

Association for a Healing Education

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A Case for Including Educational Support Programs in Waldorf Schools

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We have reached a crossroads in education. Each day in the classroom we experience that all children, including those raised in nourishing environments, have individual needs. This has been true for decades, and we have been free to pursue the best practices to ensure that each child is being met. However, let's consider that in our present times the matter is more urgent as childhood is being eroded. Nutrition, movement, disruptions in life's rhythms, and sensory impacts for instance have all changed. Not all of this is counterproductive; yet, the question remains, "What is our response to these changes?" If a child needs more than mere moments of attention, are we equipped to intervene? Have we expanded our definition of normal? Do we deepen our understanding of the pedagogy with the fervor that was exhibited in the first Waldorf schools?

Obviously the life of a professional educator is a never-ending journey of research and self understanding. Not only does the curriculum hold many secrets but each child is also a mystery. For new teachers, the goal of reaching the level of master teacher can look formidable in light of the complexities. However, there are so many jewels available for us.

In the Waldorf movement, we have methods that break ineffective ways of thinking and create new approaches to old problems. For instance, if a child has poor handwriting we can work with the feet as Dr. Steiner recommended. A child with poor or lethargic thinking can be helped with body geography exercises or walking geometric forms with different movements. These activities can be standard practices in our schools. We have the methods and only need the courage to create the form.

One very successful form is an Educational Support program, which can be designed to fit a school's needs. A support team could include a trained remedial teacher, outside resources, master in-house teachers, therapists, Eurythmist, etc.

By weaving a program into the life of the school, parents and teachers experience an enrichment of the educational journey of all the children in many settings: classroom, faculty study, child study and in individualized sessions.

The Educational Support Program emphasizes pedagogical methods and interventions. And, like other pedagogical streams, it has two pillars. The first pillar is our understanding of the curriculum and our understanding of the universal progression of child development. The second pillar is our ability to perceive and respond to the individual whom we wish to engage in the process of healing and education.

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These two fields, knowledge and an individualized response, obviously improve when the teacher also has support.

An Educational Support Program can:

1. Build bridges in the community through better communication and services
2. Strengthen right practices in the classroom
3. Create better learning environments for children with learning style differences
4. Assist teachers in a team based approach for observation and intervention
5. Develop a repertoire of screenings, interview procedures and assessments
6. Guide faculty studies of the curriculum

Funding for a program can be approached in different ways. The school can directly supply all the in-house services or the parents can support a program as co-payers. Other schools have pursued local grants. Because Federal law has moved to more inclusion and mandates services in schools, it is in our best interest to provide services and meet these cultural demands. One view to consider is that if a school can maintain 3 or 4 children who might otherwise have to leave, these tuition funds could support a program.

At the Pan American conference in July, Dr. Glockler spoke about the task for our times. The mysteries for the future are about the engagement of the will. It is not about knowledge, it is about not wasting ourselves. How grateful we can be that Waldorf schools have this directive to educate children for the future, help them escape from body bound thinking and be free to act toward the good.