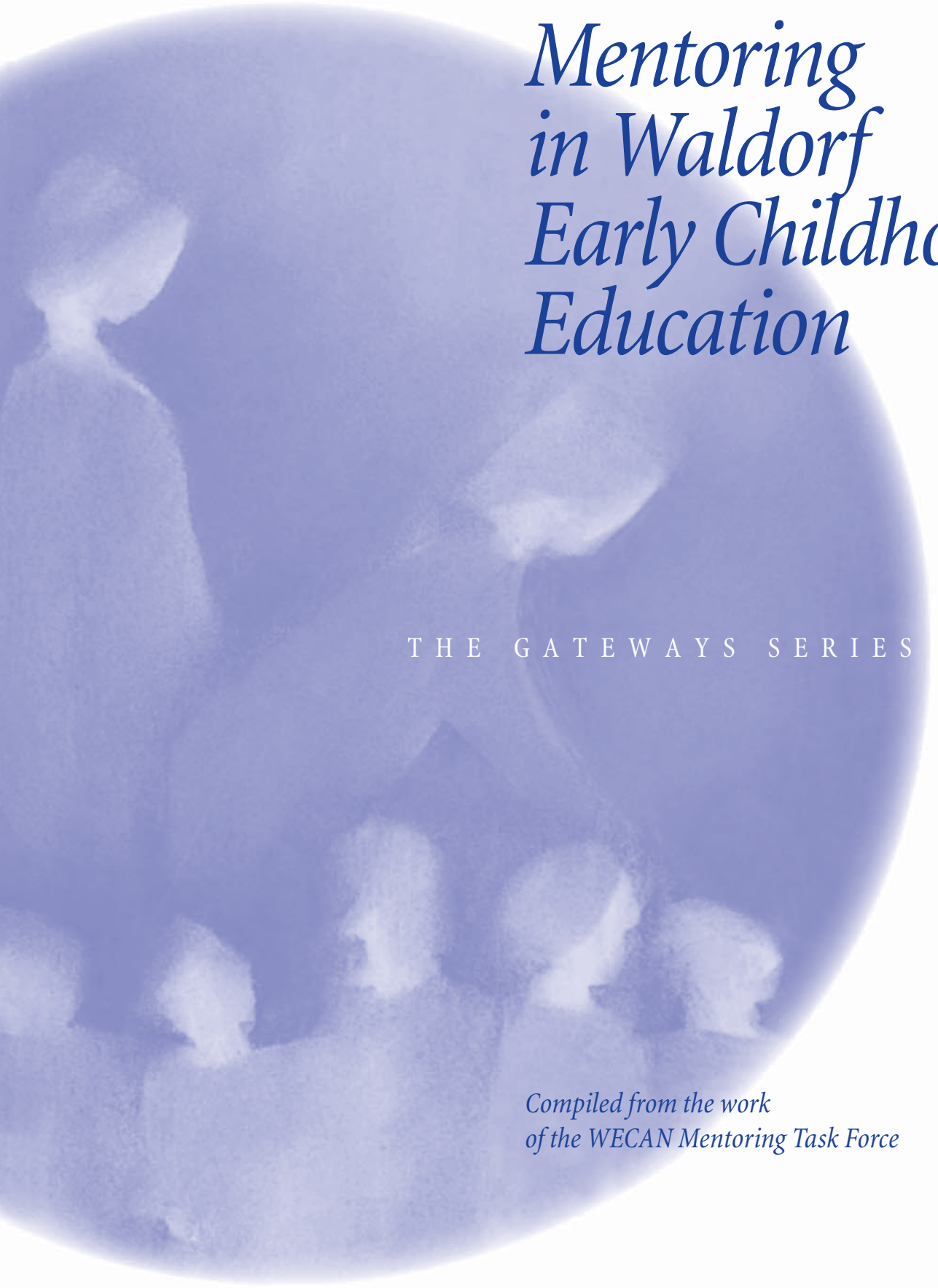

Mentoring in Waldorf Early Childhood Education

THE GATEWAYS SERIES FOUR

Compiled from the work of the WECAN Mentoring Task Force

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This book is a collection of contributions, some of which have appeared in *Gateways*,
by the members of the WECAN Mentoring Task Force:
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This publication is made possible
through a grant from the Waldorf Curriculum Fund.

Published in the United States by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America
285 Hungry Hollow Road, Spring Valley, NY 10977

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
0–9722238–1–9 Volume 4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

About mentoring . . . to begin with . . .

Mentoring is a collegial relationship which contributes to the personal and professional development of both the mentor and the student, teacher, or caregiver being mentored (called the "mentee" in this handbook). Mentoring is a process of mutual adult learning.

The mentor, an experienced teacher, supports the growth of the mentee through observation and the mentoring conversation, sharing the fruits of her experience in a way that helps the mentee to see her own work more clearly and to feel encouraged in her striving. It is important to keep in mind that mentoring is distinct from evaluating.

The mentee, who may be a student in a training program, a new teacher or caregiver, or an experienced professional seeking renewal, offers the mentor an opportunity for new insights on her own path.

In mentoring, the experienced educator serves the Waldorf movement by helping to insure that programs are rooted in a strong Waldorf early childhood offering; a mentored teacher or caregiver is able to enhance the health of the setting where she works. In a fundamental sense, the mentor serves children and their parents through her work with their teacher or caregiver.

The work of the mentor grows out of an understanding of, and gratitude for, the insights of Rudolf Steiner. Keeping these insights at the forefront in the mentoring work—in a way that is thoughtful, not dogmatic—fosters the development of a Waldorf movement with integrity, true to its essential qualities.

The quality of the mentoring visit will be heightened by communication in advance to ensure clarity of purpose, expectations, and process. The follow-up record of the visit and conversation will contribute to the usefulness of the experience for the mentee.

In *Mentoring in Waldorf Early Childhood Education*, we have enlarged on these key aspects of mentoring, with chapters on the essentials of Waldorf early childhood work, the paths of self-education and adult learning, the "nuts and bolts" of mentoring, and the nature of a fruitful mentoring conversation. Our hope is to follow this publication with a companion handbook on teacher evaluation.

Each chapter retains the voice of its author, but was written after thorough work among the Task Force members and other experienced mentors. We hope you, the reader—whether a mentor, mentee, or member of a school committee—will feel free to read chapters in whatever order seems most useful.

We gratefully acknowledge the Waldorf Educational Foundation for providing support for the work of the WECAN Mentoring Task Force over the past two years.

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Introduction

Along with a growing interest in Waldorf education, and the proliferation of new initiatives, comes the need for more early childhood teachers and caregivers. And along with the preparation of these professionals—through early childhood education programs and individual inner work—comes the need for collegial support. Such support is of value not only to new teachers and caregivers as they launch into this vital work, but also to those with experience who are seeking further professional development.

One of the great gifts of Waldorf education is the stimulation of the human capacity for life-long learning. This capacity is nurtured in both the students and their teachers. Rudolf Steiner admonishes us never to become stale, and certainly the children who come to us are asking—indeed, demanding—that we continue to grow and learn. We are grateful to Rudolf Steiner's insights which provide the substance for our work and enkindle our enthusiasm.

Through the mentoring partnership, professional growth of both mentor and mentee are encouraged and supported. Early childhood education is a challenging profession, and having a supportive colleague can be a crucial factor in a teacher's developing competency, pedagogical artistry, and self-confidence. There is a wonderful passage from Ecclesiastes (4: 9-10) which expresses the essence of mentoring:

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil.
For if they fall one will lift up his fellow. Woe to him who is alone.
When he falls he has not another to lift him up.

