

seminar conversations

For Steiner / Waldorf teachers

Issue 3 T2 2026

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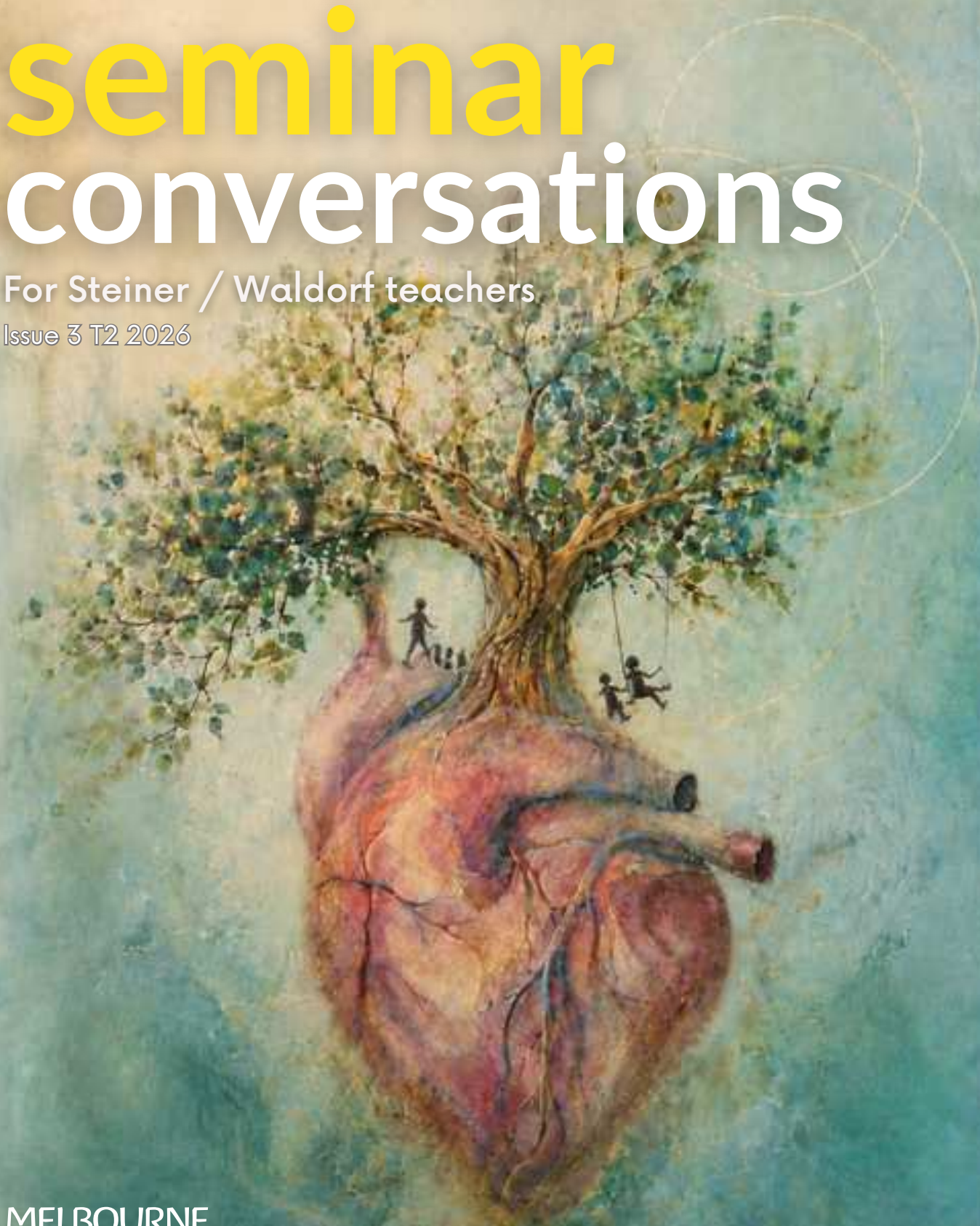




TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 Why Clay Matters: The Art of Sculpting Thinking, Feeling, and Willing >

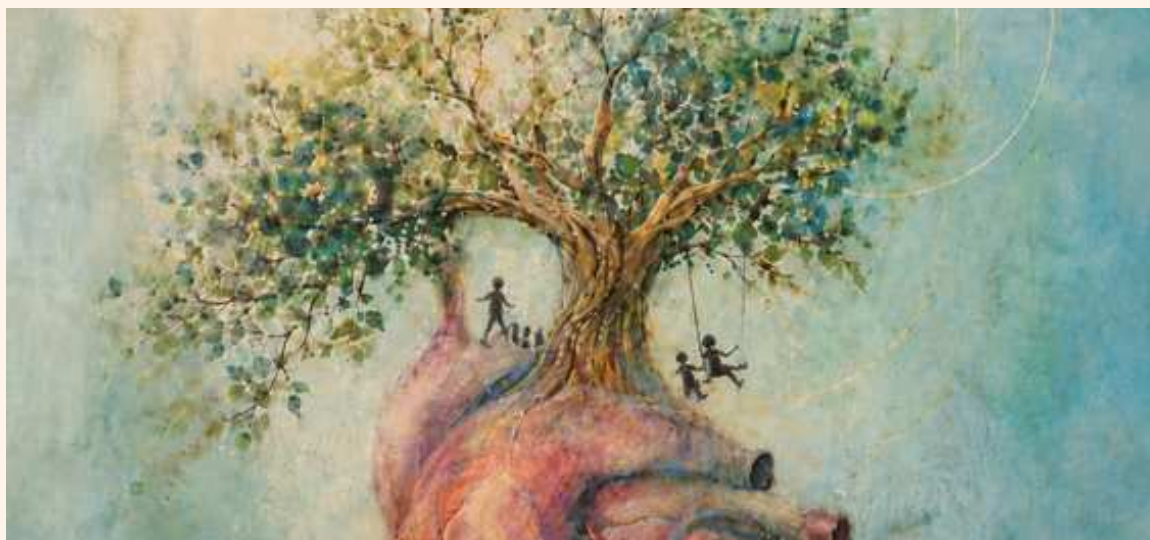
02 The Sense of Movement >

03 What Rudolf Steiner said about Child Development and Arithmetic >

04 The Foundational Bodily Senses as Pathways for Awakening Healthy Social Emotional Responses >

05 College and the Heart of the School >

06 Professional Development Courses >



Welcome to the third issue of *Seminar Conversations* & about the cover image

The heart lies at the centre of human life. Contemporary research continues to reveal the profound relationship between heart rhythm, breathing, the nervous system, hormonal activity, and our overall health, vitality, and wellbeing.

From an anthroposophical perspective, the heart and the entire rhythmic system are expressions of the etheric (life) organisation. The rhythms of the heart, breath, and other biological processes reflect the activity of the life body. Together with our soul life and the senses—particularly the sense of movement and the other foundational senses—these rhythms play a vital role in fostering balance, vitality, and healthy development. They provide an essential foundation for learning, growth, wellbeing, and the cultivation of a healthy body.

Within Steiner education, the College of Teachers is often described as the heart of the school. Just as a healthy rhythmic system supports the flourishing of the individual, a healthy and collaborative College supports the wellbeing, growth, and vitality of the entire school community.

In this edition of *Seminar Conversations*, we explore the relationship between movement, learning, healthy development, and the heart through the insights and experiences of tutors and contributors working across a range of Steiner educational disciplines.

We hope you enjoy this collection of articles and find inspiration, insight, and renewed appreciation for the central role that rhythm and movement play in education and human development.

Seminar Conversations is an initiative to contribute to a cultural fellowship amongst Steiner teachers and educators developing in Australia. We hope that by offering fresh perspectives and insights, born out 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.

Why Clay Matters: The Art of Sculpting Thinking, Feeling, and Willing

by Tania Hungerford



In an increasingly fast-paced and abstract world, clay modelling offers students an opportunity to reconnect with the tangible, sensory, and deeply human dimensions of learning. Through the shaping of form, students develop not only artistic skill, but also attentiveness, perseverance, creativity, and purposeful action. The encounter between hand, material, and imagination lies at the heart of Waldorf/Steiner education, nurturing capable, grounded, and imaginative young people.

Clay modelling holds an important place within the Visual Arts and Sculpture curriculum because it engages students in a direct and embodied experience of form. As a living and responsive material, clay invites continuous exploration through touch, movement, observation, and imagination. In contrast to the speed and abstraction of much contemporary life, modelling fosters patience, presence, and meaningful physical engagement.

More than a creative exercise, clay work supports the development of the whole human being. Through the steady process of shaping and reshaping, students cultivate flexibility, concentration, and resilience. Many senses are engaged simultaneously — touch, movement, balance, sight, temperature, and spatial awareness — creating a rich sensory experience that strengthens integration between thinking, feeling, and willing.

Sculptural work also contributes to both physical and cognitive development. Working with clay refines dexterity, strengthens the hands, and develops sensitivity to gesture, pressure, weight, and proportion. Arthur Auer described this as the development of the “emancipated hands” — hands capable of becoming instruments of conscious and purposeful activity. At the same time, modelling encourages flexible thinking and imaginative perception, as students continually adapt their ideas in response to the material before them.



