

# The Organization of the Waldorf School

by Siegfried Finser

*One aspect of Waldorf Education, and one which is often bewildering to newcomers and outsiders, is school organization. This piece by Siegfried Finser carefully describes the various "organs" that make up the "body" of the typical Waldorf school and their separate, complementary, and sometimes overlapping functions. Christopher Schaefer's article (p. 19) describes the benefits of this type of organization and suggests that it can be applied to public schools. Sheila Harrington (p.24) portrays the vital community life that a Waldorf school can help create, in part because of the way it is organized. These three articles together provide an excellent introduction to and overview of the organization of Waldorf schools. As Siegfried Finser points out, however, the Waldorf community is constantly working to refine and improve school organization.*

R.E.K.

The Rudolf Steiner Foundation is the financial services organization for the Anthroposophical movement in North America. It works with borrowers and lenders as well as givers and receivers. During the past twelve years, it has advised hundreds of clients on matters related to fund development and credit worthiness.

In our work with Waldorf schools, we at the Foundation frequently deal with organizational issues. We are asked to clarify the tasks of the several organs of the school - the Faculty, the College of Teachers, the school Board of Trustees, and the Administration. We are often asked to strengthen the work of the Board and the Administration.

Following are some ideas concerning the organization of the Waldorf school. These ideas, based on our experience with client schools and on our work in Anthroposophy, are part of a continuing search for inner realities. They are not meant to establish any absolute norm. Also, they do not apply to every school. Schools are at different stages of growth, and in some schools all

organs are not yet fully developed. Some schools have unique situations in which certain organs are simply not required.

## The Task of the Individual Teacher

The task of the individual teacher is relatively clear and is the best understood of several functions. On this question Rudolf Steiner gave the most help. The main task of the teacher is to guide the process of incarnation of each child, a process begun by the parents and continued by the teachers.

In lectures published under the title *Study of Man*, Rudolf Steiner describes how the teacher helps each child's incarnation and how the teacher's work assists the integration of the various subtle bodies so that the child has the best opportunity to be a "whole being" in adulthood. It is a sequential task in which each preparatory step overlaps the next. The physical body, etheric body, astral body, and ego (higher spiritual self) are nurtured in such a way that the other aspects of the soul and spirit can unfold in natural order at later stages of life.

The primary task, then, of the Waldorf teacher is to help each child to incarnate harmoniously, integrate the various bodies, and prepare for the later incarnation of the three soul members and the three spiritual members inherent within them.

## The Task of the Faculty

The task of the Faculty is to help the teachers be successful in their work. The Faculty functions well, as an organ of the school, when it fosters supportive collegial relationships, increases understanding of the educational processes, and encourages the development of improved capacities in each teacher. When the

teachers feel helped and supported in their work through their participation in the faculty body and its activities, we can say that the Faculty is meeting its responsibility to the school.

The Faculty naturally engages in, but is not limited to, such activities as:

- Pedagogical and curriculum study.
- Study of child development and actual children and grades.
- Understanding current social, political, and economic events.
- Deepening understanding of Rudolf Steiner's indications for teaching.
- Structuring the school's daily, weekly, and yearly rhythms.
- Creating the social forms within the school community.

The fundamental responsibility of the Faculty is to support the work and development of each teacher and to foster the creation of a professional faculty body with purpose and direction.

### **The Responsibilities of the College of Teachers**

A teacher can, usually after a year at a school, elect to become a member of the College of Teachers. Not all teachers do. But when a teacher does join the College of Teachers, a greater commitment to the other teachers, to the school, and to Anthroposophy is asked. This is because the College has tasks that are qualitatively different from those of the Faculty. It is additionally responsible for the development of the school, its organization, and its connections with the land and the surrounding community.

Also, the College coordinates and balances the activities aimed at fulfilling two major spiritual tasks. One is to ensure that the work of the individual teachers with the incarnating children can be fruitful. The other is to guide the incarnating processes of the "being" of the school. Just as each child is a picture at every moment of an incarnating human being, so the life of the

school at each moment is a picture of the incarnating personality of the school. Responsibility for that emerging being of the school falls within the teachers' realm when they become members of the College.

Activities of the College include:

- Forming the ideals of the school and stimulating the activities necessary to realize them.
- Ensuring the quality of programs and maintaining the highest possible standards in the conduct of the school's activities.
- Envisioning the future of the school.
- Creating policies by which staff are paid and will be cared for in illness and old age.
- Creating the administrative procedures by which children are admitted and parents are oriented and introduced into the parent community.
- Ensuring that the budget reflects the ideals of the school and that the manner in which income is generated supports both the social and financial intentions of the school.
- Deciding how the school grows, on what land it locates, what buildings it needs, how the buildings should look, and what image of the nature of the school they should convey.
- Dealing with problems between people, and around particular persons, and resolving conflicts in a positive way.