The Mentoring Task Force of WECAN was formed in 2004 in recognition of the essential role of mentoring in the healthy development of Waldorf early childhood education and Waldorf early childhood teachers and caregivers. Our mandate was to find ways to offer support and guidance to those who are mentoring others. In consultation with other experienced Waldorf early childhood mentors from all over North America, we have created a document which we hope will be informative and helpful to mentors, to those who are being mentored, and to schools and other settings which may be establishing in-house mentoring practices.

We offer practical guidelines for clarity in the mentoring process, thoughts on the role of self-education, and a look at the underlying essentials of Waldorf early childhood education, We also include chapters on the nature of advice and on the art of fruitful conversation, which is the heart of the mentoring relationship. The final chapter, an examination of the path of adult learning and self-development, could be a valuable resource for faculty study. A list of references concludes the handbook.

Our intention is to provide a working handbook for the mentoring partnership. Such a handbook is necessarily incomplete, a work-in-progress. Mentoring, like teaching, involves continual growth, questioning, and learning. We hope this book may play a part in that process.

—Nancy Foster, for the WECAN Mentoring Task Force

Mentoring Task Force: Nancy Foster, Andrea Gambardella, Susan Howard, Carol Nasr Griset, Kim Raymond, Celia Riahi, Susan Silverio, Connie White

1. Self-Education as the Basis for the Art of Mentoring

Andrea Gambardella

In these times of cultural change, bringing challenges and obstacles to the health of childhood, children are being born who inspire the founding of Waldorf playgroups, parent-child classes, home care programs, child care centers, and increased numbers of kindergartens in established Waldorf schools. There is a burgeoning need for new Waldorf teachers and care providers. This in turn engenders a need for experienced teachers and care providers to support and accompany them on their journey of professional and personal development, while at the same time deepening their own capacities to provide such support.

One tool for meeting the self-development needs of both new and experienced teachers and care providers is the collegial partnership of mentoring. Engaging in a mentoring relationship can provide significant opportunity for mutual growth in terms of both inner reflection and development of practical skills.

The mentor brings to the relationship her years of service to children; through her experience she has developed her own approach to working with young children. How does an experienced teacher offer help and support to a newer teacher while meeting her with respect and refraining from a prescriptive approach? How can the experienced teacher enter the mentoring relationship with a prepared inner space to share and work with the other's experiences and inquiry? How can she be an active ingredient in the other's self-education? In short—how does an experienced teacher become an effective mentor?

Those who take up the work of mentoring embrace self-development as an essential part of their professional and personal life. In Waldorf education, such work arises from the wellspring of Anthroposophy and the possibilities of inner life practices offered by Rudolf Steiner. A powerful expression of this process of self-development is offered in a verse by Steiner, found in *Verses and Meditations*:

The wishes of the soul are springing,
The deeds of the will are thriving,
The fruits of life are maturing.
I feel my fate,
My fate finds me.

I feel my star,
My star finds me.
I feel my goals in life,
My goals in life are finding me.
My soul and the great World are one.
Life grows more radiant about me,
Life grows more arduous for me,
Grows more abundant within me.

The activity of self-development requires strong intention and concerted effort, regardless of what specific inner practices are chosen for daily work. In a lecture of 1912, "Self-Education in the Light of Spiritual Science," Rudolf Steiner offers us helpful suggestions for cultivating the soul capacities of thinking, feeling, and willing in a way that will support our efforts as mentors toward unprejudiced judgment; toward rising above our sympathies and antipathies; and toward entering the human encounter of the mentoring relationship in a direct and honest way. In this sense of inner work and striving, Rudolf Steiner uses the term, "self education," to indicate that the adult is at the same time both teacher and student.

Cultivating Dynamic Balance

In his lecture on self-education, Steiner describes the self-education of the will through interaction with the outer world. He encourages us to confront people and life situations directly, tempering the brooding tendency of our thoughts and feelings. For the early childhood educator, the activity of the children offers a clue for our own work in the realm of the will:

In a certain sense, play remains an important educational factor throughout life . . . where we set our muscles in motion, without any deduction . . . then we have a self-educational form of play . . . If we are able through spiritual science to rise up to where the human being can leave his personality without losing himself, then we are educating ourselves by taking hold of life directly. If we let life work on us just as play works on the child (and the comparison should not be misunderstood) then we are educating our will . . . How can we understand this? . . . [T]he human being educates himself best through life experiences which he doesn't understand with his intellect but to which he feels connected in sympathy or love, or a feeling that the things are sublime or touch his sense of humor.

Of course thinking and feeling are always intertwined with willing, and so we must attend to their education as well, especially regarding their interaction with our deeds and actions. In this lecture Steiner indicates that we may work with our sympathies and antipathies through reflecting on our emotions and character "with wise self-knowledge." This reflection is not to be attempted while we are under the sway of our emotions, but at a time when we are least influenced by them. Therefore, Steiner says, in addition to meeting the outer world directly, "the will must be educated in life by taking the course of our moods and emotions wisely in hand." In *How to Know Higher Worlds*, Rudolf Steiner describes the eight-fold path as a practical way to work with meeting the outer world. These exercises, also appearing in *Guidance in Esoteric Training* as the exercises for the days of the week, include "right contemplation," giving consideration to the interconnected relationships of thinking, feeling, and action.

What does this mean for the mentor? Considering sympathy and antipathy as two poles, we seek for what lives in the balance. This place of balance may serve as a vessel for a mentor's observations. In Rudolf Steiner's statue of the Representative of Humanity,* we can see the dynamic gesture through which the two poles are rightfully held in balance so that our highest self can look out into the world as a true human being. This dynamic balance might be schooled by engaging in artistic activity where one can meet and work with inner mobility.

While variety of experience and interaction educates our will, quiet moments of review help us to school our feeling life. Taking a walk, journaling, or carving out time to sit quietly are some pathways for such reflection. Developing our cognitive faculties requires the active focus of concentration. As Rudolf Steiner states in the 1912 lecture, "Whoever has managed to reduce things (thoughts, impressions, perceptions) to certain main ideas will find that he can confront life with great serenity when it demands active deeds from him." As an experienced early childhood teacher, the mentor practices this principle of concentration and focus in creating the classroom environment and the rhythms of activity and rest. Simplicity, expressed by the wise saying, "Less is more," reigns as a cornerstone of caring for young children; and so the mentor may bring this same practice into the mentoring relationship. This practice of concentration provides the mentor with a lens for observations and for creating a sense of direction for the encounter with the mentee. This concentration on essentials arises out of attentiveness: directing and acknowledging the focus of our attention; being fully present.

Making Way for Something New

In addition to developing and strengthening the cognitive capacities, honing our ability to focus our attention bears other fruit for the mentor. In his lecture on self-education, Steiner describes the aspects of our thinking capacity: to remember, picture, and "forget in the right way."

In this context, "forgetting" indicates a releasing or letting go of an image or thought-content, thus creating a void into which something new can enter. Rudolf Steiner describes such a process in some detail as a part of the Rose Cross meditation, found in Chapter V of *An Outline of Esoteric Science*.

In this exercise, an image is carefully built up in thought, imbued with feeling, and then extinguished. This is the point at which the true meditation begins; the possibility for communion with a higher world begins to exist. Another process of releasing is offered in the Review of the Day or Rückshau (see *Guidance in Esoteric Training*), in which details are remembered, visualized, and then allowed to dissolve.

As mentors we carry our extensive professional experiences with us. In this process of "forgetting," we may find clues for extinguishing what we have built up with effort, love, and care, so that we may allow what is new—and truly needed—to arise in the mentoring encounter.

* In this statue, Rudolf Steiner shows the universal human being standing between the opposing forces of Lucifer and Ahriman, holding them in dynamic balance. The statue, originally intended for the first Goetheanum, now stands in the second Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

In our teaching, we know how to order the children's environment and rhythms of activity; these are transparent for the child's imitation, meaningful gestures that require no accompanying words. In mentoring, however, there is no prescription for the mentee to simply imitate us like a child, nor, as an adult, to understand us simply by listening to our reports of our own practices. Therefore, before entering the classroom of our mentee, we allow our carefully built-up concepts of "how things are done" to dissolve, so that the possibility is created for something altogether new to appear.

