

The Association for a Healing Education

As the activities and awareness of the Association for a Healing Education continue to spread, and a newsletter of this organism is now appearing, we thought it might be helpful to briefly describe the genesis and evolution of the Association.

To do this thoroughly would require a booklet; the concerns, needs and issues connected to the relationship between the curative and pedagogical work are far reaching and, in some cases, quite subtle.

The *concept* of the Association for a Healing Education evolved out of several conversations with Janet McGavin in the summer of 1984 as we

hiked in the mountains surrounding Bled, Yugoslavia at the Idriart Festival. For a number of years prior, conferences had been held in various places for Waldorf and curative educators. The first of these was held at the Hawthorne Valley School in Harlemlive, New York. These initial conferences, and the inspiration behind them, had arisen largely out of the insights of Carlo Pietzner and Rudolf Copple, and later Colin Young and Janet McGavin. They had perceived the growing concern among teachers in Waldorf schools for children requiring special soul care, and extra curricular attention.

Increasingly, the extraordinary needs of young children called upon insights, experiences and capacities just beyond what was available or "normal." It was recognized that the disciplines, attitudes and approaches necessary in a formal curative educational context, could, in some instances, be "transferred", or shared with direct benefit to the situations in Waldorf Schools.

These observations were, and still are, fully consonant with related trends and developments on a nationwide basis: the incidence of learning disability and exceptional needs has risen dramatically and decisively in the last five to ten years. While the public school system has been mandated to re-structure itself vis-à-vis the educational needs of "special" children at the hand of the now (in)famous federal law PL.94 142 (Right to Education Act), this has, of course, not been the case for private schools.

As an educational movement, which itself has grown quantitatively in leaps and bounds since 1970, the Waldorf schools have also encountered a greater incidence of children with exceptional needs. As is almost always the case, quantitative aspects of growth have influenced the qualitative development of the school movement. While not regulated by outer dictates, we nevertheless have recognized the necessity to respond to this phenomenon - from the inside out, as it were. To do this gradually, responsibly, and comprehensively, has been the agenda which forms the *raison d'être* of the Association for a Healing Education.

Our organizational consolidation began in late fall 1984 with incorporation as a non-profit association with subsequent tax-status recognition by

the Internal Revenue Service as a charitable enterprise shortly thereafter.

It has been a goal and hope of the Association to work closely and in cooperation with the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America. We have further tried to respond to and solicit input from the Pedagogical Section Council about its concerns and recommendations. We have also not tried to stake out a policy position, posture ourselves organizationally or advocate one form of remediation or "style" of curative application, but rather listen and work with existing initiatives and efforts in a constructive manner.

It is a challenge not to *become* something too quickly, because as you become *one* thing you forfeit the possibility to be *another*. The incarnation process of this organism has been, and will continue to be, gradual and modest, yet firm and strengthening. This is perhaps too simply put, but the Association is trying to be both national in scope and specific in activity, and we feel the need to chart an open course for a year or two.

A major activity of the Association for a Healing Education has been the summer conferences which have continued over the last years. Now in its eighth year, the "Camp Glenbrook Conference", as it has come to be called, provides a forum for parents and teachers to come together and rediscover the creativity and inner resources which must, ultimately, serve as the guide post for all educational endeavours.

This conference can be seen as a complement to the Waldorf Schools Conference which usually takes place a few days later. With nearly 100 participants it has become a major event and clearly appreciated, with several days of workshops, lectures and artistic activity.

The Association has been active in other areas. By offering financial subsidies it has sponsored consultants to Waldorf schools to provide insight into children with special needs. It has conducted a nationwide survey of how Waldorf schools themselves perceive the issues of remedial/curative work and needs, and is planning a small invitational colloquium with the Association of Waldorf Schools in North America to discuss and determine common concerns and perspectives in this area.

We have also been working with the Manadnock Waldorf School (Keene, New Hampshire), which has hosted the summer Camp Glenbrook Conferences, as a consultant in the development of their *Christopher Class* - a small ancillary class of special children. Another area of involvement is exploring avenues of cooperation with the teacher training centres. It is our belief, confirmed by many training centre graduates, that this incipient time is an invaluable opportunity for exposure to an augmentary training in the complexities of special children and curative education.

However, it is our earnest wish to distill a living agenda from the expressed needs of the schools and the individuals who are working and striving to offer a penetrating and appropriate education. In one sense this work is still in its infant stages, and it is a challenge to gather the many threads of endeavour throughout this large country and weave them into one association. However, a climate of goodwill, cooperation and intense and genuine interest prevails, and will serve as a strong basis for finding methods to work together to clarify, understand and tackle some significant issues facing Waldorf education. It is a basic tenet of the Association for a Healing Education that dialogue and communication will stimulate a viable and effective resource exchange between Waldorf and curative education.

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