

# seminar conversations

For Steiner / Waldorf teachers

Issue 1 T4 2025

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SEMINAR



50 years of teacher training

Symphony of Hope  
carved by Tania Hungerford

## **Welcome to our first issue of *Seminar Conversations***

*Seminar Conversations* is an expression of our commitment to continuing and extending our conversations with our many alumni and to initiate a conversation with all other Steiner teachers and educators working in Steiner Schools and Waldorf Schools across Australia and overseas.

It is our wish, that this initiative might contribute to a cultural fellowship amongst Steiner teachers and educators developing in Australia. We hope that by offering fresh perspectives and insights, born of our work at the Melbourne Rudolf Steiner Seminar, we may contribute something towards deepening, extending and stimulating all Steiner teachers and educators' thinking and practice.

## **About the Cover Image**

### **'Symphony of Hope' carved by Tania Hungerford**

The choral finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony sets Friedrich Schiller's "An die Freude" (Ode to Joy), a poem that celebrates the idea of humanity bound together in brotherhood. In an age of political turmoil and social division, this message was revolutionary—and it remains so today.

The sculpture grew from a deep response to this sentiment. It sought to give physical form to its spirit: a movement toward hope, unity, and fellowship that continues to speak to us now.



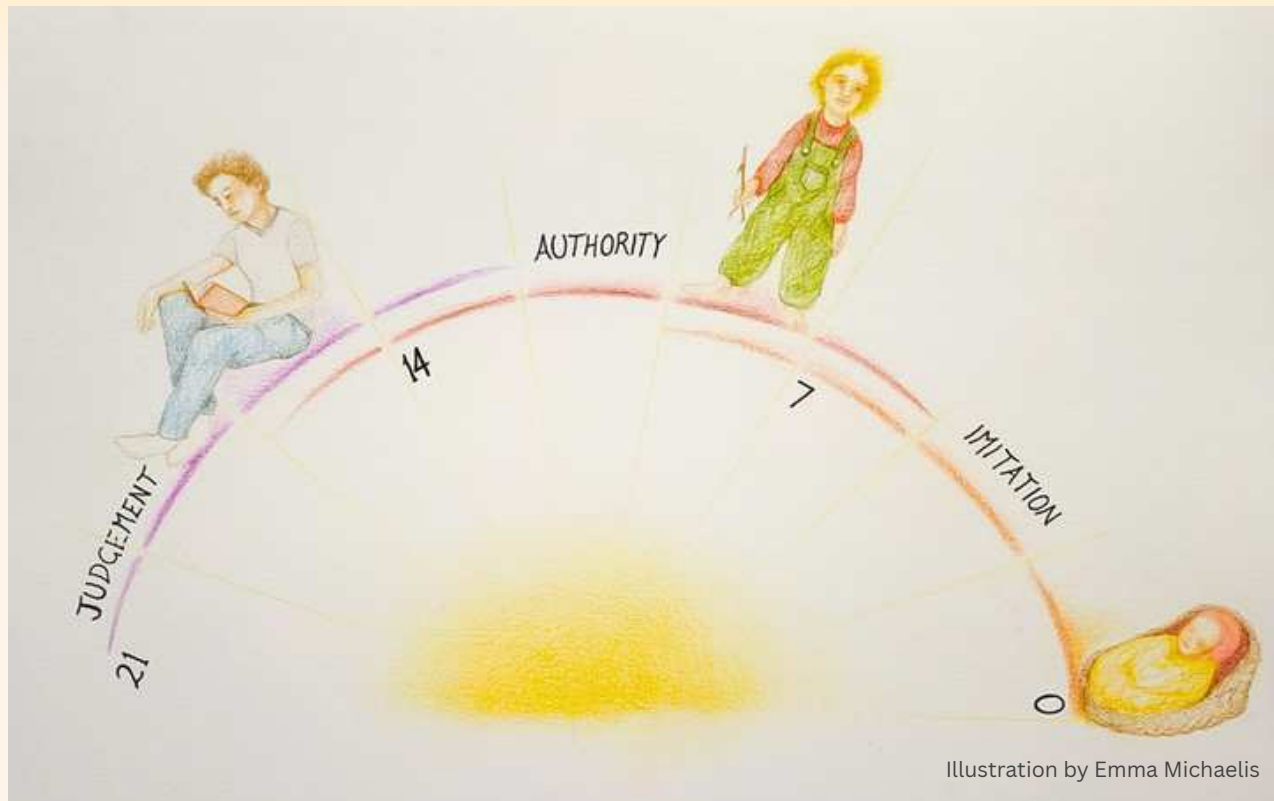
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- |    |                                                                                                      |   |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 01 | The educator as sculptor of the Contents of the Child's Soul                                         | > |
| 02 | Healing in the Classroom: A Waldorf / Steiner Perspective on Trauma-Informed Teaching                | > |
| 03 | Imagination                                                                                          | > |
| 04 | About the Tutors / Writers                                                                           | > |
| 05 | Seminar News                                                                                         | > |
| 06 | Advanced Diploma Student Sculpture Presentation: The Will as a Seed: Understanding Inner Development | > |
| 07 | Professional Development Courses                                                                     | > |

# The Educator as Sculptor of the Contents of the Child's Soul

*Classroom Management, Student Discipline & Child Development*

by Rod Tomlinson



Through a careful and close observation of children over the course of many years, Rudolf Steiner developed a conceptual framework describing a typical child's development which can deeply inform and assist a Waldorf teacher's approach to student discipline and classroom management.

