modern, constitutional state, the citizens enjoy a universal principle of legal rights, according to which parents have the right to be heard in the life of a school. If Waldorf schools were to sidestep altogether the establishing of parent committees (or of something equivalent), they would expose themselves to the crossfire of politicians and press in case an offended group of parents, for instance, should become vocal.

This should not make us feel as if we were subject to alien pressure. In a Waldorf school context, proper parent participation in the life of the school is an inalienable part of the idea of the school. We can choose the particular, technical way of carrying out this participation in accordance with our own laws of life. It will not be a question of “shared control” in areas which are under the jurisdiction of other quarters (faculty, school committees, general meetings). (The state, too, does not require such shared control for the parent role that it supports; one need only read the corresponding statutes with some care.) But every school should have proper procedures and dispositions in this regard. Where a school community as a whole has a written constitution, it is quite possible, though not really necessary, to include such procedures in its bylaws.

On the other hand, some written statement of the role and makeup of the “advisory parent committee” should definitely be provided, perhaps through the minutes of a general meeting, or of a meeting of the advisory committee itself. The way to defend oneself against objections or protests, which sometimes happen, is really by having some sort of formal, written declaration. A very simple one, with just a few sentences, will do. As to the nomination and choice of class representatives, the matter should be left in the hands of the parents of each class. It is best not to insist on a special election or any other way of doing it. It will be enough to say that each class should “pick” one or two representatives.

V

From the indications given so far about parents and teachers working together—the form, substance and extent of their interaction—it would seem now, after all, that the only place where parents have a real say in making decisions is in matters of finance and economics. Does this really mean that in other basic concerns—in those belonging to the life of spirit, as we would say in terms of the threefold social order—and apart from participation in resolving very general questions, or questions of fundamental overall procedure—does this really mean that in the realm of the life of spirit parents will always be more on the receptive side, with at best the opportunity of contributing some advice?

To answer this question it is important to bring out a point which is not often clearly realized. The spiritual life forces of a Waldorf school are twofold or, we could also say, there are two motives for its existence. On the one hand, it is the starting point for a renewal of education based on a spiritual knowledge of the whole human being (the teacher's vocation as such). On the other hand and at the same time, it is the working model for a social community, it is an institution of the free life of spirit. Remember that the Waldorf School was founded World War I as part of the larger movement towards a threefold social order after. When this large-scale effort to renew the social order, nourished as it was by Rudolf Steiner's impulse, found itself thwarted, the Waldorf School itself remained, as a sort of "living relic" after the storm, but also as a seed, bearing in itself the potential for the renewal of social life in our times. The school—with its various examples of cooperation among different segments of its community and with inhering self-determination as a faculty-run institution, since 1919—has been a full-working model for an organization rooted in the free life of spirit, and as such it stands as a continuing impulse to re-awaken awareness of the threefold social order and put it into practice.

Once these two component aspects are genuinely seen as belonging to a Waldorf school and as constituting a task to work for, it is up to the parents to seize the initiative and play their role amid the conflicting forces of the time. In the realm of the life of spirit, their special task is not the pedagogy of the school. It is, rather, first to acquire a real

understanding of the ideas and reality of the threefold social order. Then it will be apparent that one thing is very necessary if Waldorf schools are to develop fully and fruitfully: namely, a constant, progressive transformation of existing social conditions. What is necessary is to widen the space for freedom of action within the sphere of the life of spirit and to pour out from it impulses that can give direction to politics and economics. Here then we have the specific task of parents whose children are the beneficiaries of a Waldorf school education, if they want to do justice to their role as parents within a school community: to see and seize as their very own task this aspect of political re-education—of themselves and of others. It isn't at all a matter of throwing oneself impulsively into the fray. The first step must be to familiarize oneself with the concepts of the threefold commonwealth, thoroughly and intensively. Just as a Waldorf school teacher has to acquire, by hard inner work, a thorough grounding and the right pedagogical tools before he can apply Waldorf pedagogy in the teaching of a child, so the parents, too, by a real inner effort, must acquire their right tools and insights if they are to act effectively in the social context we have been discussing.