Within Waldorf education, particular importance is placed on cultivating the will — the capacity to act with intention, initiative, and perseverance. Clay modelling offers a powerful means of strengthening these qualities because it requires sustained engagement, responsiveness, and careful observation. Rudolf Steiner expressed this educational aim clearly:

"Our highest endeavour must be to develop individuals who are able, out of their own initiative, to impart purpose and direction to their lives."

In modelling, this inner activity becomes visible. The sculptor continually adjusts movement and form in response to the changing qualities of the clay, demanding both discipline and openness.

The arts in Waldorf education are not regarded as supplementary subjects, but as essential pathways for learning and human development. Artistic activity deepens observation, strengthens imagination, and enriches understanding across the curriculum. This becomes especially evident in scientific and nature-based modelling studies. When students sculpt plant forms, animals, or human anatomy, they learn to perceive structure, movement, and relationship with increasing care.

CULTIVATING THE WILL



In Class 7 anatomical studies, for example, students usually draw, but they also may model human organs in clay, translating observation into three-dimensional understanding. Through this process, scientific study becomes both artistic and experiential, uniting conceptual understanding with sensory engagement.



Unlike drawing on a flat surface, sculptural work requires forms to be understood from all sides. Students must hold an active inner picture of the whole while continually refining their perception through touch and observation. Clay cannot be approached through intellect alone; it asks for responsiveness, imagination, and the intuitive intelligence of the hands.

In this way, clay modelling becomes far more than an artistic discipline. It offers a meaningful pathway toward embodied learning, creative thinking, and holistic human development.

About the writer / tutor

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.

Tania is giving a course [Clay and Wellbeing: a Therapeutic Journey through Touch, Movement, and Creativity](#) in Term 3, starting July 13th, 2026.

THE SENSE OF MOVEMENT

by Tom Hungerford



Human beings understand the world through movement long before they understand it through words.

The young child first experiences movement as self-movement. In the earliest months of life, the baby moves reflexively: arms and legs thrash through space without intention or direction. Gradually, however, something remarkable occurs. Reflex becomes intention. The child begins to reach for an object they desire, to roll over deliberately, to crawl towards a

goal. Movement is no longer simply happening within them — it is initiated by them.

Much has been written about this early developmental stage. Yet far less attention has been given to what follows. How do we continue to develop our sense of movement throughout life? What does it mean to refine movement consciously? And what is the deeper structure of movement itself?

These questions lead beyond physical coordination alone. They touch consciousness, perception, time, and even our relationship to the future.

The Structure of Movement

Sir Isaac Newton stated that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Rudolf Steiner and Fritz von Bothmer approached movement differently, suggesting that every movement contains a corresponding opposite movement within itself.

This can be observed clearly in sport.

Imagine preparing to strike a tennis ball. Before the racket moves forward, the arm draws back. The backward movement is not separate from the strike — it prepares and shapes it. At the very moment the arm begins its forward motion, there is also a simultaneous movement along the same pathway in the opposite direction.

Our physical movement travels towards the ball, while another movement seems to travel back towards the point from which the action began. The point at which the racket meets the ball becomes the point of greatest intensity — the meeting point of these two directions of movement.

This principle helps explain why the follow-through is so important in sport. In tennis, golf, cricket, football, archery, and many other disciplines, athletes devote enormous care to the completion of movement after the ball has been struck or the arrow released.

If movement were merely mechanical, the action would end at the point of contact. Yet experienced athletes know instinctively that the integrity of the movement depends upon its completion. A harmonious follow-through reveals that the movement as a whole has remained coherent and uninterrupted.



The success of any action depends upon how completely the physical movement can remain aligned with the movement in the etheric that is moving in the opposite direction.

Movement and Consciousness

As children develop, they learn to coordinate their physical movement with their inner sense of movement. Through this process they learn not only to walk, run, skip, and balance, but also to orient themselves meaningfully within the world.

Over time, this capacity extends beyond self-movement into the perception of movement more generally.

We have all witnessed dancers, martial artists, athletes, and craftspeople who seem to possess more time and space than others around them. They move effortlessly into the right position at precisely the right moment. Their movements appear almost intuitive.

Perhaps what they perceive is not merely the visible movement itself, but the direction and unfolding tendency within the etheric. They perceive where the movement is going at the same moment they perceive where it begins.

In ordinary life we do this constantly, often unconsciously. A parent catches a toddler just before they fall. A footballer moves instinctively towards the place where the ball will arrive. A driver senses another car's intention before it changes lanes.

Movement carries meaning before words are spoken.



Movement as Therapy

Movement also possesses profound therapeutic possibilities.

When movements are practised slowly and consciously, hidden habits and tensions begin to reveal themselves. Physical compensations that may have become deeply ingrained can gradually be softened and reorganised.

Slow, attentive movement creates the possibility for repair.

Through repeated practice, more harmonious patterns of movement may begin to work inwardly to the etheric before becoming established physically. In this way movement becomes not merely exercise, but a means of reshaping perception and consciousness itself.

To become more conscious of movement is also to become more conscious of our perception of the world.

The Language of Movement

It is through our sense of movement that we make sense of the movements surrounding us.

The bird weaving through the trees, the dog bounding across the grass, the rhythm of people walking through a crowded street — movement tells us what is happening before thought has time to analyse it.

Movement carries intention, emotion, rhythm, and meaning.



Perhaps this is why movement stands so close to the origins of language itself. Before we speak, we gesture. Before we explain, we move. Before concepts arise, there is orientation, direction, approach, withdrawal, balance, and flow.

The modern task may be to bring this unconscious wisdom into greater consciousness: to understand movement not merely as mechanics, but as a living bridge between body, perception, intention, and meaning.

About the writer / tutor

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 Anthroposophical 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.



WHAT RUDOLF STEINER SAID ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND ARITHMETIC

by Gordon Woolard



In the lecture course given by Rudolf Steiner in Sept-Oct 1920 entitled *The Boundaries of Natural Science*, GA 322¹, he asked 'Who, in the child, is the mathematician?' and he went on to say that this mathematician lives in every child, is initially asleep and needs to be awakened. He portrayed the process of a child's learning mathematics as an awakening from sleep. The following is my paraphrasing of key points in this lecture course, largely from the lecture of 29th September.

In normal development when does this mathematician first appear? It is at the onset of the change of teeth, around the age of 7. Up to this time, during the child's first seven years, the child's ether forces (not yet born but still embryonic, until age 7) have the task to form the metabolic organs. The child's astral powers (also embryonic, right up to age 14) have the task to form the child's sense organs during this first seven years of life.

At the onset of the change of teeth, the ether forces are born or individualised so that the child now has their own ether body. Also the



child's ether forces are no longer needed for the formation of the metabolic organs because that task is completed. So these forces are freed-up for another use. The use to which the child's freed ether forces is put is thinking, ordinary thinking.

At this same moment in the child's life, the astral powers (remaining embryonic, for their birth or individuation has to wait until age 14) have completed the formation-task to build the organs of sense. No longer needed for this task, they are freed-up for another. What is it ? The use to which the astral powers are put is 'mathematising' our mathematical thinking.

Here Rudolf Steiner used the German word 'mathematisieren' and hence the translation into 'mathematising'. Later in the lecture course he went into some detail as to what he meant by this word. He said: Addition and subtraction — Multiplication and division — Raising to a power and finding a root. So we could justifiably call this arithmetic or arithmetising.

Note: The details of the above indications, describing two events (not just the one event) that occur at the onset of the change of teeth and distinguishing between them, prove to be fairly unknown in the Waldorf world. Many are familiar with the consideration that the unborn ether forces form the organs (organs per se, not specifically the metabolic organs) and that these ether forces are freed at this point in life, to become the activity of thinking (thinking in general, not a specific kind of thinking to be discerned from mathematical thinking).

How could it have come about that this important indication has passed largely under the Waldorf radar, down the decades for over a century, since the time when Rudolf Steiner spoke about these things to audiences? I wonder if it is because (unlike the other courses under the heading 'Scientific' and given mainly to the teachers, all given in Stuttgart in the 1920's) this course was given at the Goetheanum in Dornach, then a day's journey away from Stuttgart. Also it was given in late September and early October when the teachers based in Stuttgart would have been busy with their daily work teaching in the school. Perhaps this is why it never became a part of 'Waldorf currency'?

Further, Rudolf Steiner went on to give more detail: Regarding the awakened mathematician in the child, the mathematising activity which consists of freed astral powers, this activity has its basis in the lower

senses, the senses of life, of movement and of balance. Specifically he stated that: addition and subtraction are based upon the sense of life; multiplication and division are based upon the sense of movement; raising to a power and finding a root are based upon the sense of balance.

Note : Elsewhere, in GA 115², in the lectures of Oct 23rd and 25th 1909 we read of how these three lower senses in turn are based upon the highest members of the human being, the Spirit Man, the Life Spirit, the Spirit Self. From these lectures we can gain pictures of the way in which each of these three lower senses is active.