## **The Map is Not The Territory**

From the outset, we would do well to repeat Steiner's caution to educators

to beware of defining or judging an actual living child by the degree to which they may or may not conform to this archetypal characterisation; "An educator should not be concerned with how the human being *ought* to develop, but with the reality of how the student actually does develop."<sup>[1]</sup> But *our* observations of *our* children can become more penetratingly perceptive, when afforded the benefit of Rudolf Steiner's conceptual lens.



# THREE PHASES IN EACH SEPTENNIAL

## Three Phases in Each Septennial

He conceived of child development as progressing through three identifiable seven-year stages (septennials); from birth to around the age of seven, from around seven to fourteen years of age and from around fourteen to twenty-one years of age. Within each of these seven-year periods, Steiner drew attention to three observable phases of equal duration, which extend to just over two years each.[2]

In their first septennial, from birth to age seven, Steiner characterises the child's orientation to those around them by the term 'Imitation', that children are primarily mimicking and copying the conduct and behaviours that they observe in their environment. In their second septennial, from seven to fourteen years of age, children seek adults whose discernment they can trust and whose authority they are willing to defer to, so that they do not have to try and weigh things up and make up their own minds before they possess the faculties to do this independently. In their third septennial, from fourteen to twenty-one years of age, they seek to develop confidence in their own capacity to form sound judgements and draw valid conclusions, to wisely direct their own lives.

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[1] Rudolf Steiner, 24.1.1907, Berlin (GA 55). Carl Jung was fond of relating the anecdote of the pile of pebbles which have been statistically determined to all be on average 500g in weight. And yet, you will likely find not one pebble that is in fact 500g in weight. Rudolf Steiner went as far as recommending that we do not consider a human being as a member of a species but that we consider every individual human being, a species of their own – we are that different!

[2] Steiner did on occasion go so far as to designate these phases as precisely as 'typically' being around 2 1/3 years duration, or two years and four months. We can appreciate his reluctance to do this consistently for fear of this degree of mathematical precision being mistakenly and prescriptively imposed on – and expected of – the ever-varied, individuality of our actual, and always unique children. "Before all other things the teachers and educators at the Waldorf School must be cultivating in themselves openness... without prejudice from the past, we cannot comprehend human growth and development... We need openness... a nature that is open to changes in life—its unexpected and continuous freshness." Rudolf Steiner, *The Spiritual Ground of Education*, 25.VIII.1922, Oxford (GA 305).

# BETWEEN IMITATION & RESPONSIBILITY

## Between Imitation & Responsibility

Around the age of nine years old and four months, a developmental transformation occurs. Previously they have felt at one with everyone and everything around them. Now they begin to experience themselves as separate individuals, distinct from everything and everyone around them. This change catalyses a definitive step away from their susceptibility to mirroring other's behaviour and a greater receptivity and need for an authority that they can trust for individual moral direction.

Please note though that during the first phase between 7 and 9 years of age, the children are still critically influenced by the faculty of imitation which extends into and throughout this first phase of the second septennial. During this time, they are still inclined to just participating in the behaviours of others around them and being drawn into whatever mischief is afoot. You will often hear a child respond that, "She made me do it", "It wasn't me, it was him", even when they know that we observed the incident! They genuinely may not experience their individual contribution or participation in the incident. This changes markedly however with this change in consciousness around the age of nine, when they experience themselves as no longer part of everything and everyone around them. Now they are capable of moral choices and can be held responsible in a new way.

Understanding these developmental nuances during these transitional phases can help us enormously to discern the nature of a child's behaviour and to appreciate to what degree the behaviours are volitional and so, the degree to which the child should be held accountable.





### **Independent Feelings & Independence of Mind**

Steiner draws attention to the awakening of the twelve year old's independent exercise of the intellect and the adjustments that these changes demand of us, in the way we approach a 12-14 year olds' infractions. This soul faculty is also accompanied by an awakening of their soul feelings of like and dislike, of attraction and aversion to everything and everyone around them. When these feelings first arise in the soul, they are often experienced and expressed as unruly, uncontrollable excesses of feeling – we may even be tempted to characterise them as unnecessarily inflated feelings – but the essential thing is to see and understand that children have enormous difficulty in controlling or reining in the unexpected, and sometimes intoxicating, floods of uncontrolled feeling.