In the words of Rudolf Steiner, *"For out of this forgotten element there often arises something that is the object of what can genuinely be called our imagination, our fantasy. . . Everything that brings our soul forces into movement in such a way that we become inventive, is a fruitful and enlivening and life-promoting element."*

Mentoring and Destiny

Finally, Rudolf Steiner brings to our attention the essential acknowledgment of our destiny as an ingredient in self-education. We learn the right way to move between passive surrender and active engagement in life as key elements of this acknowledgment. The effort required for the practice of acknowledging our destiny and being awake in our life-encounters allows us to reach beyond the boundaries of our own personality. Steiner points to the capacity for compassion—the experience of another's pain or joy—as one result of such effort to transcend our boundaries. In compassion, the mentor acknowledges her own moments of struggle and of success, recognizing that such moments belong to the path of personal and professional development for all teachers and care providers. The mentor is enabled to hold with respect the destiny questions carried by the mentee.

One who lives in acknowledgment of destiny, Steiner says, will be able to say, *"What meets me in life as my destiny, as pain or joy, what brings me into contact with this or that person and so forth, I must view from the standpoint that I, with my Self which transcends my narrow personality, am the very one who has brought all this about."* Further, *"There is nothing in our self-education which can make our will stronger than the surrender and devotion to destiny, meeting it with calmness and composure."*

Looking far back in history, we can be reminded of the roots of our work as mentors. In the story of the Odyssey, we are told that Odysseus, in setting out for Troy, entrusted his house and the education of his son Telemachus to his friend Mentor. Thus the mentor is not merely someone who offers experience and skill, but is a trusted confidant. The elements of love, dedication, and trustworthiness are inherent in the essence of mentoring.

II. The Role of Mentoring Early Childhood Teachers and Caregivers: Context and Purpose

Connie White

A Spectrum of Roles

The role of the mentor differs essentially from the roles of evaluator and advisor. Each serves a distinct and important function. Although this document focuses on the role of the mentor, the following brief descriptions of the roles of evaluating and advising are included to clarify the differences.

Mentoring

A mentoring relationship between an experienced early childhood professional and a new teacher/caregiver or one who is in training (the mentee), is a nurturing process in which the mentor provides guidance, advice, support, encouragement and feedback. It is an ongoing relationship based on trust and respect for the mentee's professional and personal development. As described in other chapters of this document, the mentoring relationship is most effective if the mentor, as well as the mentee, is on a path of self-education and adult learning. When possible, it is helpful for the mentee to visit the mentor's program. Although the mentor does not write an evaluation report, she may be expected to prepare written records of visits and meetings.

Evaluating

The evaluator gives an objective report of what is happening in the early childhood setting at a given time. She does not necessarily engage in a process over time as does a mentor. The written or oral report given to the school or center by the evaluator indicates the progress, skills and capacities of the teacher/caregiver being evaluated. The evaluator may share her observations with the teacher in a follow-up conversation or in a review of the written report. Self-evaluation can be a useful part of the evaluation process.

Advising

The advisor focuses on the early childhood program or organization as a whole, rather than the work of the individual early childhood teacher/caregiver. An example of advising, which involves both mentoring and discernment on the institutional level, is the site visit by a WECAN or AWSNA representative. The advisor gives support and advice to those responsible for the program in such areas as teacher development, program offerings, organization, and administration. A daycare, for example,

might consult with an advisor regarding the structure of the board, budgeting, staff salaries, and the development of policies and promotional literature. An advisor might also be asked about licensing and non-profit status as it pertains to government agencies.

Varieties of Mentoring

The mentor is responsible to the mentee, the children, and also to the work of the Waldorf early childhood movement. The types and spectrum of mentor roles can vary according to the situation and may include responsibility to an early childhood training center, a school, a daycare center, or to WECAN.

Essential qualities and background required of a mentor to build a trusting and growing relationship include:

- Ability to clearly articulate thoughts and ideas;
- Ability to listen to thoughts and ideas of others;
- Ability to share in a reflective process;
- Non-judgmental attitude, i.e. ability to observe in an open way;
- Ability to enter the mentoring process in a learning mode rather than an authority mode;
- The soul qualities of empathy and authenticity;
- Ability to support the "other" in a process of becoming;
- Ability to kindle questions and to foster self-reflection;
- Inclination to look to the highest in others;
- A working relationship to Anthroposophy as a path of self-development;
- Waldorf early childhood training or equivalent;
- Experience as a Waldorf early childhood teacher or caregiver.

Mentor Designated by an Early Childhood Training Program

A mentor from an early childhood teacher education program is usually expected to visit the mentee several times over a period of one or two years during which the relationship of trust and respect is developed. It is also helpful if the mentee has the opportunity to visit the mentor's program. If this is not feasible the mentor may suggest that the mentee visit and observe another experienced teacher or caregiver.

The training program usually requires a written record of the visit. While not an evaluation, this can put stress on the confidentiality component of a developing trust relationship. If, however, the expectations of the training program are clearly outlined and made available to both the mentor and the mentee, this stress can be minimized. It is helpful if the mentee receives a copy of the observation record and has opportunity for input.

Outside Mentor Assigned by a School or Center

A school or center may ask an outside mentor to work with a new teacher or caregiver, or one who is experiencing difficulties. An effective relationship between the mentor and the mentee is

supported by establishing a rhythm of several visits over a period of time. If a record is required by the school, the expectations should be clearly outlined and made available to both the mentee and the mentor as described above. It is possible that the outside mentor would help develop a plan to include other in-house teachers/caregivers to support the mentee in the mentor's absence. As suggested above, it is helpful, when possible, for the mentee to visit the mentor's program.

In-House Mentors

Many early childhood departments have established an in-house mentoring program. This may be in the form of a more experienced teacher working with a new teacher. The role may be filled by an experienced teacher who no longer has a class but continues to be involved in early childhood work. In-house mentoring could also include a situation in which two experienced teachers or caregivers partner with each other to share their joys and challenges. Regardless of the arrangement, it is important that the guidelines are clearly defined in writing so that all parties are aware of the expectations of the school or center.

An in-house mentor will have the possibility of meeting with the mentee and visiting her program more frequently than does an outside mentor. This arrangement allows for regular support and follow-through with the mentee on areas in which she is striving to develop. An in-house mentor, for example, could work together with a new colleague in developing a circle theme, or help her learn new songs by singing them with her. This form of mentoring also provides an easier opportunity for the mentee to visit the mentor's program

Additional Types of Mentoring Roles

The following two variations of mentoring also require the essential qualities described above: A *practicum host* works primarily as a model for the teacher- or caregiver-in-training. She also offers support, advises, and gives feedback as the trainee gradually begins to work with children. The host collaborates with the training center regarding expectations.

Co-mentoring indicates that two colleagues are working together in a mutually supportive way. It may be an informal support, feedback, and advisory system, or one with expectations outlined by the school or center.

Rhythms and Duration

Rhythm and duration of mentoring will depend on the particular situation and program; these need to be clearly defined. Some early childhood education programs provide two mentoring visits per year for each year of study. The visits may be of a one- or two-day duration. Some training programs provide monthly telephone conversations between mentoring visits. It is possible that monthly or semester visits and/or meetings could occur in an in-house mentoring situation.

Mentoring Contexts

Waldorf early childhood teachers and caregivers work with children in many different contexts. The setting varies from a large school to a home daycare, age groupings vary from program to program, and the role of the teacher or caregiver varies. The mentor is therefore called upon to be sensitive to the mentee's unique situation and to work in an open, empathetic, and non-judgmental way to support the mentee's personal and professional growth.