Alas Rudolf Steiner did not give more detail on just how the three senses' activities give rise to the three corresponding arithmetic operations $+$ / $-$ and $\times$ / $\div$ and power/root. Perhaps we might, however, surmise that this very 'giving rise to' is the 'awakening' process he spoke of when saying that the mathematician in the child has only to awaken. I would say that the word-pictures in GA 115 certainly are a help in trying to bridge this gap.

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Rudolf Steiner Archive <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA322/>
2. Steiner, R. (1909, Oct 23rd and Oct 25th), *Anthroposophy I*, *Anthroposophy II*, GA115
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About the writer / tutor

Gordon Woolard has been a valued tutor with the Seminar, offering courses in Projective Geometry, Early Childhood, and Sensory Integration. His training includes university Physics, the Foundation and Education years at Emerson College, the Wynstones Science Teachers' course, the Michael Hall Kindergarten training, Joinery and Cabinet Making, a post graduate teaching diploma for SpLD (Dyslexia) and Audrey McAllen's Extra Lesson training.

On a quest for the roots of arithmetic, he tries to unravel the lower senses' developments of early childhood – as Rudolf Steiner indicated – and its application to the understanding of maths. Added to this is his experience as teacher, educator and Extra Lesson practitioner for children of all ages.

He applies the Extra Lesson methods to help children who struggle with literacy, numeracy, the school environment and the spatial world. He seeks to throw light on this work out of Rudolf Steiner's insights on the senses.

For the past twenty years in Europe and Asia Gordon has given training to teachers working in Waldorf and in mainstream education – inspired by anthroposophy – and brings workshops that link the kindred themes of projective geometry, the Philosophy of Freedom and the observation of plants.

He is giving a course *Primary Maths Through Hands and Feet* in Term 3, starting July 16th, 2026.

The Foundational Bodily Senses as Pathways for Awakening Healthy Social Emotional Responses

by Terri McMillan



Behaviour is the way we communicate the effect a situation has on us - emotionally, psychologically, in our actions and in our thinking. It reflects our inner perception or 'soul response' to the circumstance and provides an opportunity for us to 'awaken'.

We awaken in our behavioural response through our twelve senses. They enable us to learn as we receive, sort and process sensory input from our bodies and environment. Learning is complex, emergent and individual. It lays the foundation for individuation through self-realisation and the transformation of potential. This occurs as an unfolding 'I' organisation supports us to form higher level social and cognitive skills, to sense our own well-being and build a capacity to emotionally and behaviourally self-regulate. It is our 'I' organisation that enables us to feel 'a oneness', to sense 'it is me', and to behave appropriately.

The infant is just beginning this journey of self-realisation when, from conception, a karmically enfolded being grows in preparation for birth out of the realm of spirit and into matter.

Although all senses are present at birth, they progressively evolve and develop in alignment with the seven year phases of child development, coinciding with the births of the physical, etheric and astral bodies.

The infant 'awakens' to their own body, and the path of human development is initiated, as they experience the sense of touch through the intimacy of a parent's warming love. The soul/spirit nature then begins to take hold of the body via the dynamic etheric or life stream within it and, out of the impression of touch, the will to move becomes the unconscious response. The infant gently draws into itself and, emerging slowly out of an unfiltered 'oneness' with their environment, a germinal sense of self manifests, shaping and reconciling the infant's understanding of the world.

Movement is therefore an expression of the soul spirit incarnating into the body, and the activity of the etheric stream shaping and organising it. Touch speaks to the infant of their body, and the infant responds in self-movement or proprioception. Awareness of body position



then begins to arise providing the framework for developing body geography.

Movement supports muscle development as balance, or the vestibular sense, is unconsciously sought and sympathetic neural pathways within the body's bounds multiply¹. Through balance the 'I' sense becomes anchored into the physical body.

The Importance of the First Seven Years in Awakening to Self

Rudolf Steiner emphasised the enormous significance of the first seven years in the development and maturation of the foundational, bodily senses of touch, wellbeing, self-movement and balance. During this phase when the etheric stream is most directly involved in formative inner activity, the experience of separateness is progressively supported as the child moves, prompting a germinal realisation of self².

This occurs when sensory integration takes place as:

- a) the intimacy of touch provides an inner experience of body boundary and a sense of security;
- b) the life sense arises out of a feeling of comfort or disharmony through adaptation to the general rhythm of life;
- c) the sense of self-movement (proprioception) forms muscle memory and interconnection;
- d) the sense of balance (vestibular) strengthens confidence in the experience of uprightness.

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR AND SENSORY OVERWHELM

Free movement and play is essential for the foundational bodily senses to integrate and mature. Extensive, progressively complex, neurological organisation develops in the child left free to orientate themselves in space and engage in their immediate world. With independent movement self-reliance grows building the child's sense of wholeness - of integrated being. This process of individuation, nurtured through free movement, will manifest as the crucial ability to master and self-regulate emotion and behaviour.

Overwhelm in Sensory Processing and its Impact on our Sense of Self

An individual's behaviour patterns and capacity to self-regulate reveal unique sensitivities and processing pathways. Challenging or atypical behavioural patterns arise when sensory overwhelm interrupts integration and healthy reception and processing of sense impressions are disturbed. Neurological organisation is then inhibited.

For the sensitive or heightened child, sensory overwhelm impacts the sympathetic nervous system resulting in tension, anxiety and an 'over' or 'under' response. Extreme emotional outbursts or, contrastingly, an inner gesture of withdrawal, may both signal a struggle to filter outer world stimulation³. Regardless, the tender soul/spirit struggles to master their physical constitution causing insufficient integration.

Poor mastery of the physical constitution when dysregulation to sensory input occurs profoundly impacts an experience of self. Disorientation and confusion disrupt a child's capacity to both sense themselves and to feel joy in their engagement with the world. A self perception of being 'inadequate' or 'flawed' may arise. Inner forces required for an 'I' sense experience become stunted and the child's life intention and potential is frustrated.



FREE PLAY TO SUPPORT MUSCLE DEVELOPMENT & FOUNDATIONAL SENSES



Reviving the expanse between child and the world so sensory overwhelm is reduced

Freedom to move and play unhindered is fundamental to the integration of the foundational senses in the first 7 years of life. Out of movement the child finds equilibrium and calm, if composed, centred adults surround them and activity unfolds in an ordered, rhythmical and familiar environment.

Some infants have had little opportunity for free movement. Nursery equipment can place infants into postural positions before they have achieved independent muscle development and integrated the foundational senses of self-movement and balance. The infant's neck is especially ill-equipped to support the head before they bring themselves into uprightness out of their own inner forces. Playpens, walkers, bouncinettes, and excessive time spent in car seats reduce movement opportunities. Passive time in front of screens, frequently with rapid animation, leave the child unable to integrate what is ultimately a sensory assault.

*"The child wants to be active simply out of a natural and inborn impulse. Play activity streams outward from within."*⁴ Rudolf Steiner

In contrast, embedded in healthy early childhood tasks and free play as children dig, sweep, polish, wash, sort, and tidy, are archetypal patternings of spiral, lemniscate, straight line, triangle, point and circle, all necessary for ego organisation⁵. Each movement requires lifting, stretching, pushing, pulling and carrying – tension and relaxation, expansion and contraction- requiring constant adjustment of bodily position as the child intentionally moves.

MORNING CIRCLE TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENTAL MOVEMENT

Strengthening of proprioception and vestibular movement patterning can easily be replicated in classroom morning circle work, particularly in early primary years. Carefully observed, a child's personal movement responses will enable educators to recognise where remediation is necessary. Displays of poor postural and motor control and erratic, unregulated behaviour, will attest to this. Specific daily movements/exercises brought pictorially and contextually will, given time, enable significant developmental improvements due to the remarkable neuroplasticity of the brain. Some children however may need individual remedial attention.

Developing Potential for Learning Through Remediation of Sensory Processing in Classes 1 and 2

*"The significant and most important task for the class teacher years consists in a gradual progression from play to work."*⁷ Rudolf Steiner

Having taken possession of the body in their first 7 years, the child is ready to learn through the expression of its own inner feeling and thinking nature. The formative etheric forces principally engaged inwardly in completing the bodily structure now transform into imaginative, feeling thinking with understanding arising out of a pictorial presentation.

Rudolf Steiner advises "We must lead.. [the child].. in harmony with what wants to flow from its being without with any kind of intellectual descriptions".⁸

Remnant imitative capacity together with the child's newly forming faculty of imagination can be utilized especially between 7 and 9 years.⁹ Morning circle activity can incorporate and replicate archetypal developmental movement within a daily routine of repetitive, rhythmical movements. Movement that arises out of pedagogically appropriate, imaginative content, will strengthen sensory integration, muscle memory and spatial awareness. The life forces of the child, the carrier of the habit pattern, will be activated and the child will look healthier as their etheric begins to glow.



The entire class benefits and a warm, socially integrated atmosphere will be built in the joy each child feels as they actively, often humorously, work together in movements activated through rich imaginations which have inwardly stirred their will to engage.