Steiner points out that both of these experiences are what we rely on to weigh things up, and form meaningful, individual judgements of our experiences and observations of the world and others. We cannot make up our own minds or make our own decisions in life if we do not know how we feel about something or are lacking the 'scales' of the intellect on which to weigh our various thoughts and responses to events and people around us. These two faculties of the intellect and strength of independent feelings are, in combination, the tools that provide the means for developing through their adolescent years, a capacity for giving independent, sound direction to their lives. Critically in these 'tweenie' years, their first exercise of these twin faculties is expressed as opinions – often ill-considered and ill-informed, and so all too easily dismissed by busy adults. This we must train ourselves not to do. If we damage these first tentative efforts by disregarding or

dismissing their opinions without granting them our full attention, consideration and engagement by assessing their opinion's strengths and shortcomings and developing these through classroom discussions. We endeavour to teach them to draw on further perspectives and considerations beyond their own, from others' experience and insights, so that they can refine and develop their understanding through consultation with others, to better inform their judgements. Denied this process of learning, they may not develop confidence in their ability to think for themselves, through consultation with others, in contrast to seeking to be informed or directed by an external authority.

## **Honouring Their Independence of Mind Wins Their Trust**

During these in-between years, between 12 and 14 years of age, we must reckon with the child's need for acknowledgement and endorsement of this nascent capacity for independent judgement, while recognising the need to still have recourse to the wisdom of their trusted teachers, parents and guardians. Two common hurdles will contend with the healthy realisation of this development. A child will develop this confidence in their own thinking by initially deferring to authorities of their own free choosing, to peers and popular sporting heroes or pop idols etc. Also they can sometimes abandon their attempts to develop their own power of discernment altogether as a rebound effect, if significant adults in their lives dismiss or disregard their initial efforts to form and express their own opinion. Navigating this Scylla and Charybdis, is the primary task of teachers in Classes 6, 7 and 8. Each teacher must endeavour to harmonise the children's need to attempt to think for themselves and to develop their own power of judgement with their continuing need to be guided still, by the wise guidance of trusted adults when they find themselves in circumstances beyond their own powers to judge.



## Harmonising Children's Contradictory Needs

"Around twelve years of age, an important change begins in the development of the child. At the age of twelve, thirteen, fourteen—it is different in each child—that which comes to expression after puberty, namely, the ability to judge arises. Judgement comes into play and must work together with the reduction in the need for authority. The teacher must harmoniously handle the need for authority and the power of judgement during this age." [3]

These transitional stages of child development – in the first phase of their second septennial and the third phase of their second septennial – serve to give rise to abrupt changes in character and contradictory behaviours which can often be perplexing to teachers and parents.

Rudolf Steiner's characterisation of what finds expression in these contrasting features of the children's souls, can make the seemingly confusing, inexplicable behaviours, explicable. In my experience, there is much in Rudolf Steiner's insights that can lend support to the development of further fruitful insights of our own.

*This is the first of a series of articles seeking to understand this increasing sense of entitlement and demand for instant gratification in contemporary classrooms and the training of our perception of children's behaviour in an endeavour to reach the source rather than just the symptoms of these behaviours and to explore further indications of Steiner's on creating healthy learning environments.*

*Feedback and Questions?*

*Click [\*\*HERE\*\*](#) to communicate with us.*

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[3] Rudolf Steiner, The Spirit Of The Waldorf School, Lecture 2, 'The Spirit Of The Waldorf School', 31.VIII.1919, Stuttgart (GA 297).

# Healing in the Classroom: A Waldorf / Steiner Perspective on Trauma- Informed Teaching

by Tania Hungerford

The presence of trauma and stress-related challenges is becoming increasingly visible in today's classrooms. While Steiner/Waldorf education is grounded in healing principles, these challenges call teachers to develop deeper insight, responsiveness, and inner capacity.

Waldorf education is often described as a "healing education," based on a holistic view of the human being—body, soul, and spirit. Rudolf Steiner believed that education must support the whole human being in balanced development. It is both preventive, by nurturing healthy rhythms and capacities from early childhood on, and therapeutic, offering tools to meet challenges with care and understanding.