Settings

A Waldorf early childhood program may be part of a school or may be a stand-alone program in a private home or center. The school can be a small initiative with one teacher and an assistant, or a large, established member of WECAN and AWSNA with an early childhood department consisting of a number of colleagues. Early childhood programs usually have a morning program that differs significantly from the afternoon extended care program, and the two programs frequently have different teachers. A stand-alone daycare, whether large or small, may also be a full member of WECAN, or an initiative striving to become a developing member. Still another possibility is that a mentor could be asked to work with a mentee who is striving to develop as a Waldorf teacher or caregiver while teaching in a mainstream daycare or public school.

Age Groupings

Within the variations of early childhood settings there are also a number of age-group variations. Some programs accommodate children of only one age in a given group. Other programs have mixed-aged groupings, which may include three- to six-year-olds, or an even wider age-range. There is no fixed rule. Even in parent-child programs, which are yet another early childhood program configuration, there are no set guidelines about how infants to six year olds are grouped with their parents. Like other early childhood programs, parent-child groups are found in established schools as well as in very new initiatives.

Awareness of the Essentials

Mentors may be asked to work with mentees in varying phases of professional development. For example, the mentee may be in an early childhood training program, may be experiencing her first year of working with children, or may be an experienced teacher or caregiver. She may be an assistant, lead teacher, or co-teacher.

As there are so many variations in early childhood programs and mentoring situations, it is impossible for the mentor to rely on a prescribed curriculum or on specific "right methods" when communicating with the mentee. The mentor, rather, must be conscious of the essential qualities of Waldorf early childhood education (see Chapter IV) and be discerning as to how they are living in a program and how they may be enhanced.

III. Laying the Basis for the Mentoring Visit

Nancy Foster

This chapter offers a look at the practical aspects of preparing for the mentoring visit. Establishing an open, trusting mentoring relationship is essential to a fruitful experience for both mentor and mentee, and getting off on the right foot can do much toward establishing such trust. Clarity of purpose, transparency of process, and mutual understanding of the approach to observation and follow-up will all contribute to a healthy working relationship. What follows, therefore, is a nuts-and-bolts approach to the mentoring visit.

Clarity of Expectations

Mentoring for an early childhood education program

In mentoring for a training program, it is helpful if the program director gives a written statement to both the mentor and mentee outlining expectations for the mentoring visits, including the following:

- purpose of the visit (aspects to be observed; an observation form may be provided);
- length of meeting/conversation time to follow the observation;
- format of the observation record and how/with whom it is to be shared; and
- responsibilities of the mentee in terms of housing, meals, time and space for conversation.

A mentor for a training program does not provide a record for, or meet with, any committee or other representative of the mentee's school or center. Her responsibility is solely to the mentee and the training program. If the mentee wishes to share the record with her school or center, she may do so.

Independently-requested mentoring

In mentoring requested by a teacher or caregiver or her school or center, the above factors also need to be clearly agreed upon before the mentor's visit. If a written statement of expectations for the mentor is not provided, she should request such a statement or possibly draft one and offer it as the basis for an agreement.

A statement of agreement should include whether someone in addition to the teacher or caregiver is to receive a record of the visit, and in what form it will be presented (written? a meeting with a committee or individual?). The purpose of the mentoring visit should be clear both to the mentor and the mentee, as well as whether an element of evaluation is to be included.

Compensation for the mentor

Mentoring is carried out for the deepening and health of the Waldorf movement, and care must be taken to find the appropriate level of compensation depending on circumstances. Some mentors may have to take time off from their program; others may be retired or on sabbatical. Travel expenses may be a factor. Early childhood education programs generally have an established daily honorarium for mentoring, plus a provision for reimbursing travel expenses. If a mentor is engaged by a school or center, the daily rate established by AWSNA and WECAN may serve as a guide. In any case, extra obligations taken on by the mentor (such as an evening talk for parents) should be arranged separately with the school or center at an additional fee.

Practical Preparations for the Visit

The mentor should contact the mentee before the visit to arrange or confirm the date and time of the visit and other details of the arrangements. It is worthwhile for the mentor to request the following information in writing before the visit:

- class demographics (size and age range of group);
- daily and weekly rhythm of the class.

The mentor may request additional information from the mentee which might take the form of a self-evaluation:

- aspects of the work which the mentee feels are her strengths;
- any particular areas of concern to the mentee; this could include pedagogical questions, particular children, collegial relationships, or other aspects of challenge.

Both kinds of information will prepare the mentor to be attuned to the content and context of the observation.

The mentee should make arrangements in advance to ensure that there is a protected time and space conducive to a fruitful conversation after the observation. It should also be considered whether to include the classroom colleague in the conversation. In some situations it may be helpful to include the colleague for part of the time, but it is also essential that the mentor and mentee have adequate time for private conversation.

Mutually agreeable arrangements will need to be made for travel, meals, and housing. Possibilities for housing might include staying with the mentee, with another faculty member, or with a parent, taking into account any allergies or other considerations.

It is helpful for the mentor and mentee to discuss by phone before the visit what the mentor's role in the classroom will be during the visit. Is there work the mentee would like the mentor to help with, or should she bring her own handwork? Should the mentor participate in any of the

morning activities or simply sit and observe? The two should agree on what will be most helpful and comfortable for both parties. (See additional details in Chapter V.)

Establishing Trust and Rapport

It is helpful for the mentor to remind the mentee that she is coming to offer support for her striving as a professional, not to judge her work. The mentor is visiting in the spirit of "How can we work together to support your growth as a teacher or caregiver?" She may ask, "Is there anything I can help you with?"

If time allows, a face-to-face conversation before the actual observation can be helpful to give the mentor and mentee time to get acquainted if they have not met before, and permits the mentor to gain a sense of the mentee's circumstances and state of being. Learning something of the mentee's interests and joys beyond the world of her work can help to create a personal connection. This connection can be deepened if the mentor shares her own biography. If such a conversation is not possible, the preparatory phone conversation described above can help to meet this need. Other possibilities for forming a social relationship between mentor and mentee include a home visit, going for a walk, or having dinner together, depending on circumstances.

During the conversation following the observation, the mentee usually feels more comfortable if the mentor does not give the sense that there is "one right way" and that the mentee will be judged by that standard. Rather, it will help build the mentee's confidence if the mentor clearly makes an effort to understand what she is trying to do and works with her on that basis. The mentor's openness to a particular situation (for example, if the mentee is working in a public school or other non-Waldorf setting) will be a positive contribution.

A sense of trust and rapport are created when the mentor is a good listener and responds thoughtfully to what she hears, rather than lecturing the mentee, and when positive comments are freely offered.

Mutually supportive colleagueship can be built if the mentor shares her own questions and struggles with the mentee, rather than delivering a series of "should's" and "should not's." The mentor will need to use restraint and discretion in sharing her experiences, choosing only relevant events that will really help the mentee.

It can also be helpful if the mentor asks questions, such as, "What was your intention when you [removed Billy from the painting table]?" or "Was the transition from circle time to snack typical today?" or "How do you feel the children are affected when you arrive at the same time as they do in the morning?" It is sometimes useful for the mentor to restate what the mentee has said, to help the mentee perceive whether she has really said what she meant and if so, whether the mentor has understood. Chapter VI discusses the mentoring conversation in depth.

The Mentor's Preparation for the Visit

Before the observation, the mentor may review the information she has been given by the mentee: the composition of the class, the morning rhythm, the mentee's statement of her perceived strengths and of her questions/concerns. If the mentor has previously observed this mentee, she may

wish to re-read her observations of that visit; or, she may prefer to do this after the observation so as to begin with a "clean slate," while afterwards bringing to consciousness those areas where change has occurred. The mentor may also wish to re-acquaint herself with any observation criteria established by the mentee's training program.