In a young school that does not yet have a visible College of Teachers, the Faculty and Board will together carry these responsibilities in a way that works for them.

### **The Task of the Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees is comprised of teachers, parents, and supporters of the school. Its work appears to be largely financial and legal. The Board of Trustees is almost exclusively involved with such activities as:

- Determining and planning how the school can efficiently and effectively realize its vision.

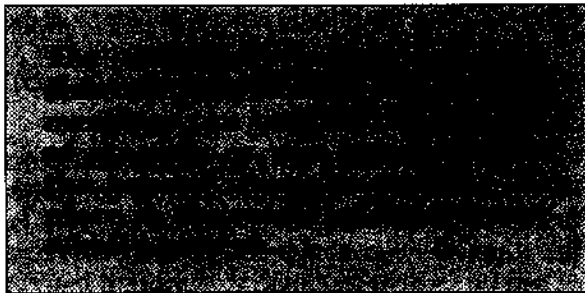
- Overseeing the acquisition, renovation, and maintenance of land and buildings; and managing the conservation, wise use, and growth of capital resources.

- Achieving the necessary balance of income and expenses.

- Ensuring the exercise of budgetary disciplines, from forming and finalizing the budget, to monitoring and acting on imbalances, through seeing from year to year that budgets reveal direction and purpose.

- Creating and organizing a volunteer structure around the school that provides ladders of opportunity for volunteer development and recognition.

- Nurturing the service of volunteers and encouraging their involvement in the many tasks and challenges that make the school a known and respected presence in the community.



- Managing the external relationships of the school with the surrounding community so that mutual respect and cooperation develop.

- Formulating policies under which the school conducts its business with vendors, contractors, government agencies, and local organizations.

- Resolving problems that are not resolved by other organs of the school.

In the Waldorf community, the spiritual tasks of overseeing the process of the incarnation of the children and of the being of the school are usually seen as the exclusive domain of the individual teachers, the Faculty as a whole, and the College of Teachers. The Board of Trustees usually is seen as having the financial and legal tasks. If the Board assumes a spiritual task, it may be

criticized for overstepping its bounds. This view does not coincide with our perceptions of what really happens in many schools. Something is missing in this frequently held view of how a school functions and should function.

After contemplating the many tasks of Trustees, we believe that the Board of Trustees has the chief responsibility for the spiritual task of incarnating the being of the school into its full reality. However, the Board can only carry this responsibility in close collaboration with the College of Teachers, which is actively concerned with both the incarnation of the children and that of the school.

We are advocating the acknowledgment of the spiritual work of the Board, not on philosophical grounds, but on the basis of what we have observed in Waldorf schools. The Board functioning as a purely temporal organ is not what we find in the schools.

A school Board of Trustees includes teachers, College members, parents, and members of the community. The Board is a microcosm of the entire community that cares about the incarnation of the school.

Boards take on important and often monumental tasks. They marshal immense volunteer forces to bring about the purchase of a building, the acquisition of land, the renovation, enlargement, and improvement of facilities. Boards carry out significant capital campaigns to make possible a suitable home for the school. They often have to fight for the very existence of the school.

This work is detailed; it is concerned with the physical realities; it consumes much volunteer time and energy. In what it brings into being, the work often creates miracles. Above all, it is permeated (usually) with spiritual energy. When work is permeated with spiritual energy, those doing it are carried in their activity by forces much greater than their own personal strengths. They are playing parts in a drama in which the choreography exceeds their individual and collective capacities.

The sometimes routine and mundane subjects worked on by Board members are actually revelations of progress as the personality of the school struggles to take its place in the world and to become wholly present. Financial information is a mere shadow of the reality it mirrors. It reveals the biographical process that is bringing about the full individuality of the school.

### Administration

Administration has sometimes been called "the art of the possible." It involves "how things are done" at the school and helps form the identity of the school. Good administration develops procedures that foster orderliness, consistency, accuracy, and completeness.

Administrative work does not exclude anyone. Every individual working within the school has some administrative task at one time or another. The official administrative staff, however, provide the focus for all such work, regardless of who may actually be doing it.

Administration involves so many details that a high level of consciousness cannot be maintained for each. Procedures by which a group of details can be routinely managed must be created with great consciousness. Administration is an art form that is intensely human and yet relies on systems-thinking in order to stay human. It ultimately serves the entire school, supports all the organs, maintains the vast flow of detail, and establishes connections required for the organization to function.