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3. Audrey McAllen "The Extra Lesson" 1985.
4. Rudolf Steiner "The Child's Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education" Lectures given April 1923
5. Joep Eikonboom Waldorf Journal Extra lesson 'Extra Lesson'
6. Rudolf Steiner "The Child's Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education" Lectures given April 1923
7. Ayres, A. Jean (1979), Sensory Integration and Your Child. Western Psychological Services.
8. Rudolf Steiner "The Child's Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education" Lectures given April 1923
9. R. Steiner: "Up until approximately the ninth year (the child) wants to participate in the formation of the picture – it will not yet play the role of spectator." P.109 ibid.

Specific movement patterns:

Unfortunately the scope of this brief article is inadequate to provide an explanation of archetypal movement patterns that can be incorporated in classroom morning circle. Educators can research Sensory Processing Pathways and movements that be incorporated into class work in the fields of Sensory Integration Programs (Jean Ayres), Extra Lesson (Audrey McAllen), Therapeutic Eurythmy, specific Occupational Therapy among others. Each approach adopts play, active movement, and archetypal movement patterning to effectively support children to feel at home in their bodies and reduce learning and social problems .

There may be an opportunity to workshop specific age-appropriate movement activities at an Intensive to be held at the Seminar in 2027.



Sensory Processing Pathways:

Position in space and Balance supported by:

- The primary reflexes
- Postural reflexes
- Retained reflexes
- Stretching and lifting
- Creeping/ Crawling
- Laterality
- Dominance
- Self-movement or proprioceptive sense
- Body Geography
- Vestibular

"Our task is to do what we can to open up the stream through which their sense of place in the world and within themselves can better flow". Kim Payne and Bonnie River¹⁵

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About the writer / tutor

Terri McMillan is a teacher of 35 years experience in a Steiner School and 5 years in the State system. She co-founded the Maingdample Steiner School (now Mansfield), took two classes through the Primary Class Teacher period, and was a senior geography teacher for the past 10 years. Terri co-authored the Steiner Geography Curriculum for the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework.



COLLEGE AND THE HEART OF THE SCHOOL

by Rod Tomlinson



"We will not organize the school to be governed from above but collegially and will direct it in a republican way. In a true teachers' republic we will not have the cushioning of prescriptive directions coming from a headmaster but rather, we must contribute [that which we carry in ourselves], that which every one of us can offer, what each of us has the possibility to offer, in complete responsibility toward what we have to do. Each one of us must be fully responsible."[1]

[1] "Deshalb werden wir die Schule nicht regierungsgemäß, sondern verwaltungsgemäß einrichten und sie republikanisch verwalten. In einer wirklichen Lehrer-Republik werden wir nicht hinter uns haben Ruhekissen (rest-cushions), Verordnungen (prescriptions), die vom Rektorat kommen, sondern wir müssen hineintragen [in uns tragen] dasjenige, was uns die Möglichkeit gibt, was jedem von uns die volle Verantwortung gibt für das, was wir zu tun haben. Jeder muß selbst voll verantwortlich sein." Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7 of Steiner's Opening Address on the Eve of the Teachers' Seminar, Stuttgart, 20 August, 1919.

Of Colleges and Headmasters – an introduction

The first Waldorf school which Rudolf Steiner inaugurated in Stuttgart in Germany in 1919, was initiated with a uniquely significant organisational feature – it didn't have a headmaster but was run by a 'College' made up of the teachers in the school (along with Emil Molt, the Business Manager, Karl Stockmeyer, the Educational Administrator, and Rudolf Steiner, the Director of Education).

Comparable arrangements continue to be instituted in Steiner schools worldwide and this was also the case in Steiner schools that started in Australia before the turn of the Millenium.

Since the turn of the Millenium - in Australia and elsewhere – there have been some persuasive, pragmatic justifications made for instituting the office of a headmaster or principal in the organisational structure of Steiner schools. In some states of Australia it was understood that it was going to become a statutory obligation. In some schools it was conceived of as a necessary corrective or 'triage' to organisational problems perceived as stemming from dysfunction in the College.

This 'Principal Model' is currently understood by most Steiner teachers to be the only way to organise a Steiner school. That this is not the case is attested to by a number of Steiner schools in Australia who still operate under the directorship of their College of Teachers and one that successfully 'reverted' four years ago, reinstating the College's direction of their school, without *"the cushioning of prescriptive directions" and decisions, "coming from a headmaster"*. [2]

Can We Afford to Disregard This Question?

A review of Steiner's own statements on this organisational feature of the first school will not only help to better understand his position and his reasoning for this but will also serve to draw attention to why, in 1920, he might have identified the presence of this organisational feature, and only this organisational feature, *as the basis for his endorsement of other schools as being in the spirit of his movement for educational renewal*. [3]

To begin with, let's consider two of the key underlying ideas which informed Steiner's thinking in this regard.



The Principle of Authority is an Anachronism in Our Time

Firstly, in 1923, Steiner shared his conviction that, "After the nineteenth century ended, from that time forward, social life was no longer ruled in the same way by the principle of authority." [4] For Steiner, this meant that the exercise of authority by one human being over another human being, would become an anachronism in our time and increasingly problematic. This led Steiner to recognise the need for circumstances to be created, somewhere in the social fabric, that would be conducive to human beings developing the skills and capacities to work together collaboratively and harmoniously, such that there was no longer any need to resort to the cushioning of prescriptive directions from an authority. His mandate to the teachers of the first Waldorf school was for each and every one of them to take full responsibility for their work and conduct in the school – to the same degree that conventionally this would be expected of a school principal or a headmaster – this effectively promoted all of the teaching staff to fulfilling the role of principal, to becoming co-Principals. Having formed a College of Teachers, they appointed three of their members to a College Executive responsible for executing the will of the College in the day-to-day management of the school (in smaller schools, this may be limited to just one executive member, acting as Chairperson of the College). This arrangement satisfied any external party's need for a 'Principal', but it is critical to note that they were appointed by, and reported to, the College – they were the Executive Officer of the College of Teachers, not a Chief Executive Officer executing the will of a School Board.

A Conscious Form of Social Understanding Must Take Place

Secondly, Steiner regarded the development of new ways of learning to work harmoniously and effectively together, as one of the most important evolutionary demands of our time, "Human beings should learn to live together and understand one another. *If this human fellowship is not achieved, all talk of spiritual development is empty.*"[5] In other words, of all the possible lines of self-actualisation, or of spiritual development available to us today, none of them are as important as learning how to live together harmoniously, how to understand one another, and work together fruitfully and effectively. If there was any hope of these ideals being developed somewhere in the social fabric of the present, surely teachers would be able to work it out and learn the new skills and capacities necessary to respond effectively to Steiner's challenging mandate.

Steiner's indications as to the inner transformation that would allow for the birth of this new *conscious* form of social understanding sound deceptively simple; "A conscious form of social understanding must take place... An understanding that there is this type of person and there is that type of person, and, with each, one must deal differently... No progress will be made towards a true practical understanding of the human being until we... make up our minds to take people as they are."[6]