Meditative preparation by the mentor on the evening and/or morning preceding the observation helps to lay the basis for a perceptive eye, an understanding heart, and a tactful yet honest approach to the conversation which follows the observation. There are, of course, many possibilities for such preparation, and this must be left to the freedom of the mentor. A valuable collection of meditative material is found in *Spiritual Insights*, compiled from Rudolf Steiner's work by Helmut von Kügelgen and published by WECAN. This and other sources are listed in the Reference Section.

In summary, a successful mentoring visit—one which helps and supports the mentee in her development—begins with clear mutual expectations, a sharing of preliminary information, the establishment of a trusting relationship, and inner preparation on the part of the mentor.

IV. The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education

Susan Howard

Is there a Waldorf early childhood "curriculum?" Are there specific activities—perhaps puppet plays or watercolor painting, for example—that are required in a Waldorf program? Are there certain materials and furnishings—lazured, soft-colored walls, handmade playthings, natural materials, beeswax crayons—that are essential ingredients of a Waldorf setting? What is it that makes Waldorf early childhood education "Waldorf?" Rudolf Steiner spoke on a number of occasions about the essentials of education and of early childhood education. His words shed light on what he considered fundamental:

Essentially, there is no education other than self-education, whatever the level may be. This is recognized in its full depth within Anthroposophy, which has conscious knowledge through spiritual investigation of repeated Earth lives. Every education is self-education, and as teachers we can only provide the environment for children's self-education. We have to provide the most favorable conditions where, through our agency, children can educate themselves according to their own destinies. This is the attitude that teachers should have toward children, and such an attitude can be developed only through an ever-growing awareness of this fact."

(Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*)

Thus the essential element in early childhood education is actually the educator, who shapes and influences the children's environment, not only through the furnishings, activities, and rhythms of the day, but most importantly, through the qualities of her own being and her relationships: to the children and other adults in the kindergarten, to the parents, to daily life in the kindergarten, and to living on earth.

These qualities, which include attitudes and gestures both outer and inner, permeate the early childhood setting and deeply influence the children, who take them up through a process of imitation. The results of such experiences appear much later in the child's life through predispositions, tendencies, and attitudes toward life's opportunities and challenges.

Viewed in this way, early childhood education demands an ongoing process of self-education by the adult. If we again ask, what makes a Waldorf program "Waldorf," the answers might be sought less in the particular activities or rhythms or materials and furnishings, and more in the extent to

which these outer aspects are harmonious expressions of inner qualities, attitudes, capacities, and intentions of the teacher—all of which can have a health-giving effect on the children, both in the moment and for the rest of their lives.

Those of us who are committed to this path of Waldorf early childhood education, whether as early childhood teachers or mentors, may actively ask ourselves how qualities essential to the healthy development of young children are living in our own early childhood groups, in our own daily lives, and in our own inner practice.

Rudolf Steiner spoke on a number of occasions about experiences essential for healthy early childhood education, including the following:

- Love and warmth
- Care for the environment and nourishment for the senses
- Creative, artistic experience
- Meaningful adult activity as an example for the child's imitation
- Free, imaginative play
- Protection for the forces of childhood
- Gratitude, reverence, and wonder
- Joy, humor, and happiness
- Adult caregivers on a path of inner development

The following brief descriptions of these qualities and related questions are intended to serve the self-reflection of the individual teacher, the observations of the mentor, and the process of helpful, open dialogue between mentor and mentee.

Love and Warmth

Children who live in an atmosphere of love and warmth, and who have around them truly good examples to imitate, are living in their proper element.

(RS, *The Education of the Child*)

Love and warmth, more than any programmatic approach to early education, create the basis for development. These qualities are expressed in the gestures that live between adult and child, in the children's behavior toward one another, and also in the social relations among the adults in the early childhood center. In other words, they form the social community of early childhood education. When Rudolf Steiner visited the grade school classes of the first Waldorf school, he was known to ask the school children, "Do you love your teacher?"

Although we would not ask younger children such questions, we *can* ask *ourselves* the following questions, and possibly discuss them in our mentoring conversations:

- Are love and warmth living in the atmosphere?
- How are they expressed in the gestures that live between adult and child?

- How are they expressed in the children's behavior toward one another?
- How are the social relations among the adults caring for the children?
- What hindrances exist to creating a loving atmosphere?
- How is love expressed in the teacher's response to "inappropriate" behavior (excessive noise, aggression, disruptions, conflict)?

Less apparent within the day, but also of great significance, are these same qualities of love and warmth in relations with colleagues outside the classroom, with the parents, and with the wider community:

- How are the relations between the early childhood educators and the parents?
- How are the relations with the other colleagues in the early childhood groups and in the rest of the school?
- How does the teacher work with conflict and difficulties with adults?
- Are the children surrounded by a community which offers love and warmth and support?

Care for the Environment and Nourishment for the Senses

The essential task of the kindergarten teacher is to create the "proper physical environment" around the children. "Physical environment" must be understood in the widest sense imaginable. It includes not just what happens around children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment, everything that can be perceived by their senses, that can work on the inner powers of children from the surrounding physical space. This includes all moral or immoral actions, all the meaningful and meaningless behaviors that children witness.

(RS, *The Education of the Child*)

Early learning is profoundly connected to the child's own physical body and sensory experience. Thus the physical surroundings, indoors and outdoors, should provide nourishing opportunities for the child's active self-education. Outdoor experiences in nature provide diverse yet integrated sensory experiences through the child's senses of touch and balance and self-movement. Satisfying experiences in nature can bestow a deep sense of security and belonging. And indoors, when the caregiving adult is able to bring the surroundings into a meaningful, understandable, and harmonious order, the child unconsciously experiences the love, care, intentions, and consciousness expressed through the furnishings and materials of the classroom. These inner qualities offer a moral grounding for the child's development; the environment is "ensouled" and nurturing.

The adult shapes not only the spatial environment, but also the temporal environment, creating a loving, lively yet orderly "breathing" through rhythm and repetition. Through this healthy breathing process, the child gains a sense of security and confidence in his or her relationship with the world.

Here we can ask:

- Does the environment of the early childhood program offer these qualities of order, care, transparency, and meaning? What is expressed through the outer furnishings and materials?

- Does the space offer diverse opportunities for nourishing experiences in the realm of touch, self-movement, balance, and well-being?
- Are the activities of the day integrated in time into a healthy flow, in which transitions are as smooth and seamless as possible?
- Are there opportunities for lively, joyful physical movement as well as for more inward, listening experience? for large-group, small-group, and solitary experiences?

Creative, Artistic Experience

. . . . [I]n order to become true educators, the essential thing is to be able to see the truly aesthetic element in the work, to bring an artistic quality into our tasks. . . . If we bring this aesthetic element, we then begin to come closer to what the child wills out of its own nature.

(RS, *A Modern Art of Education*)

In the early childhood class, the art of education is the art of living. The teacher is an artist in how she perceives and relates to the children and the activities of daily life. She "orchestrates" and "choreographs" the rhythms of each day, the week, and the seasons in such a way that the children can breathe freely within a living structure. In addition, the teacher may offer the children opportunities for artistic experiences such as song and instrumental music, movement and gesture (including rhythmic games and eurythmy), speech and language (including verses, poetry, and stories), modeling, watercolor painting and drawing, puppetry and marionettes.

Here we may ask:

- How does creative artistic experience live in the surroundings, in the teacher, and in the children?
- How is the rhythmic flow of time formed?
- Is the teacher engaged artistically in the domestic arts and work processes?
- How is creative, artistic experience fostered through the furnishings and play materials of the early childhood room?
- Is the play of the children creative and artistic in its imagery, its social interactions, its processes?
- Is the teacher's work with individual children both practical and imaginative? What kinds of imaginations inform her work?
- Is the teacher herself engaged in creative artistic endeavors? Is she striving to deepen her own understanding and experience of what it means to be artistic?