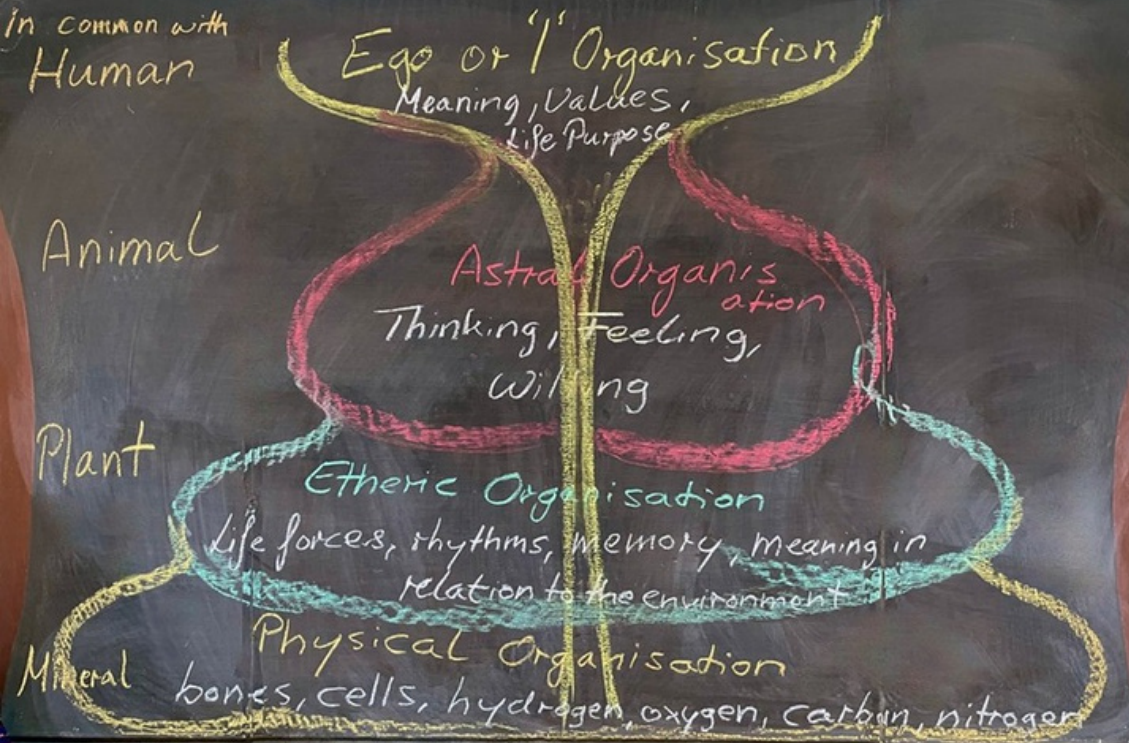
To meet trauma with ever deepening understanding, we draw from both living anthroposophical insight and the evolving body of contemporary research and practice. This includes awareness of the Rudolf Steiner's understandings of the human being, the twelve senses, the four temperaments, child development, brain development, the nervous system, attachment theory, Goethean observation and Child study principles. With this foundation, educators are better able to recognise trauma's signs and respond in ways that are grounded, respectful, and whole.



## Trauma Through the Lens of the Fourfold Human Being

Trauma affects all levels of the human being—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. A sense of being 'out of the body' is a frequently reported experience, especially in response to overwhelming stress or shock. When viewed through the fourfold lens (physical, etheric, astral, and I-organisation), we gain deeper insight into how trauma fragments the inner life.

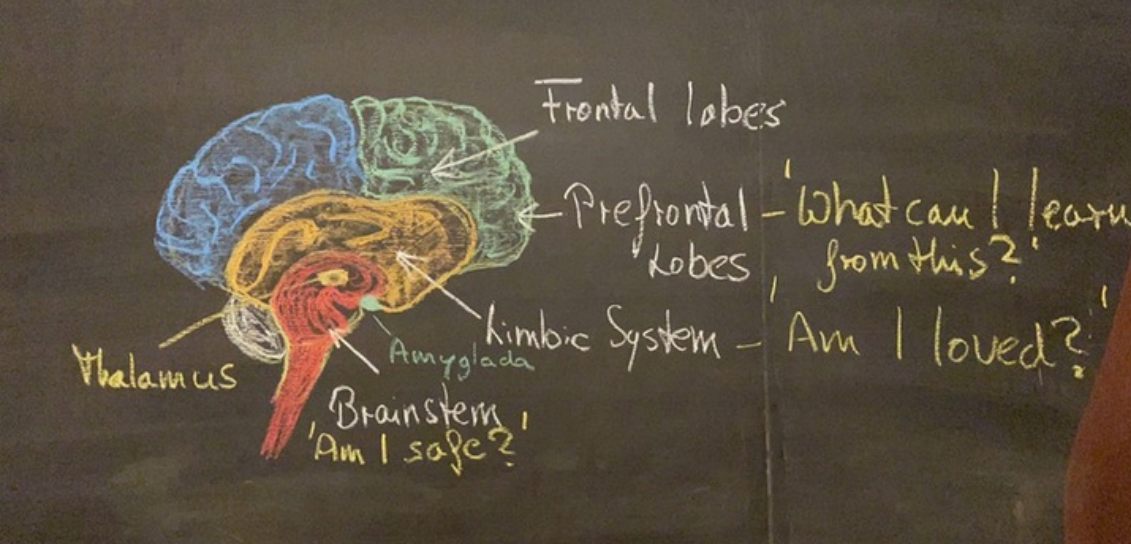
At the 2015 International Kolisko Conference on Trauma in Childhood, Dr Michaela Glöckler described how traumatic experiences affect biological and physiological processes, often leading to a disintegration of the four bodies.



## TRAUMA AND THE FOUR FOLD HUMAN BEING

- The physical organisation may show disrupted sensory processing—overstimulation, disconnection, or lack of coherence in perception.
- The etheric body, which holds rhythm and memory, may present disturbed heartbeat and breathing, sleep and appetite, weakened vitality, and disordered daily rhythms.
- The astral body, home of thinking, feeling and willing relating to the emotional life, may manifest trauma as overwhelming thoughts, feelings of anxiety, emotional volatility, or withdrawal, and behavioural dysregulation.
- The I-organisation, the centre of selfhood, may experience a loss of meaning, inner disorientation, or a sense of existential crisis.

These disturbances are also reflected in the brain and nervous system, often showing themselves through dissociation or chronic stress responses. Dr Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model in Education affirms that the brain matures in a developmental sequence—beginning with the lower, survival-oriented centres, progressing through emotional and relational capacities, and culminating in higher cognitive functions (2021).