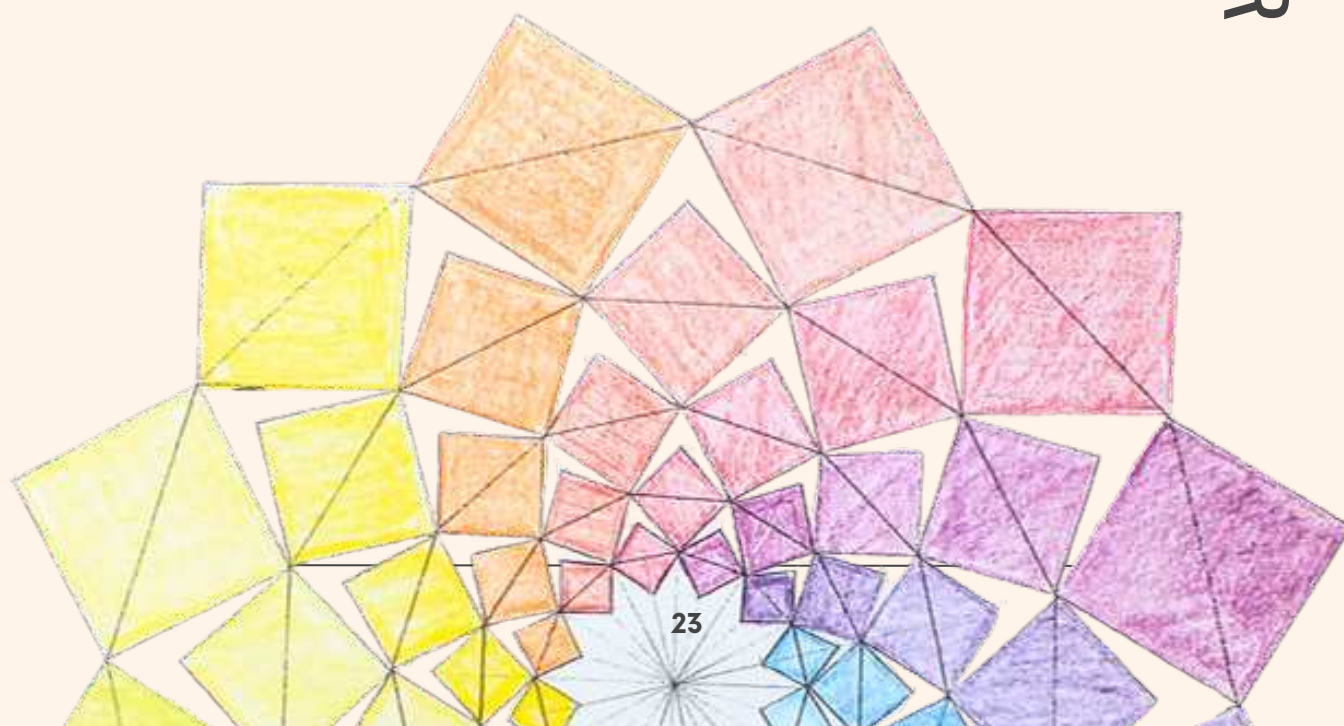


Conscious Social Understanding and Skilful Means

Working and living by this principle, this *modus operandi* demands of us that we collectively and collaboratively share our views on everything happening in the school and endeavour to arrive at a mutual understanding of one another's views, and in the process of doing so, negotiate mutually acceptable ways of proceeding, together. Not exercising any perceived privilege of office, status, reputation, or force of personality that may tempt us to override a colleague's view or position, but to hear their reasons for adopting a position that differs from ours and together find a resolution, that both of us can accept and agree to, that allows us to proceed together. This requires a great deal more conscious, social understanding and skilful means than we currently possess but Steiner demonstrates and provides a plethora of indications and guidance in order to support us in undertaking the development of such capacities,[7] but note that Steiner recognised the need to create the circumstances first, which would necessitate the development of these fresh capacities.

Was Steiner the Headmaster of the First Waldorf School?

Steiner's role as Director of Education in the first school was a subject of discussion in one of the College of Teachers' meetings in 1920. He had been asked by one of the teachers, how was his role as 'Director of Education' distinct from the role of a headmaster? Steiner responded at some length, but significantly summarised his case in the following way, "My relationship to the College must be one, where neither I *nor anyone else* wills or wants something against the will of any other member of the College." [8]



Hamlet's Other Question: To Do or Not To Do?

Many will argue that these capacities are beyond our means to achieve at present. But consider for a moment the question, do we actualise new capacities by waiting for them to arrive in our laps, or are we called on to engage with one another differently to bring them into being, to *develop* these capacities because we recognise that we have been placed in circumstances that necessitate their development? Rudolf Steiner saw that to catalyse the evolution of these capacities, some of us would have to engage in some form of collaborative endeavour which would require of us that we bring these faculties into being.

Steiner characterises our present times as, "An age... in which, it is essential that people, as individuals, form their *own* judgements." [9] The development of this independence of thought, independent judgement and capacity for sound decisions is key to understanding why Steiner granted teachers the responsibility for collegially giving direction to the school.

And if not us, then who? And if not now, then when? And if not like this, then how?

Self-Responsible and Self-Directing

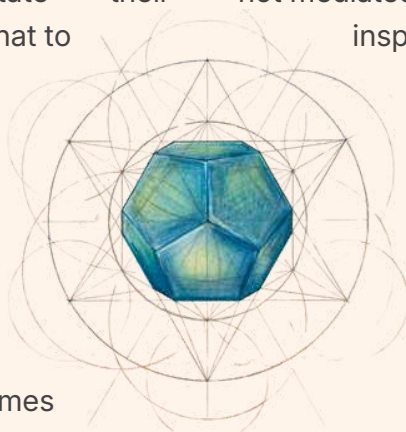
In 1921 Steiner goes on to say that these organisational arrangements are integral to realising his renewal of education, "The school must be self-managing; teachers cannot be civil servants. They must be fully their own masters, because they know a higher master than any outer circumstance, the spiritual life itself, to whom they stand in a direct connection, that is not mediated by school officials, principals, inspectors, school boards, and so forth.

The activity of teaching, if it is really independent, requires this direct connection to the sources of spiritual life.

Because only teachers who possess this direct connection are then able to convey the reality of the spirit to the children in their classes." [10]

"Educators and teachers can only allow individual faculties [of students] to develop freely because their own have been given free rein." [11]

Working in this way demands of us that we fully appreciate that, "Each one of us must be completely responsible" [12] and that "This can only be achieved if everyone commits their full personality to it. Everyone must commit their full personality to it from the very beginning." [13]



Abrogation of Individual Responsibility to the Anachronistic Principle of Authority

Why can it appear to be so challenging to take on this responsibility for the directing of a school? Steiner points out a couple of antagonistic forces that need to be recognised and countered, if realisation of this new republican ideal of working as a College of Teachers is to be realised. One is the reassertion of the now anachronistic desire for someone in authority to relieve us of our responsibility, “[At the present] we find a marked conflict between germinating liberty of thought and the principle of authority which works into our times like a hang-over from the past... In previous epochs we were endowed by nature with sound understanding; now we must acquire sound understanding, develop it, and our belief in authority holds us back from doing so.” [14]

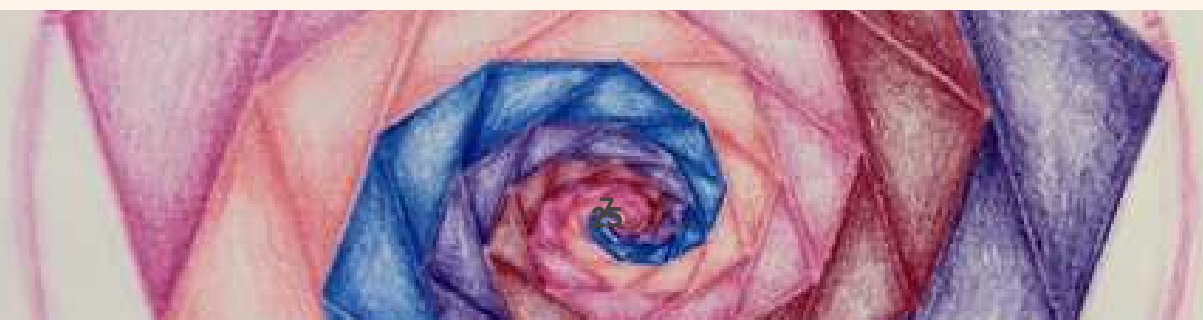
Societal Prejudice against Teachers Practical Competence

Secondly, Steiner points out a generally held prejudice that teachers are impractical people, ill-equipped to arrive at sound decisions, incapable of wisely directing a school's operations. “What is the source of these prejudices? We recognize their antisocial nature when we perceive that they originate in the unconscious belief that teachers are impractical people who cannot be trusted to

assume practical responsibilities on their own. It is assumed that all organization must be carried out by those who are engaged in practical matters, and educators should act according to the terms of reference determined for them... This assumption ignores the fact that it is just when teachers are not permitted to determine their own functions that they tend to become impractical and remote from reality. As long as the so-called experts determine the terms of reference according to which they must function, they will never be in a position to turn out practical individuals who are equipped for life by their education... It is anti-social to allow our youth to be educated by people who themselves have become strangers to reality because the conduct and content of their work has been dictated to them from without.”[15]

Republicanism Not Anarchism

It is critical to note here that Steiner did not intend for teachers to directly 'administer' or 'run' the school themselves. Instead, the College of Teachers functions much like a school board does. Meeting weekly, the College not only shares their work, learnings, and consults with colleagues concerning their challenges, they also receive and review reports from school officers—such as the business manager, educational administrator, and principal, etc—and provides them with counsel and direction as needed.

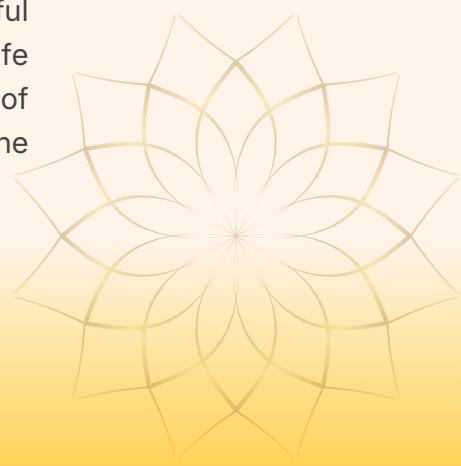


What Was Given Birth in the Schools was to Bear Further Fruit in the Rest of Society

As we begin to appreciate Steiner's intentions in inaugurating the first schools in this way, we also begin to appreciate more fully the far-reaching significance of these organisational arrangements for Steiner. They were intended to respond to the evolutionary demands of present-day humanity and to do so in the educational realm as a way to transform the rest of society by giving birth to these capacities amongst teachers because they were engaged in working in this form of collaborative republicanism.