Meaningful Adult Activity as an Example for the Child's Imitation

The task of the kindergarten teacher is to adapt the practical activities of daily life so that they are suitable for the child's imitation through play. . . . The activities of children in kindergarten must be derived directly from life itself rather than being "thought out" by the intellectualized culture of adults. In the kindergarten, the most important thing is to give children the opportunity to directly imitate life itself.

(RS, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*)

Children do not learn through instruction or admonition, but through imitation. . . . Good sight will develop if the environment has the proper conditions of light and color, while in the brain and blood circulation, the physical foundations will be laid for a healthy sense of morality if children witness moral actions in their surroundings.

(RS, *The Education of the Child*)

Real, meaningful, purposeful work, adjusted to the needs of the child, is in accordance with the child's natural and inborn need for activity and is an enormously significant educational activity. Thus, rather than offering "thought-out," contrived projects and activities for the children, the teacher or caregiver focuses on her own meaningful work through activities that nurture daily and seasonal life in the classroom "home:" cooking and baking, gardening, laundry and cleaning, creating and caring for the materials in the surroundings, and the bodily care of the children.

This creates a realm, an atmosphere, of freedom in which the individuality of each child can be active. It is not intended that the children copy the outer movements and actions of the adult, but rather that they experience the inner work attitude: the devotion, care, sense of purpose, intensity of focus, and creative spirit of the adult. And then, in turn, each child is free to act as an artist-doer in his or her own right, through creative free play and active movement, according to his or her own inner needs and possibilities.

As we observe a class we may ask ourselves:

- How does meaningful adult activity live in the group, both indoors and out?
- Does the caregiver seem able to devote herself inwardly and outwardly with enthusiasm, in an artistic way, to real life activities and adult work?
- Does she appear engaged artistically in a creative process?
- Are her work activities truly meaningful and purposeful, in a logical sequence that the child can grasp?
- Do the children imitate the adult's work through their play (not necessarily her outer actions, but perhaps more important, the inner gesture of her work)?
- What qualities are expressed in the children's play?

Free, Imaginative Play

In the child's play activity, we can only provide the conditions for education. What is gained through play stems fundamentally from the self-activity of the child, through everything that cannot be determined by fixed rules. The real educational value of play lies in the fact that we ignore our rules and regulations, our educational theories, and allow the child free rein.

(RS, *Self-Education in the Light of Spiritual Science*)

And then, a seemingly contradictory indication:

Giving direction and guidance to play is one of the essential tasks of sensible education, which is to say of an art of education that is right for humanity. . . . The early childhood educator must school his or her observation in order to develop an artistic eye, to detect the individual quality of each child's play.

(RS, un-translated lecture, Feb. 24, 1921, Utrecht, Holland)

Little children learn through play. They approach play in an entirely individual way, out of their own unique configuration of soul and spirit, and out of their own unique experiences in the world they live in. In addition, the manner in which each child plays may offer a picture of how he or she will take up his or her destiny as an adult.

The task of the caregiver or early childhood educator is to create an environment that supports the possibility for healthy play. This environment includes the physical surroundings, furnishings, and play materials; the social environment of activities and social interactions; and the inner/spiritual environment of thoughts, intentions, and imaginations held by the adults.

We may ask the following questions relating to the children's play in the kindergarten:

- What is the quality and duration of the children's play? Is it active, dynamic, healthy, creative? Are the children self-directed and deeply engaged, socially and individually?
- How does the early childhood teacher reconcile these two seemingly contradictory challenges: to give free rein to the child at play, and to guide and direct and provide the conditions for healthy play to develop?
- What are the themes and images of free play in the kindergarten?
- Do the play materials offer diverse and open-ended possibilities for creativity, social interaction, and bodily movement?
- Are there opportunities for a wide range of play activities outdoors? How are the children active outdoors, compared with indoors? How much time is there for indoor vs. outdoor play?

Protection for the Forces of Childhood

Although it is highly necessary that each person should be fully awake in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination in which his early years of life are passed. For if we allow his organism to grow strong in this non-intellectual way, he will rightly develop in later life the intellectuality needed in the world today.

(RS, *A Modern Art of Education*)

The lively, waking dream of the little child's consciousness must be allowed to thrive in the early childhood group. This means that the adult refrains as much as possible from verbal instruction and questions; instead, her gestures and actions provide a model for the child's imitation, and familiar rhythms and activities provide a context where the need for verbal instruction is reduced. Simple, archetypal imagery in stories, songs, and games provides "digestible" experiences that do not require intellectual or critical reflection or explanation.

Here the mentee and mentor may ask:

- Does the atmosphere in the room foster an imaginative, not-yet-intellectually-awakened consciousness in the children?
- Are the children allowed to immerse themselves fully in play without unnecessary instruction and verbal direction from the adults?
- Are play processes allowed to run their course, or are they interrupted?

- Does a "group consciousness" prevail in group activities, or are children singled out for special privileges, asked many questions, or offered choices and "turns?"
- Do the sequence and rhythms of the day carry the children along, or do the children ask what is coming next?
- Does the teacher invite children to participate in activities such as rhythmic circles or finger games through her own activity, or does she wait to see if children are "ready" or verbally explain what is coming?

An Atmosphere of Gratitude, Reverence, and Wonder

An atmosphere of gratitude should grow naturally in children through merely witnessing the gratitude the adults feel as they receive what is freely given by others, and in how they express this gratitude. If a child says "thank you" very naturally—not in response to the urging of others, but simply through imitating—something has been done that will greatly benefit the child's whole life. Out of this an all-embracing gratitude will develop toward the whole world. This cultivation of gratitude is of paramount importance.

(RS, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*)

Out of these early all-pervading experiences of gratitude, the first tender capacity for love, which is deeply embedded in each and every child, begins to sprout in earthly life.

If, during the first period of life, we create an atmosphere of gratitude around the children, then out of this gratitude toward the world, toward the entire universe, and also out of thankfulness for being able to be in this world, a profound and warm sense of devotion will arise. . . upright, honest and true.

(RS, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*)

This is the basis for what will become a capacity for deep, intimate love and commitment in later life, for dedication and loyalty, for true admiration of others, for fervent spiritual or religious devotion, and for placing oneself wholeheartedly in the service of the world.

And so mentor and mentee may ask:

- How do gratitude, reverence, and wonder live in the kindergarten?
- Do they come to natural expression from adults and children?
- Are they spontaneous and sincere, or sentimentalized?
- Or if these qualities seem to be missing, how does their absence manifest?

Joy, Humor, and Happiness

The joy of children in and with their environment must therefore be counted among the forces that build and shape the physical organs. They need teachers who look and act with happiness and, most of all, with honest, unaffected love. Such a love that streams, as it were, with warmth through the physical environment of the children may be said to literally "hatch out" the forms of the physical organs.

(RS, *The Education of the Child*)

If you make a surly face so that a child gets the impression you are a grumpy person, this harms the child for the rest of its life. What kind of school plan you make is neither here nor there; what matters is what sort of person you are.

(RS, *The Kingdom of Childhood*)

The so-called milk of human kindness is a formative force in the development of the young child. The innocent delight of young children, their enthusiasm for life, and their sense of wonder flourish when they are cared for by adults who have retained some of these forces of childhood and are able to bring them to expression in their daily lives. This does not mean that adults—or children—should be "happy" at all times! But laughter and humor bring about a kind of "soul breathing" that weaves together the social fabric of community.