This mirrors the unfolding of the fourfold human being, reminding us that healing interventions must meet the child in the right order: first supporting regulation and rhythm, then relationship, and only then engaging the thinking life.

Understanding this layered impact helps us respond not only with compassion, but with clarity and intention—offering experiences that support reintegration across all levels of the child's being.

### Healing Tools within Our Reach

The teacher's inner disposition is central to this healing work. Warmth, presence, authenticity, and the ability to form real human connections create the safety and rhythm children need. When lessons are brought with artistry, imagination, and breathing space, they help restore balance and foster inner resilience.

In Waldorf education, healing tools are already embedded in the curriculum. Artistic activity, movement, form drawing, music, and storytelling are more than enrichment—they are essential supports for wholeness, bringing the curriculum to life and integration.

### The Grounding Power of Clay

Clay modelling, for example, is a powerful therapeutic tool. Clay—an earthy, grounding material—supports the foundational senses of touch, movement, balance, and life. Through slow, rhythmic shaping of this earthy material, children settle into focused calm. A deep sense for form awakens as their hands meet the material with intention.

Many teachers observe that during clay work, the classroom grows still. Children and adults alike emerge from these sessions feeling more grounded, calm, and centred.

Burnishing—the polishing of clay until smooth and shiny—adds a further dimension. The repetitive, soothing motion quietens the mind, offering a meditative space of inner stillness and sensory harmony.

## A Conscious Path Forward

As Waldorf educators, we are entrusted with more than academic instruction. We are called to hold space for healing—to bring our presence, insight, and creativity in service of each child’s wholeness. When we meet trauma with understanding and reverence, we help children find their way back to themselves.

This is the deeper work of education: to nurture not only knowledge and skill, but integration, resilience, and the quiet unfolding of the human spirit.

*Feedback and Questions?*

Click [\*\*HERE\*\*](#) to communicate with us.

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# IMAGINATION

## *The Path from a Rich Imagination to Creative Thinking*

by Tom Hungerford

**This article will examine the movement from fantasy to imagination, the link between imagination and thinking, and how to foster these qualities in children.**

Imagination is the fertile ground from which all human achievement has grown—from the simplest tools to the most advanced technologies. Without the mind's eye envisioning what might be possible, nothing new could ever be created.

It's important to distinguish imagination from fantasy, or at least to see them as points along a continuum. Fantasy often gives shape to desires that may never be realized, things we dream of, but which exist outside the realm of possibility. Consider expressions such as:

- "That's just a flight of fantasy."
- "Tell him he's dreaming."

### **Imagination vs Fantasy**

These phrases reveal the qualities of fantasy:

- It flows with a dreamlike quality.
- Anything seems possible.
- Logic does not apply.
- Time becomes irrelevant.
- It cannot be tested against the reality that we experience.
- There is no universal truth that anchors it.

Now contrast that with expressions like:

- "I can imagine that being possible."
- "I can't quite imagine that happening."

These statements point to a different kind of mental activity. They highlight the nature of imagination:

- It organizes thoughts into a logical, and chronological, sequence.
- It tests possibilities against the reality we experience.
- It helps translate dreams into something potentially real.



# IMAGINATION - THE STARTING POINT OF THINKING

**In this way, imagination becomes the very starting point of thinking.**

Take, for example, the age-old dream of flying. To believe we can fly unaided is pure fantasy. But imagination takes that dream and asks: What would make it possible for a person to fly?

The hang-glider, the airplane, and the jet engine are all outcomes of imagination put to work—dreams shaped by the laws of physics and the constraints of the real world.

Imagination, then, is not merely about dreaming. It is about envisioning what could be and taking the first steps to bring it into being.

**The richer the imagination, the greater the capacity for thought and thinking.**

Imagination allows us to visualize a solution—sometimes one that has never been considered before.

A rich fantasy life, though free from the limits of realism, can challenge and expand the imagination. It opens pathways into unexplored territory—territory where disciplined thinking can later be applied.

Inspirational quotes for imagination

- "The man who has no imagination has no wings." ...
- "What is now proved was once only imagined." ...
- "You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus." ...
- "Live out of your imagination, not your history." ...
- "Imagination is the beginning of creation."



## Fostering Imagination in Children

How, then, do we nurture imagination—particularly in children?

Toys that offer just enough form to suggest their identity, while leaving space for the child's imagination to complete the picture, are far more beneficial than highly detailed ones. Toys that dictate every aspect of play can stifle creativity.

Likewise, stories told with warmth and openness invite a child to construct vivid inner pictures of their own. In contrast, stories delivered through digital media, with pre-formed images and rapid sequences—bypass the need for imaginative effort. Over time, if the imagination is not exercised, it can become weak and impoverished.

Children need time—and a nurturing environment—for free, imaginative play. They need space to build their own inner world.

