

FOREWORD

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An experiment in its eighth decade, with more than sixty thousand students attending five hundred schools worldwide, Waldorf education is the largest and fastest growing independent, nonsectarian school movement in the world. The more than one hundred and fifty Waldorf schools in North America appear to be but the beginning of a rapid growth that will almost certainly be continued by the next generation. This volume is intended as a companion to educators and parents, both inside and outside the Waldorf school movement, who want to explore Steiner's intuitive and spiritual scientific research concerning child development and, in particular, the positive and negative forces affecting that development in a culture that puts children at risk.

In addition to his several hundred lectures on the curricula and pedagogy that constitute the Waldorf approach to the education of young children and adolescents, Steiner published more than three hundred volumes of lectures for the education of adults. A thorough understanding of Steiner's teachings will suggest that all education, of children and adults alike, is compensatory. Called *spiritual science*, or *Anthroposophy* ("human wisdom" and "wisdom of the human"), Steiner's teachings call for the cultivation of free, active, *imaginal* thinking deepened by affect and strengthened by will. From this kind of developed spiritual activity can flow a deep harmony between science and art, between personal and social transformation, and between insights and service on behalf of humanity and the Earth.

The self-education of adults is essential for the Waldorf approach to educating children, because Waldorf does not consist solely of methods, techniques, or structures, but rather the development of human capacities—those of the children, but also and more important, those of teachers and parents. Decades before the sensible slogan “it takes a village” became current, Steiner’s lectures to Waldorf teachers and parents indicated the need for a deep and trusting collaboration between family and school on behalf of children. Rudolf Steiner was the first to bring to Western education the importance of rhythm and emulation, both of which are made possible by the child’s teachers and parents. In this respect, Steiner’s pedagogy complemented that of John Dewey and anticipated that of Maria Montessori, though it is far more developed than either.

In 1919, at the request of Emil Molt, Steiner created the first Waldorf school. The school that, in the early 1920s, Steiner guided tirelessly during the last five years of his life was built essentially on the moral, spiritual, and professional capacities of the teachers he selected, most of whom were not teachers at all but active in entirely different professions. Steiner delivered a series of lectures to those he had selected to be teachers so that they could more effectively approach their students out of their own inner resources.

The Waldorf curriculum emphasizes physical and emotional readiness; it engages the children’s bodies and artistic sensibilities in all subjects, including academic ones. Scores of parents who do not share the affirmation of the spiritual life of the child, which is central to the Waldorf approach to education, are nevertheless committed to their children’s Waldorf school, because they see its positive effects throughout the course of their children’s development.

This book, consisting of a representative selection of Steiner’s lectures on the child and education, along with helpful introductions by an accomplished Waldorf teacher, is intended for all teachers and parents devoted to a well founded and demonstrably effective approach to educating children. As will be evident, the Waldorf

approach is precisely that—an approach, not a set of fixed answers, principles, or procedures. Because of his stupendous capacity to see into the souls of modern, Western children and adults, Steiner articulated countless recommendations, or indications, none of which were intended to be creeds of faith. Steiner was a spiritual empiricist, and he urged his students and readers to be no less so.

Ideally, teachers and parents alike will increasingly join the effort to find the most effective approaches to each pedagogical challenge, each child, each relationship, each lesson, and each hour of the day. The relationship of science to art, of temperaments to pedagogy, of healthy rhythms to the clamor of contemporary society, aesthetic sensibility to rapidly developing computer technology, all require fresh and original responses by teachers and parents—and, as they mature, by students themselves. Steiner bequeathed a wide bookshelf of suggestions as well as a generation of teachers who constitute a living lineage inspired directly by his words and presence on behalf of the lives of real children in the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart. These influences are worthy of the respect accorded them by Waldorf teachers worldwide, but it is equally important to emphasize that there is no handbook and no rules. Waldorf teaching requires creativity, with each teacher committed to a lifelong apprenticeship as artist in the medium of education. Artistry is called for in the classroom, in parent conferences, in the task of revising social studies and natural science curricula, in search for greater collaboration among teachers, and in performing the complex work of school administration.

Almost all readers of Steiner tend to rely on his findings, and sometimes on his words as though holy writ, because his research was stunningly insightful and authoritative (never authoritarian). It has taken a great many Waldorf researchers to give local form and worldwide visibility to Steiner's research. Roberto Trostli, the editor of this volume, is among the many Waldorf teachers in the United States who strive daily with their students and, in relation to students' families and to the culture of which they are a

part, implement, and expand and revise the material in Steiner's lectures as needed.

One of the strengths of this volume is the close relationship between Steiner's writing and lectures and the editor's introductions to those works. By virtue of his close reading of these and hundreds of similar lectures, and his thorough knowledge of the history of science as well as his deep appreciation of the arts (especially his experience as a musician), and his fidelity to the spiritual practices that Rudolf Steiner recommended, Roberto Trostli brings to this volume the fruits of his own research during the past thirty-five years. Having taken four classes for the upper elementary grades and one class for the full eight-year cycle, "one's own research" really means a combination of spiritual practice and close collaboration with striving colleagues in one's school, throughout the community of Waldorf schools, and with great teachers who combine spiritual and pedagogical depth.

Readers of this volume are invited to savor the depth of Steiner's understanding of the child and the process by which children, teachers, and parents can cooperate to enable children to realize their deepest capabilities and intentions. Steiner's insights and recommendations need to be tested by individuals and communities if children are to receive the healthy start they deserve. A culture so lacking in understanding of, and dedication to, the beginning and end of life seriously endangers the current generation of children, affluent ones, as well as those who are economically disadvantaged. May this volume be so used as to give renewed meaning to Steiner's recommendation to Waldorf teachers that they receive the child in reverence, educate the child in love, and send the child forth in freedom.