Here the mentor and mentee may explore the following questions:

- Do happiness and joy live in this group of children and the adults who care for them?
- What are the most joy-filled aspects of the work?
- Which aspects of the work are least permeated with joy?
- How is the teacher's earnestness and serious striving held in a dynamic balance with humor, happiness, and "honest, unaffected love?"
- Are there moments of laughter and delight in the room? How does humor live in the community of children and adults?

Adult Caregivers on a Path of Inner Development

For the small child before the change of teeth, the most important thing in education is the teacher's own being.

(RS, *Essentials of Education*)

Just think what feelings arise in the soul of the early childhood educator who realizes: what I accomplish with this child, I accomplish for the grown-up person in his twenties. What matters is not so much a knowledge of abstract educational principles or pedagogical rules. . . . [W]hat does matter is that a deep sense of responsibility develops in our hearts and minds and affects our world view and the way we stand in life.

(RS, un-translated lecture, "Education In the Face of the Present-Day World Situation," June 10, 1920)

Here we come to the spiritual environment of the early childhood setting: the thoughts, attitudes, and imaginations living in the adult who cares for the children. This invisible realm that lies behind the outer actions of the teacher has a profound influence on the child's development.

The spiritual environment includes recognition of the child as a threefold being—of body, soul and spirit—on a path of evolutionary development through repeated earth lives. This recognition provides a foundation for the daily activities in the kindergarten, and for the relationship between adult and child.

In addition to the questions we have already pondered above, we may ask:

- How is the teacher or caregiver actively engaged in inner development as an early childhood educator, and as a human being?
- How is she cultivating a relationship to the children on a spiritual basis?
- How is she working with her colleagues to foster an environment of spiritual striving and a deepened study of child and human development?
- Does the adult strive to approach her work in such a way that the children in her care are not burdened by unresolved issues in her personal life?
- Do goodness and moral uprightness stream from the being of the adult? Is her inner and outer activity in coherence with healthy social and ethical values? Is she striving to be an example worthy of the children's imitation? Do her appearance and even her clothing express this worthiness?
- Does the teacher or caregiver love the children? Does she work to create healthy, caring relationships with their parents, with colleagues, and with the community? Does she love the earth, and the world into which the children are incarnating?
- How does she see her relationship to the past, the present, and the future of our human journey?

This is the very challenging realm of self-knowledge and the activity of the individual ego of the adult—a realm where it is difficult to be objective in our observations. Yet it is this realm that may affect the development of the children most profoundly. It is not merely our outer activity that affects the developing child; it is what lies behind and is expressed through this outer activity. Ultimately the most profound influence on the child is who we are—and who we are becoming—as human beings. (Here we may also refer to the chapters on "Self-Education as the Basis for the Art of Mentoring," and the principles and processes of adult learning in "Meeting at the Eye of the Needle: Mentoring on the Path of Adult Learning.")

Conclusion

The so-called "essentials" described in this chapter are qualitative in nature. For the most part, they do not characterize a body of "best practices;" instead, they describe inner qualities and attributes of the teacher that foster healthy development in young children. These qualities can come to expression in a wide variety of ways, according to the age range and particular characteristics of the children in a particular group; the nature of the particular program (a kindergarten or playgroup or extended care program, for example); or the environment and surroundings (urban or rural, home or school or child care center, for example).

Many practices that have come to be associated with Waldorf early childhood education—certain rhythms and rituals, play materials, songs, stories, even the colors of the walls or the dress of the adults or the menu for snack—may be mistakenly taken as essentials. The results of such assumptions can be surprising or even disturbing: a "King Winter" nature table appearing in a tropical climate in "wintertime," or only dolls with pink skin and yellow hair in a program where some or all

of the children in the school and the surrounding culture are brown-skinned and black-haired. Such practices may express a tendency toward a doctrinal or dogmatic approach that is out of touch with the realities of the immediate situation and instead imposes something from "outside."

There is a parallel concern at the other end of the spectrum from the doctrinal or dogmatic. The freedom that Waldorf education offers each individual teacher to determine the practices of her early childhood program can be misinterpreted to mean that "anything goes," according to her own personal preferences and style. Here too, there is the danger that the developmental realities and needs of the children are not sufficiently taken into consideration.

Each of these one-sided approaches may be injurious to the development of the children. As Waldorf early childhood educators we are constantly seeking a middle, universally human path between polarities. (See the chapter on "The Mentoring Observation: What Do We Look For?" for a further discussion of observing polarities.)

Rudolf Steiner's advice to the first Waldorf kindergarten teacher, Elizabeth Grunelius, in the early 1920's, could be paraphrased as follows: Observe the children. Actively meditate. Follow your intuitions. Work out of imitation.

Today we are challenged to engage in a constant process of renewal as Waldorf early childhood educators, actively observing today's children in our care, carrying them in our meditations, and seeking to work consciously and artistically to create the experiences that will serve their development. Our devotion to this task awakens us to the importance of self-education and transformation in the context of community. Our ongoing study of child and human development, our own artistic and meditative practices, and our work with Anthroposophy, independently and together with others, become essential elements for the practice of Waldorf early childhood education. Here we can come to experience that we are not alone on this journey; we are supported through our encounters with one another and with spiritual beings offering support toward our continued development and toward the renewal of culture Waldorf education seeks to serve. The mentoring process described in the chapters that follow can be a vital aid on this journey.

V. The Mentoring Observation: What Do We Look For?

Nancy Foster

Basic Considerations

In the observation, fundamental questions confront the mentor: What makes a classroom situation "Waldorf?" How do I discern the middle ground in the polarity of relativism (supremacy of individual style or preference) and dogmatism (fundamentalism; the "one right way")? For example, the mentor visits on painting day and notices that the mentee "demonstrates," painting a picture while the children watch. Perhaps the mentor says, "It's inappropriate for the teacher to paint first. This is not the Waldorf way for early childhood." The mentee responds, "But I love to paint, and I've always done it this way. It just feels right to me." In this exchange the mentor is approaching the situation dogmatically, while the mentee is approaching it out of her personal preference. In such a case, a "middle ground" would be based on neither personal preference nor a dogmatic statement, but rather on a mutual exploration of child development and the nature and purpose of the activity of painting. Through such an exploration, an understanding might better be reached. The search for this middle ground can only truly take place in the meeting of the mentor and mentee striving together in a process of becoming. An attitude of warm objectivity during the observation will be helpful to the mentor in resisting the impulse to form quick judgments. Chapter IV, "The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education," offers both mentors and mentees a valuable basis for considering pedagogical questions.

A mood of honest questioning and seeking on the part of the mentor will contribute to this sense of warm objectivity. The mentor may ask herself, for example, in response to her own reaction to what is observed, "How do I know whether something is developmentally appropriate?" Such a question may require research. The mentor may suggest that she and the mentee look into the question in preparation for the mentor's next visit, and she might suggest sources for this research. The mentor may also strive to see the value in a particular activity, asking, "What was the teacher's intention in this situation?" Such an attitude will add to the value of the conversation to come.

The Mentor as Observer: Onlooker or Participant?

An additional question is that of the role of the mentor in the classroom during the observation. Will the mentor learn the most through the "fly on the wall" method, or is participation

in the classroom process more conducive to a helpful view of the situation? What role will be most harmonious and least intrusive for the children? There is probably no single answer to this question; rather, it will depend on the particular individuals and situation involved.

While the mentor will not want to sit with notebook and pen in hand, looking on as a clinical observer, she may find it helpful to take unobtrusive notes now and then. The mentor should let the mentee know that she may do this. On the other hand, becoming immersed in the classroom activities might prevent the mentor from taking in a sense of the whole, and direct involvement with the children might be a distraction from observation. In many situations, the middle ground may be that the mentor is busy with simple handwork that makes her a part of the "work of the home" while leaving her free to direct her attention to what is happening in a given moment. Ironing, for example, is a non-distracting activity which allows the mentor an overview of the classroom.