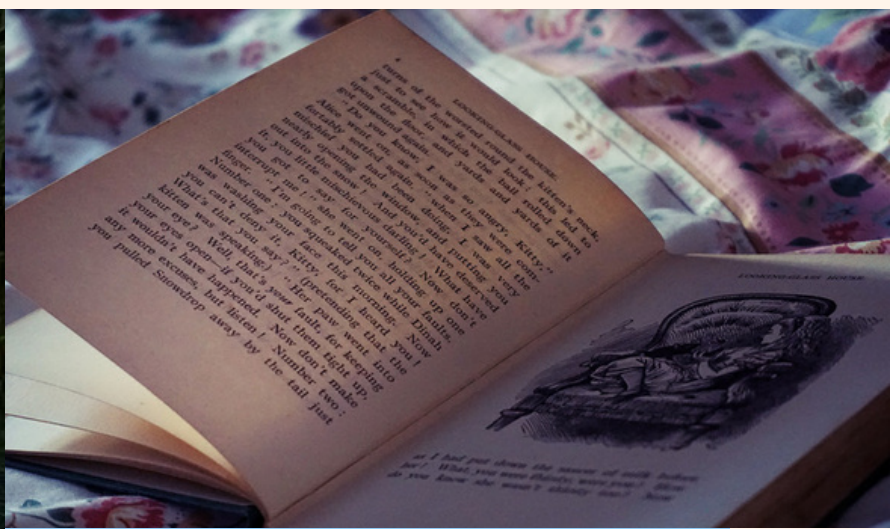
If the imagination is stunted, then thinking is stunted. When imagination is no longer possible, all that remains is precedent—repeating past solutions. And precedent alone can only recreate the conditions of the past.

It is through imaginative thinking that we arrive at new concepts. As Rudolf Steiner put it, it is through gaining concepts that we “win reality.” The more refined our concepts become, the clearer our understanding of the world.

It is often said that educating children for the jobs of today is of limited use, as many future occupations have not yet been invented. Those who will thrive in the future will not necessarily be those with the most knowledge, but those with the strongest capacity for imagination.

*Feedback and Questions?*

Click [HERE](#) to communicate with us.



# About the Tutors - Writers

## **Tania Hungerford**

Tania Hungerford is both the First Year Coordinator for students and a tutor in many subjects. She has been teaching adults and working with Anthroposophy for 30 years, drawing on a background in sculpture, social science, biography work, counselling and art therapy. She teaches units including Sculpture, Form Drawing, the Twelve Senses, Human Development, the Four Temperaments, Professional Communication and Conflict Resolution, understanding and working with trauma, and developing inclusive teaching practices for working with children with individual learning needs. Tania has offered many professional development programs to Waldorf teachers in schools around Australia and in Asia.

## **Tom Hungerford**

Tom Hungerford is the Second Year Coordinator and has taught in Steiner Schools for over 25 years, principally as a Bothmer Gymnast and Physical Education Teacher but also extensively in the high school in the Hard Crafts. Most recently Tom was a Class Teacher at Sophia Mundi Steiner School in Melbourne. Tom has been teaching at the Seminar for 30 years. He teaches Anthroposphical Studies, Pedagogy, Epochs, Pedagogical Drama, Hard Crafts, Festivals, Physical Education and is also a Second Year Student Co-ordinator and the Practical Placement Co-ordinator.

## **Rod Tomlinson**

Rod grew up in Tasmania, encountering Anthroposophy while at the University of Tasmania studying classical and modern European languages. He helped establish Tarremah, the first Steiner school in Tasmania and has since been involved in a number of other Australian Steiner schools over the past forty years as a Primary Class Teacher, a High School Class Guardian and English, Literature, History teacher, and teacher trainer. Rod has and continues to work with school management and governance in NSW, Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria.

# Seminar News

## The Advanced Diploma of Rudolf Steiner Education

The second years of the Advanced Diploma just finished their final Intensive at the Seminar, and we celebrated their achievement at the Presentation Graduation Evening. We are immensely proud of them. Below are some images of their sculpture presentation and from the presentation evening.



### An Exploration of 'Spirit Human' by Ella Burns

The being that lives and continues to expand within the infinite spirit. Rudolf Steiner indicates that the metaphorical seed of our truest essence already lies within our physical bodies. This sculpture is an embracing ode to our body and the spiritual forces that support the collective evolution of humanity, towards self-realisation.

Watch an interview about her 2-year journey [HERE](#).



### Weaving the 12 Senses by Joanne Ormsby

I have learnt how important the 12 senses are in our development, helping us to know ourselves, others and the world we live in. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the senses and how I could integrate them into my teaching practices in the future. Through my research I came to understand how the senses are constantly weaving in and out of our consciousness and this was the basis behind the sculpture.



### The Hand as the Hearth by Ryan Coker

As a craftsperson and maker, I felt compelled to look more deeply, through the lens of Anthroposophy, into the development of the will in children, and how we, as teachers, can help awaken and guide that will towards freedom.



### The Will as a Seed: Understanding Inner Development by Briony Lipton

Read Briony presentation on the next page.



Find out more about this online / on campus course [HERE](#).