The Centre of Gravity Descends from the 'Head' into the Heart of the School

Steiner describes this role of the College as one where the whole life of the school comes into the College's deliberations in its meetings, whereby it functions as a central organ, taking all that has occurred in the previous week into its discussions and deliberations and giving birth to fresh impulses, life and direction which the teachers would carry into the life of the school throughout the following week. This collaborative work and developing capacities of the teachers replaces the need for a Headmaster. "The teachers' every practical experience in school becomes part of their own education... gaining a profound psychological insight into the practical side of education on the one hand, and on the other, insights into the children's qualities, characters, and temperaments. All the experiences and knowledge acquired from the teaching are pooled at these meetings. Thus, in spirit and soul, the College of Teachers becomes a whole, in which each member knows what the others are doing, what experience has taught them, and what progress they have made as the result of their work in the classroom with the children. In effect, the College of Teachers becomes a central organ from which the whole life of practical teaching flows, helping teachers to maintain their freshness and vitality. Perhaps the best effect of all is that the meetings enable teachers to maintain their inner vitality... It must be the teacher's constant aim to maintain a youthful freshness of soul and spirit, but this cannot be done unless real life flows through a central organ, just as human blood flows into and out of the heart. This is... what teachers work for in their meetings at the Waldorf school." [16]



Steiner's Insistence on College Direction without a Headmaster

In 1920, Steiner gave a further indication of the wide-ranging significance of these distinguishing features of his schools, when he made it apparent that for him, these organisational features were the key to receiving his endorsement that another school was 'comparable to', and was 'formed in the spirit of', the original Waldorf School; "A few months ago someone came to me who wanted to found something similar to the Waldorf School, in France... I told her I could recognize what she wants to form in Paris as being in the spirit of the Waldorf School only **if they organise the school in exactly the same way** that we organised the Waldorf School... [17]Otherwise, I would have to strictly deny that it was comparable..."[18]

Four Questions

These four 'principles' offer us a valuable basis for review of the degree of our congruence with some of these more radical features of Steiner's renewal of education:

1. Are we assuming full responsibility for developing and exercising our own sound faculty of discernment in the discharge of all of our responsibilities?
2. Are we succumbing to the temptation of the 'freedom' from responsibility that prescriptive directions from an authority offer?
3. Are we willing or wanting anything against the will of any of our colleagues?
4. Have we organised our school in exactly the same way that Steiner organised the original Waldorf School?

To be continued in the next edition. Please see next page for references.

About the writer / tutor

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 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 continues to work with schools' teachers, management and governance in NSW, Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria.

References

- [1] "Deshalb werden wir die Schule nicht regierungsgemäß, sondern verwaltungsgemäß einrichten und sie republikanisch verwalten. In einer wirklichen Lehrer-Republik werden wir nicht hinter uns haben Ruheklissen (rest-cushions), Verordnungen (prescriptions), die vom Rektorat kommen, sondern wir müssen hineinragen [in uns tragen] dasjenige, was uns die Möglichkeit gibt, was jedem von uns die volle Verantwortung gibt für das, was wir zu tun haben. Jeder muß selbst voll verantwortlich sein." Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7 of Steiner's Opening Address on the Eve of the Teachers' Seminar, Stuttgart, 20 August, 1919.
- [2] This was Rudolf Steiner's initial formulation of the arrangement in his 'Opening Address' to the teachers, on Wednesday evening of 20 August 1919 (cf. Rudolf Steiner, *The First Teachers' Course: Anthropological Foundations, Methods of Teaching, Practical Discussions* pp. 16-18)
- [3] Rudolf Steiner, *Faculty Meetings*, Saturday 24. Juli 1920, 18 Uhr (GA 300a).
- [4] Rudolf Steiner, *Awakening to Community*, Lecture 8, 2.III.1923, Dornach (GA 257).
- [5] Rudolf Steiner, *Vor dem Tore der Theosophie*, Lecture 11, 1.IX.1906, Stuttgart (GA 95).
- [6] Rudolf Steiner, 'How Can the Destitution of Soul in Modern Times Be Overcome?' 10.X.1916, Zürich (GA 168).
- [7] cf. Steiner's indications for participating effectively and fruitfully in College meetings in 'The College' booklet at <https://www.pedagogicalsectionaus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-College-7thSep2021.pdf>.
- [8] "Daher muß es... daß meine Stellung zum Lehrerkollegium diejenige ist, die nicht von mir oder von irgend jemand gewollt wird gegen den Willen irgendeines Mitglieds des Lehrerkollegiums." Rudolf Steiner, *Faculty Meetings*, 22.IX.1920 Stuttgart (GA 300a).
- [9] Rudolf Steiner, *Awakening to Community*, Lecture 2, 30.I.1923, Stuttgart (GA 257).
- [10] "Dieses immer fort und fort aus dem lebendigen geistigen Quell Herausschöpfen, das ist das, was unseren Lehrern eigen sein soll. Da muß man sich dem geistigen Leben gegenüber verantwortlich fühlen. Dann muß man das geistige Leben frei wissen, dann muß die Schule Selbstverwaltung haben, dann darf nicht der Lehrer ein Beamter sein; er muß vollständig sein eigener Herr sein; denn er erkennt einen erhabeneren Herren an als eine äußere Instanz, das geistige Leben selber, zu dem er in einer unmittelbaren Beziehung steht, nicht durch Schulbehörden, durch Rektoren oder Schulinspektoren oder Oberschulräte, Studienräte und so weiter hindurch. Ein wirklich freies Schulleben hat dieses direkte Inbeziehungstehen zu den Quellen des geistigen Lebens notwendig." Rudolf Steiner, *Rudolf Steiner In The Waldorf School*, 13.I.1921, Stuttgart (GA 298).

References

[11] Rudolf Steiner, 'The Threefold Social Order and Educational Freedom', in *The Renewal of the Social Organism*.

[12] "Deshalb werden wir die Schule nicht regierungsgemäß, sondern verwaltungsgemäß einrichten und sie republikanisch verwalten. In einer wirklichen Lehrer-Republik werden wir nicht hinter uns haben Ruhekissen (rest-cushions), Verordnungen (prescriptions), die vom Rektorat kommen, sondern wir müssen hineintragen [in uns tragen] dasjenige, was uns die Möglichkeit gibt, was jedem von uns die volle Verantwortung gibt für das, was wir zu tun haben. Jeder muß selbst voll verantwortlich sein." Steiner's Opening Address on the Eve of the Teachers' Seminar, Stuttgart, 20 August, 1919 in Rudolf Steiner, *The First Teachers' Course: Anthropological Foundations, Methods of Teaching, Practical Discussions* pp. 16-18.

[13] Steiner's 'Opening Address' on the Eve of the Teachers' Seminar, Stuttgart, 20 August, 1919 in Rudolf Steiner, *The First Teachers' Course: Anthropological Foundations, Methods of Teaching, Practical Discussions* pp. 16-18.

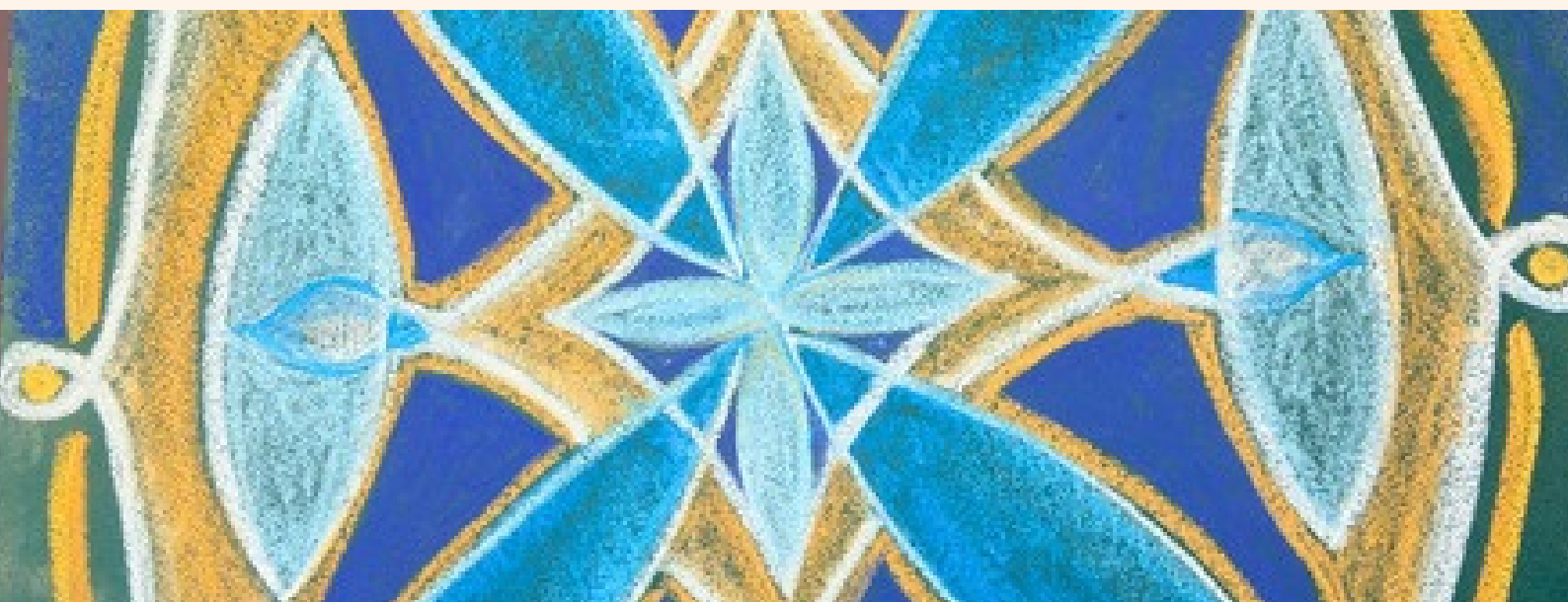
[14] Rudolf Steiner, 'How Can the Destitution of Soul in Modern Times Be Overcome?' 10.X.1916, Zürich (GA 168).