Administration also acts as the facilitating link between groups and committees of the school. Frequently called upon as "the bearers of consciousness," administrative personnel remind, push, and heckle individuals as part of their general task of seeing that things get done.

Administration supports all that happens in the school yet remains relatively invisible. It is a kind of adhesive, holding all together, but staying unobtrusive so as not to get in the way of what others must do. Administration, no matter who

actually does it, translates imaginations, inspirations, and intuitions into "real-time" processes that retain the spiritual intentions of the school.

### The Question of Ultimate Authority

Many schools feel that identifying which individual or which organ has the authority to make a final decision on an issue clarifies responsibility. Sometimes it does. However, authority is such that it cannot easily be divided up or evenly distributed. Today, authority is usually earned or is brought over from a previous lifetime during which it was earned.

Authority is usually gained in the same way as trust. It grows incrementally, in small steps, as individuals and groups act and interact. Groups and committees gain authority largely to the extent that they share a common spiritual task, have penetrated it with their understanding, and imbue their activity with their feelings and whole-hearted goodwill.

Authority seldom works if it is arbitrarily conferred. And true authority that has grown out of inner striving often goes unrecognized, even by those who observe its presence. It may be better to experiment with responsibility, assigning it to competent and willing individuals and also recognizing authority when it grows out of such assumption of responsibility.

### Summary

There are two tasks central to the the mission of any Waldorf school:

(A) To be a focused entity in which the incarnating processes of children are guided, assisted, and nurtured.

(B) To incarnate the distinct being whose biography represents the birth, development, maturation, and culmination of the entity called "the school."

If (A) is not managed well, the school loses its reason to exist.

If (B) is not managed well, the school does not enter into a healthy physical and social existence. Either one not fulfilled weakens the other. They are both essential; neither can be taken for granted.

The teachers have primary responsibility for (A). The Faculty is the organ that assists and supports the teachers in achieving (A). The College of Teachers is the organ that inspires and integrates (A) and (B) so that both are accomplished. The Board of Trustees has primary responsibility for (B). Administration of the school supplies the healthy processes that facilitate both (A) and (B) and weaves the common threads between the various organs into a cohesive pattern that fully reflects the spirit of the school.

All the organs are not only essential, but each has significant spiritual, social, and temporal responsibilities. None is inferior or subordinate to another. Each has to be competent and also must be inspired by the spirit that lives in the organism of the school.

There is probably no such thing as purely temporal work. The ancient saying, "Matter is never without spirit; spirit is never without matter," pertains to the work of a school. The question to be answered is, "What spirit?" or, more correctly put, "Which spirit?" By segregating any organ from its direct spiritual participation, the school becomes more vulnerable to unfriendly influence.

We hope these thoughts are helpful to all who care about the continued development of Waldorf Education. We are sure that, as we at the Rudolf Steiner Foundation work more with them and experience the unique way each school expresses them, we will evolve our understanding and gain further insights. Please share with us any comments or thoughts that this short description may evoke. Disagreement is welcome, since it also helps us to form sound judgment.

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Siegfried taught at the Rudolf Steiner School of New York for seven years and has been Treasurer of the Anthroposophical Society of America and the President of the Threefold Educational Foundation. He cofounded and, until this year, was Chairman of the Rudolf Steiner Foundation. The Foundation works with money to foster socially constructive projects such as Waldorf schools, Biodynamic farms, Camphill villages for the handicapped, and similar initiatives and organizations.

## Waldorf Parents on the Information Superhighway

Internet is a computer-based, international electronic mail medium. If you have a computer and a modem you can join and subscribe to any of a variety of "mailing lists" on different topics. You then receive electronic mail from all the other member's on the list, and your own messages go to all other subscribers.

Recently a "Waldorf" mailing list has been established on the Internet. While most of the subscribers are Waldorf parents, some Waldorf teachers and administrators also participate. Messages from many parts of the United States and Canada appear, and also from other parts of the world, including Germany, Scotland, Russia, Australia and the Far East.

Festivals, fairy tales, the effect of music on children, financial models for schools, and the challenge of dealing with gifted children are among the many topics that are dealt with.

To subscribe to the Waldorf mailing list send the following command to `LISTSERV @ SJUVM` or `LISTSERV @ SJVM.STJOHNS.EDU` in the body of e-mail: `SUBSCRIBE WALDORF` your first name/your last name. For example: `SUBSCRIBE WALDORF Clara Smith`. There is also a mailing list on the Internet for Anthroposophy.