# Advanced Diploma Student Sculpture Presentation

## The Will as a Seed: Understanding Inner Development

by Briony Lipton



Contemporary society places children and their educators in an increasingly difficult position. The combined pressures of neoliberal capitalism, intensified individualism, and the commodification of schooling have reshaped family and community life in ways that erode shared ethical responsibility. Scholars across sociology, education, and cultural theory show how neoliberal logics orient individuals toward self-optimisation,

personal exceptionalism, and market-based decision-making (Brown, 2015; Ball, 2012; Littler, 2018). Parents may approach schools as providers from whom they selectively accept or reject expectations. The ethos of 'rules for others, exceptions for me' reflects what Bauman (2001) characterises as 'liquid modernity', a context in which communal bonds loosen, and responsibility is unevenly distributed.

Steiner schools are not immune to these conditions. They operate within the same social and political economy that shapes family life and expectations of schooling. Yet Steiner education arises from a philosophical ground that directly challenges individualism, materialism, and competitive self-advancement. Rooted in anthroposophy, it seeks to cultivate the whole human being—thinking, feeling, and willing—through a developmental and ethically oriented pedagogy. These aims depend not only on curriculum and pedagogy, but on a shared cultural ethos sustained by teachers, parents, and the broader school community.

Here a particular challenge becomes visible. When parents entrust moral or spiritual formation almost entirely to the school, teachers and children carry a disproportionate share of the relational, emotional and spiritual work of inner development, while adults outside the classroom may unintentionally step back from the inner work that gives Steiner education coherence and depth. Without modelling and resonance at home, the child's moral orientation and the spiritual atmosphere of the classroom can become fragile. This raises an ethical and pedagogical question: how might parents' engagement with their own inner development strengthen the moral, pedagogical, and communal life of Steiner schools?

This sculpture responds to that question by exploring what unfolds when adults engage their will in deliberate and ethically attuned ways. Inner development is understood not as private self-improvement but as a relational practice. Drawing on Steiner's prolific writings, I trace three interconnected stages of inner development: the cultivation of moral strength, the awakening of spiritual perception, and the gesture of pure participation. The metaphor of the seed, understood as a slow, often imperceptible force, clarifies why contemporary expectations for rapid, measurable outcomes can undermine this process. Inner development, I suggest, extends beyond the self towards a broader social and ethical project, with significance for the sustaining of community and the healing of a fractured social world.

## **Three stages of inner development**

In Steiner's philosophical and pedagogical writings, inner development is a gradual deepening of the human being's moral, perceptual, and relational life. It is not a sequence of spiritual milestones but a disciplined reshaping of how one meets the world. Steiner identifies three interrelated movements: cultivating moral strength, awakening spiritual perception, and practising pure participation. At the heart of all three is the ethical orientation of the will.

The sculpture seeks to give material form to a process which is resistant to representation. The central seed evokes the self, while the surrounding organic shapes suggest social forces, pressures, and ethical questions. Grooves and worn areas mark points where the will encounters resistance or finds alignment. Steiner gestures towards a domain that precedes thought and emotion, writing of delicate vibrations of the soul (Steiner, 1994/1904) that occur before experience crystallises into conscious feeling. The will is shaped by these affective currents, which move between individuals. As Steiner notes that feeling is the mediator between thinking and willing (1994/1904): the will is not simply force, but a relational and ethically attuned movement.

## **The cultivation of moral strength**

The first stage begins with the cultivation of moral strength, which Steiner identifies as the essential foundation for any spiritual growth. Moral strength is not a static trait but an active, ongoing orientation of the will toward truthfulness, clarity, and responsibility. "Every idea which does not become your ideal slays a force in your soul; every idea which becomes your ideal creates within you life-forces," Steiner writes, while ideas that remain passive diminish the soul's vitality (1994/1904). Moral strength therefore arises when thoughts are consciously transformed into impulses for action; this is the basis of ethical life.

In anthroposophical psychology, the will animates movement, intention, habit, and ultimately character. Feeling plays a mediating role, shaping impulses through sympathy, antipathy, and indifference (Steiner, 1994/1904). Contemporary affect theory (Massumi, 2002; Ahmed, 2004, 2006) offers a parallel vocabulary, describing pre-conscious movements of inclination and resistance that arise before emotion becomes nameable. Moral strength involves learning to recognise these subtle movements and to guide them towards compassionate or constructive expression.

Steiner treats this stage as a universal prerequisite: spiritual capacities cannot unfold unless the individual first cultivates a morally ordered inner life through conscious self-education (1996/1922). Without moral strength, later capacities risk distortion by self-interest or the quest for exceptional experience. Modest, deliberate practices –observing one’s reactions, practising restraint, cultivating inner quiet, maintaining truthful speech– strengthen the capacity to act from freedom rather than reactivity. This work prepares the individual to meet daily challenges with steadiness and establishes the ethical ground for more refined modes of perception.

## **The will in education and in the home**

The cultivation of moral strength is not confined to adult self-development; it is central to the pedagogical aims of Steiner education. The will is shaped gradually through movement, imitation, and artistic activity long before it can be directed through conscious intention. For this reason, early childhood and the primary years emphasise embodied and imaginative experience rather than abstract moral instruction. Rhythm, repetition, and imitation form the basis for the development of moral imagination; the capacity to perceive situations ethically and act with practical wisdom.

If the will develops through imitation and relational experience, the home becomes a crucial extension of the school. Parents who engage consciously in their own inner development contribute to the moral atmosphere of the school and provide modelling that allows children to internalise ethical habits. Small, deliberate gestures, sustaining daily rhythms, completing postponed tasks, pausing before reacting, listening without interruption all demonstrate self-mastery in ways the child can perceive.