[15] Rudolf Steiner, 'Vorrede und Einleitung', *Die Kernpunkte Der Sozialen Frage In Den Lebensnotwendigkeiten Der Gegenwart Und Zukunft* (GA 23).

[16] Rudolf Steiner, *A Modern Art Of Education*, 17.VIII.1923, Ilkley (GA 307).

[17] "...wenn es ganz genau ebenso eingerichtet würde, wie die Waldorfschule eingerichtet ist."

[18] Rudolf Steiner, *Faculty Meetings*, 24. VII.1920, Stuttgart (GA 300a).



Professional Development Courses

Primary Maths Through Hands and Feet

Online, Term 3, Thursdays, 7 - 9pm, starting 16th July

This course aims to equip teachers with visible and tactile methods for the teaching of primary maths. As an example of the classroom teaching method, the teacher guides the children through phases of visible picture-making to memory and mental picture to concept. This addresses the need of all children to inwardly picture number-relationships, and especially the needs of those who struggle to do this. An understanding of this approach enables teachers to create their own techniques.

Tutor Gordon Woolard is an experienced Maths and Physics teacher of Waldorf high school Maths and Physics, Kindergarten, Extra Lesson and SpLD (Dyslexia).

For more details and timetable, visit

<https://teachsteiner.org/PrimaryMaths>



Clay and Wellbeing - *a Therapeutic Journey through Touch, Movement, and Creativity*

Online, Mondays, starting July 13th 7 - 8.30pm



This course invites participants into a healing, creative relationship with clay as a living medium. Clay engages the four foundational senses (touch, life, movement, balance), supporting will development, nervous system regulation, and embodied presence. Sessions combine hands-on clay work with reflective practice, offering tools for personal wellbeing and for use with children or groups in therapeutic and educational settings.

<https://teachsteiner.org/ClayandWellbeing>

Professional Development Courses

Primary Rudolf Steiner Education: the Class Teacher years 1-6

Online, Tuesdays, starting July 14th 7 - 9.00pm



In Term 3, Terri McMillan will start teaching the Class 1 curriculum, including child development phase at this age, Main Lessons, Morning Circle work, Fairy Tales, Nature Stories, and the Class 1 artistic activities. Pauline Lucas will be covering the Class 5 curriculum.

For more details and timetable, visit <https://teachsteiner.org/Primary>.

The Art of Communication

Communicate and Relate Professionally and Handle Conflict

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Learn the Art of Goethean Conversation, anthroposophical and mainstream insights and techniques of communication and apply the skills to conversations with children and teenagers, family, friends and colleagues, in group meetings, but also 'self conversation'.

<https://teachsteiner.org/communications>

Early Childhood Rudolf Steiner Education

Online, Wed 7-8.30pm, Term 3 starts on July 15th



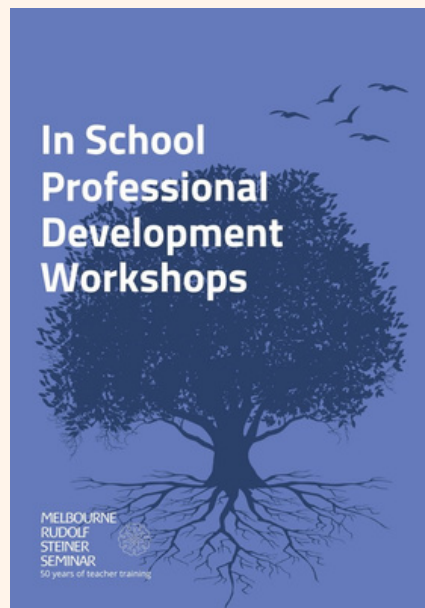
Term 3 of this one-year part-time course will cover the Art of Storytelling and Sensory Integration. It offers parents and early childhood educators the opportunity to deepen their understanding of Rudolf Steiner education for the first 7 years of childhood.

<https://teachsteiner.org/EarlyChildhood>

Other Professional Development Courses

In-School Professional Development Programme

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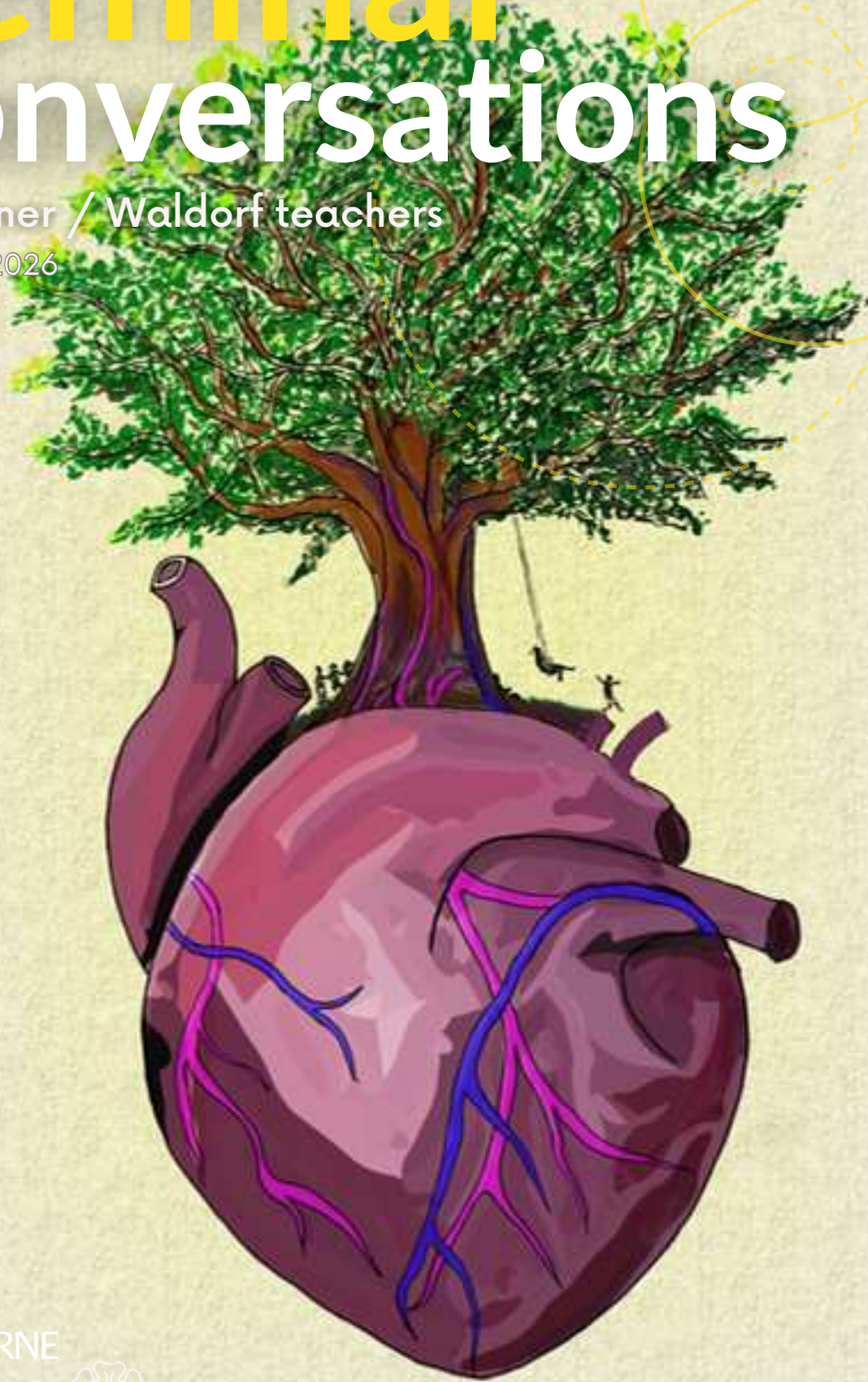