And this is indeed an important task: to be a bulwark for the Waldorf schools—not in the sense of “protecting” a school behind the walls from the social real life around it—but to be an effective bulwark in the sense of working within and upon the whole social milieu of the school so as to transform it, gradually and meaningfully. Let us admit at once that a very large number of Waldorf school parents are not aware enough of this task, let alone seriously working on it. When, as does happen at times, parents express the wish to be more responsibly and actively involved in the life of a Waldorf school—that would be the time to point out to them the twofold import of a Waldorf school and the mighty field of action that opens up for them, as described. It is easy enough to see how little the Waldorf school communities as a whole—and this goes for all members of the school community, including the teachers, of course—have been able to do justice to the challenge of this social task (a Goliath of a task by comparison with available strength to meet it). One need but look at the difficult social, conditions of the times we live in.

VI

The reality of human society comprises a threefold order: the life of the spirit (science, art, religion—culture in all its aspects), the life of rights (political and legal dispositions among men and nations), and the life of economics (production and distribution of goods).

Waldorf schools are organisms pertaining to the life of the spirit. The fact that a school is a particular legal entity (a nonprofit organization, an incorporation, etc.) does not classify it as life of rights in the sense described above. As a legal entity the school does not serve the political life of the state. Its legal formalization is entirely in the service of the school's purpose as a school, and this lies in the sphere of the life of spirit. From this it follows that a Waldorf school and its legal representatives must disclaim as such any direct political involvement, in the sense of feeling called on to take some official part in the life of *party politics*. The task of the school is to promote education and, beyond this, to create and promote *fundamental ideas for insight into the realm of politics* (significance of the threefold social order). A school and the members of its legal-corporate body as such do not stand for any particular political line of action. Only personally, as an individual, may one pursue such a line of action if one wishes and take part in politics according to one's convictions and inclinations via existing parties, or by founding a new party, or through other corresponding organizations.

Still, the furthering and deepening of political insight is a highly important part of the functions of a Waldorf school. This does not only mean exploring new ideas which the individual may then bring to bear on the whole social situation of his time. What is just as important is the social-human intercourse we must learn to cultivate among ourselves within the life of the school community—how to get along with one another. It is not always easy to take hold of particular tasks, to pursue some necessary line of action, adequately and unimpeachably. Here is where we need to practice the virtue of a true citizen: courage in the open—courage to stand up for the truth in social-human relations. Every spiritually significant process between human being and human being is embedded, as it were, in a medium, in an atmosphere which has a quality of formality, almost, if not ceremony. I mean the “how,”

the mode of meeting among human beings when they deal with one another. This does not yet take us into the life of rights in the sense of a political or state provision, but it is an area where “rights” are at stake deep in the soul of each individual. The point is always and genuinely to acknowledge the human rights of one’s fellow man, to respect his human dignity. Every human being needs a sort of inner and outer sanctuary space around him, in which he can be sovereign simply as man, without prejudice to his individual special nature or his talents. Here we find ourselves on the scent of mysteries pertaining to social life, for instance, that of the extraordinary importance of timely and adequate communication from human being to human being. We have to do here with the ability and readiness to communicate, which appears as the head pole, the thought pole, in the sphere of the life of rights. And what is the corrective agent for all and every human situation—e.g., so that I can speak out the truth and still let the other person live and breathe who receives it? It is the power of tact, as we call it, the “divining rod of the heart.”

And thus the Waldorf school, as a stage for living, is an important factor in the social education of all who are part of it.

NOTES

1. This refers to experiences, I believe, primarily in German or European schools.
2. The expansion of Waldorf schools in Germany and Central Europe has indeed been impressive. See “World List of Waldorf (Rudolf Steiner) Schools and Pedagogical Institutes.”
3. Reference here is to the written laws in the statutes of the various “Länder” (“states” or governmental subdivisions with limited autonomy) which make up the German Federal Republic.
4. See the first sentence of section VI for a brief summary reference to all three realms involved here.
5. Classes in many Waldorf schools in Europe are considerably larger than ours in America (and hence also tuition is usually lower).
6. This, I suppose, is especially based on experience with German Waldorf schools over the years. It should be mentioned here that interest of American parents in their children’s school—interest of a certain kind, especially through the PTA—has long anticipated events in European schools.
7. This, too, is especially based on experience with German and European schools. Our PTAs may or may not correspond to the “advisory committees” mentioned here. Section IV of this article, in particular, contains various references which are “local” (i.e., European).



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