Truthful speech and moments of inner quiet help stabilise the adult's emotional life; children sense this stability and take it as a reference point for meeting their own inner experiences. These practices are not attempts to recreate the classroom at home. They are expressions of adult inner work that create a shared ethos in which children's moral imagination can unfold.

## **The will as a seed**

Steiner often turns to the image of the seed to describe inner development. The soul is a seed that bears the spirit within it, "just as the plant seed bears within it the plant of the following year" (1963/1912). This image conveys both potentiality and the patience required for moral and spiritual growth. A seed carries the future within it, yet its unfolding is slow, subtle, and largely hidden from view.

Understanding the will as a seed clarifies why inner development resists quick or visible results. Seeds do not respond to pressure; they require warmth, nourishment, and protection. Similarly, the will is formed through repeated gestures of moral orientation, self-observation, and disciplined practice. Broader neoliberal cultures, with their emphasis on productivity and continual improvement, intensify expectations for rapid change. Seeds also grow in relation to their environment. Human moral life is likewise formed within a web of relationships. The seed thus stands for both individual potential and collective responsibility. Its growth is influenced by the moral atmosphere of the community, and in turn it contributes to that atmosphere through its unfolding.

## **The awakening of spiritual perception**

The second stage involves the awakening of spiritual perception. This capacity becomes possible only when moral strength has been cultivated and the will ethically prepared. Spiritual perception requires a quieting of the reactive self and should become relational and participatory rather than merely cognitive. Small gestures, shifts in atmosphere, and unspoken tensions become perceptible, and the individual begins to discern how their own inner life participates in shaping the mood and moral tone of a situation. This mode of perception strengthens responsibility by revealing the interdependence of human beings within community.

## **Pure participation**

The third stage represents a qualitative shift in how the individual meets the world. Pure participation is not a set of techniques but a mature mode of consciousness in which thought, feeling, and will become more unified. The individual stands in an ethically attuned relation to reality, able to respond with openness, humility, and responsibility. Steiner suggests that spiritual cognition requires selfless “devotion to truth” (1994/1904); pure participation is one expression of this devotion in everyday life.

Pure participation involves the capacity to be present without being dominated by habitual patterns, personal ambition, or rigid judgement. Participation is both active and receptive: it means meeting what arises with clarity and compassion, and responding in ways that honour the integrity of the situation. Steiner’s treatment of polarities such as courage and discretion or firmness and flexibility is helpful here. These are not fixed character traits but dynamic movements that must be balanced contextually. Ethical action often emerges from the interval between extremes.

## A concluding gesture

Inner development is often framed as a personal pursuit, yet Steiner repeatedly emphasised that such work is inseparable from the social world. Moral and spiritual growth are shaped within community and, in turn, shape the ethical life of that community. This becomes particularly clear in Steiner education, where the moral atmosphere of the school is not created by teachers alone. It arises through the shared commitments, relationships, and inner practices of the entire school community, including parents and caregivers.

The sculpture gestures towards this dual movement: the world shapes the seed, and the seed shapes the world. As the seed develops, it contributes to the transformation of the world through the transformation of the self.

Steiner's project is fundamentally ethical and epistemological. He cautions that spiritual knowledge requires humility and moral seriousness: only to the extent that we exercise selfless devotion to truth can we become true researchers of the spirit (1994/1904). This guards against dogmatism by grounding spiritual insight in self-scrutiny and responsibility. Inner development, on this view, is never purely private. It is a social gesture, a collective responsibility, and a contribution to the wellbeing of others. It is a practice undertaken not simply for oneself, but for the betterment of all.

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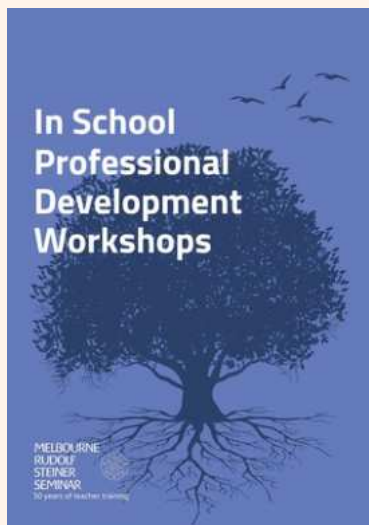
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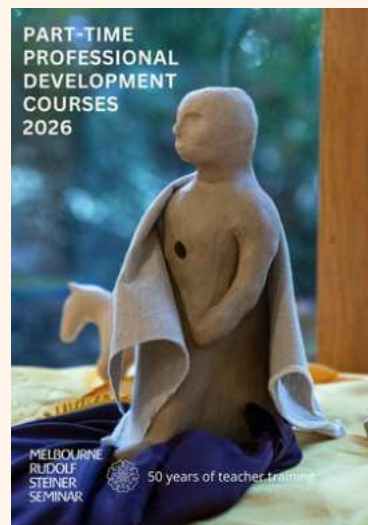
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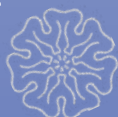
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