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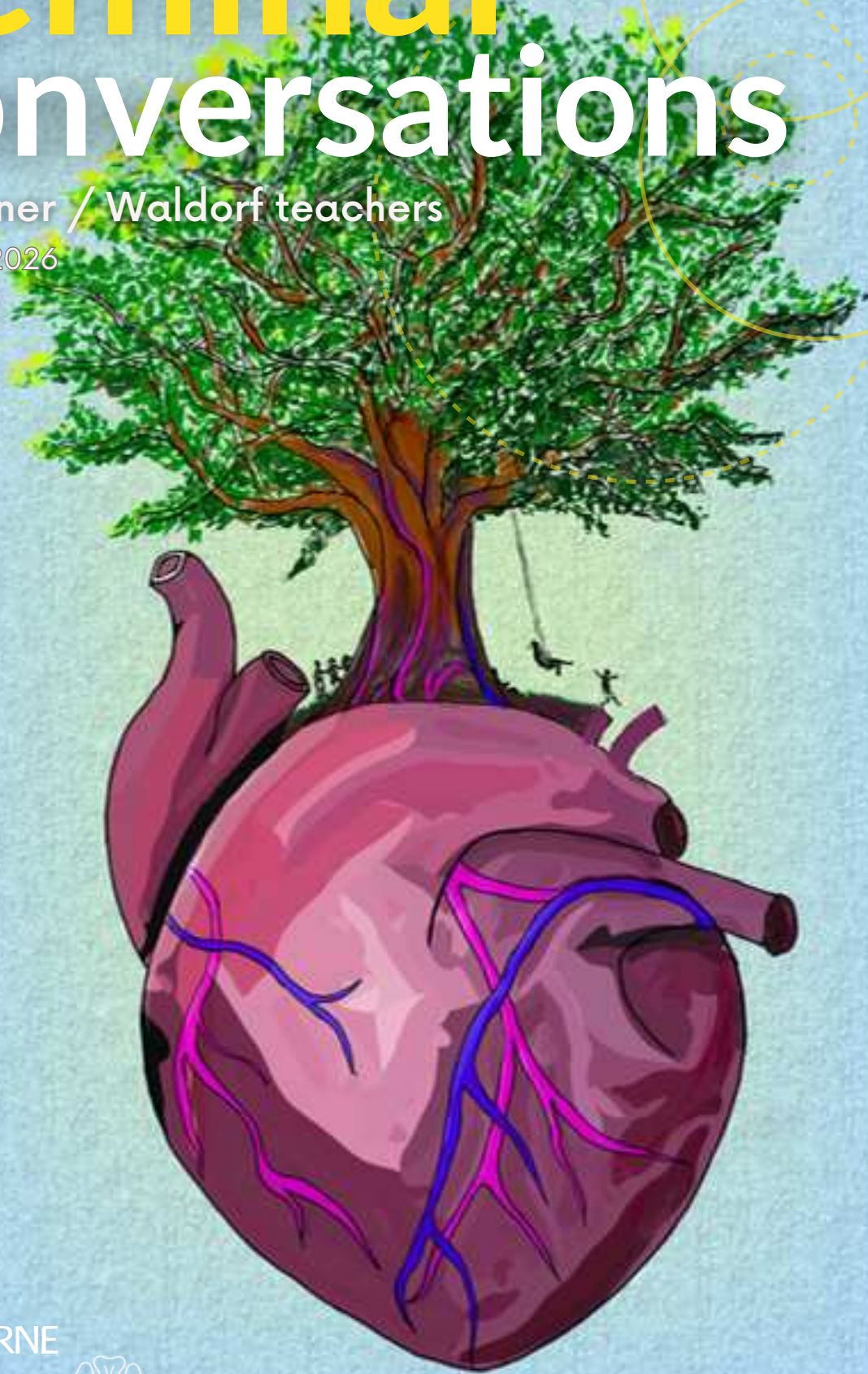


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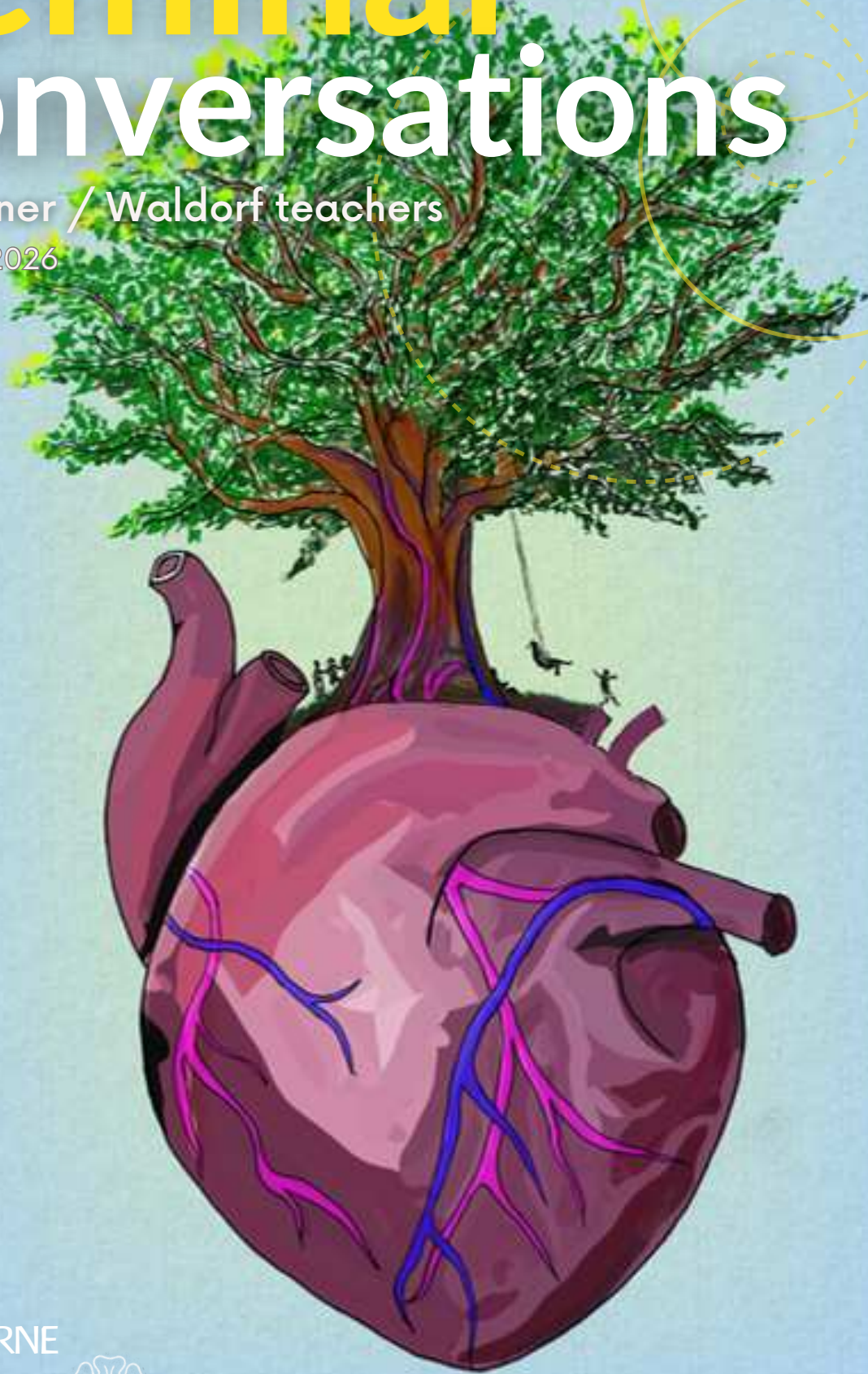


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About the Tutors - Writers

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.

About the Tutors - Writers

Terri McMillan

Terri McMillan is a teacher of 35 years experience in a Steiner School and 5 years in the State system. She co-founded the Maindample Steiner School (now Mansfield), took two classes through the Primary Class Teacher period, and was a senior geography teacher for the past 10 years. Terri co-authored the Steiner Geography Curriculum for the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework.

Gordon Woolard

Gordon has been a valued tutor with the Seminar, offering courses in Projective Geometry, Early Childhood, and Sensory Integration. His training includes university Physics, the Foundation and Education years at Emerson College, the Wynstones Science Teachers' course, the Michael Hall Kindergarten training, Joinery and Cabinet Making, a post graduate teaching diploma for SpLD (Dyslexia) and Audrey McAllen's Extra Lesson training.

On a quest for the roots of arithmetic, he tries to unravel the lower senses' developments of early childhood – as Rudolf Steiner indicated – and its application to the understanding of maths. Added to this is his experience as teacher, educator and Extra Lesson practitioner for children of all ages.

He applies the Extra Lesson methods to help children who struggle with literacy, numeracy, the school environment and the spatial world. He seeks to throw light on this work out of Rudolf Steiner's insights on the senses.

For the past twenty years in Europe and Asia Gordon has given training to teachers working in Waldorf and in mainstream education – inspired by anthroposophy – and brings workshops that link the kindred themes of projective geometry, the Philosophy of Freedom and the observation of plants.

The Structure of Movement

Sir Isaac Newton stated that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Rudolf Steiner and Fritz von Bothmer approached movement differently, suggesting that every movement contains a corresponding opposite movement within itself.

This can be observed clearly in sport.

Imagine preparing to strike a tennis ball. Before the racket moves forward, the arm draws back. The backward movement is not separate from the strike — it prepares and shapes it. At the very moment the arm begins its forward motion, there is also a simultaneous movement along the same pathway in the opposite direction.

Our physical movement travels towards the ball, while another movement seems to travel back towards the point from which the action began. The point at which the racket meets the ball becomes the point of greatest intensity — the meeting point of these two directions of movement.

This principle helps explain why the follow-through is so important in sport. In tennis, golf, cricket, football, archery, and many other disciplines, athletes devote enormous care to the completion of movement after the ball has been struck or the arrow released.

If movement were merely mechanical, the action would end at the point of contact. Yet experienced athletes know instinctively that the integrity of the movement depends upon its completion. A harmonious follow-through reveals that the movement as a whole has remained coherent and uninterrupted.

The success of any action depends upon how completely the physical movement can remain aligned with the movement in the etheric that is moving in the opposite direction.