There may be situations in which the mentee has asked in advance for guidance and the mentor has agreed to take part in an activity as an example. The mentor may, for instance, have brought a rhythmic circle game which she will lead, or perhaps she will take a place at the baking table. In a rare case a mentor may feel it necessary to intervene in a situation without prior arrangement, but this would occur only in a situation where children are actually at serious risk. Such a case would obviously need to be a topic in the conversation which follows the morning in the classroom.

Observing the Mentor

It can be very helpful for a mentee to visit the mentor's classroom for a morning, if this can be arranged. While conversations offer a wonderful opportunity for mutual learning, and the possibility to address questions together, the value of a deed cannot be overstated. It can happen that a mentee who is teaching while enrolled in a part-time training has never seen a teacher or classroom outside her own school. To observe her mentor or another experienced teacher or caregiver can be most enlightening, stimulating, and inspiring. In some part-time training programs, a mentee's visit to the mentor may be substituted for one of the mentoring visits.

Mentoring an Assistant

If the mentee is an assistant, it is most appropriate for the mentor to focus on the mentee's role rather than the lead teacher's. This will require tact if the mentee or mentor has questions or concerns about the lead teacher's approach to the work or about decisions she has made concerning the daily rhythm, room arrangement, materials, etc. The mentor will wish to maintain professionalism and avoid discussing the lead teacher with the assistant.

One approach to this situation is to encourage the assistant to ask questions of the lead teacher in an effort to understand her intentions in the choices she has made. Non-critical questions, honestly asked, may help both adults to think together and possibly to reach new insights. At the very least, the assistant will come to understand the situation better. It may help the mentee to know that there is much to be learned in any situation, from the children as well as the lead teacher, which will help her in the future when she herself becomes a lead teacher or caregiver.

If the assistant is having serious personal difficulties with the lead teacher, and has been unable to ease the situation through communication with her colleague, the mentor may consider helping to arrange for someone in the school to work with them. This could be the chair of the College of Teachers, or another experienced person on the faculty whom both teachers trust.

The Observation: What are we looking for?

Possible criteria for observation

There are a number of ways to list and organize criteria for observation. Factors to consider might include the following, with the understanding that the mentor may include additional observations and omit any not noted during the visit:

- physical environment: esthetic quality, arrangement of space, care of the room and storage areas, quality and care of play materials
- role and being of the teacher or caregiver: dress and appearance, physical and moral uprightness, relationship with children and classroom colleague, interaction with parents, mood, presence of a smile, use of voice and speech, quality of selflessness and ego presence, consciousness in relation to time (focused in the moment but aware of the stream of time)
- children: energy level, development of the four lower senses, mood, quality of creative play, participation in the morning rhythm and activities, health, dress, relationship with teacher(s) or caregiver(s), quality of social interactions, care of play materials
- elements of the program's morning or day: daily rhythm, transitions, festival life and relation with nature, mood or atmosphere (gratitude and reverence, joy, humor)
- activities of the day: creative play, clean-up, snack, circle, domestic activities, watercolor painting, story, etc.; developmental appropriateness of activities
- inner work of the adult: extent of self-knowledge and self-evaluation, carrying deep questions; on what resources does she draw?

Intuitive perception

Alongside a more or less detailed set of observation criteria which can serve as the basis for observation, there needs to be room for a certain level of intuitive perception on the part of the mentor. The mentor may find it useful, after the observation and before the conversation, to "step back" inwardly and wait to see what impressions may arise. This is a way of finding the middle ground between the "trees" and the "forest"—neither getting caught up in details without a sense of the whole, nor reaching only general impressions which lack specifics.

Discernment of qualities: a context of triads or polarities

As an aid to discerning and expressing the intangible or inner qualities of the classroom situation and the mentee's work, the mentor may consider triads—two extremes and a middle—and ask where or in what circumstances these qualities have occurred. For example, in considering the mentee's relationship with the children, the mentor might consider the triad of *coldness—love out of interest—sentimental warmth*. The mentor might observe, for example, that the mentee greets the children upon arrival with a warmth bordering on sentimentality (excessive warmth). In interactions

during creative play, the mentee may show warm objectivity or love out of interest, etc. Another example of a triad, in regard to the care of the environment, might be *compulsive orderliness—practical and esthetic attention to detail—heedlessness or carelessness*. By directing the attention to two extremes and a middle way, this approach to observation avoids the either/or or good/bad syndromes, and provides a stimulating basis for collegial discussion and conversation in the meeting following the observation. Not every observation may lend itself to the use of triads, but their consideration may add depth and a seed quality to some aspects of the observation and conversation.

Following are examples of triads which might be considered. These are *only* examples; an observant mentor will find others.

Physical environment

Care of room		
heedlessness, carelessness	practical and esthetic attention to detail	compulsive orderliness
Arrangement of space		
insufficient division of space, inviting aimless or chaotic movement	functional and welcoming	room overcrowded impeding movement
Quality of play materials		
in poor repair, too many, lack of variety	varied in function, inviting fantasy play and constructive use	"precious," detailed, highly specific in function
Esthetic quality		
unharmonious, lack of care, unfinished appearance	simple, functional, natural beauty	"pretty," sentimental, overly decorated

Role and being of the adult

Quality of speech		
careless diction, poor grammar, too soft or too loud voice	clear diction, correct grammar, natural tone of voice	affected, unnatural pronunciation

Use of language		
frequent talking, asking children questions, offering explanations	judicious use of speech	avoidance of speech failure to respond to children's questions
Interaction with parents		
Casual, chatty, personal	warm yet professional	avoidance, cold, abrupt
Consciousness in relation to time		
seems unaware of time, lets each activity continue until there is a rush at end of morning	allows morning to flow without rush, but on time	constantly checking watch, abrupt transitions

These triads, or polarities with middle ground, are intended to lend mobility to the process of observation. They are not meant as a checklist, which would defeat the purpose. This approach to observation is beautifully described in the following quotation from *Howard's End* by E.M. Forster:

The business man who assumes that this life is everything, and the mystic who asserts that it is nothing, fail, on this side and on that, to hit the truth. "Yes, I see, dear; it's about halfway between," Aunt Juley had hazarded in earlier years. No; truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm, and though proportion is the final secret, to espouse it at the outset is to ensure sterility.

In closing, a further question the mentor may ask herself after the observation is, "What did I not see that I would have expected to see? Was there something missing in the morning's experience?" This question may help to bring the morning's observations into focus and provide additional insights for the mentoring conversation which will follow.

VI. The Art of Fruitful Conversation

Carol Nasr Griset and Kim Raymond

"What is more splendid than gold?" "Light."
"What is more refreshing than light?" "Conversation."

(Goethe, "The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily")

When we think of conversation, we tend to focus on what is said. On further reflection, however, we realize that listening is just as essential a part of conversation as speaking. A true conversation is a meeting of two individuals who together have the possibility of seeing something new arise from their understanding of one another.

The Role of Listening

When I am listened to, it creates me.

(Brenda Ueland, "Tell Me More")

At the center of the mentoring relationship is the encounter we might call the mentoring conversation. At the heart of the mentoring conversation is the art of listening. Why is listening the mentor's primary responsibility? How does listening contribute to an individual's creative process? What do I have to do in order to truly listen to another?

The way we listen enables others to speak. In other words, to actively listen means giving others the possibility of saying things that they could not otherwise have said—or could not have said in the same way.

(Heinz Zimmermann, *Speaking, Listening, Understanding)*

Active listening to another is an act of love. It is a spiritual deed and requires courage, self-discipline and practice. Through listening, a mentor makes herself available as a guide in the self-development process of the other. As listening mentors, we strive to create a fertile space within ourselves where the other's words may take root and grow. We open ourselves to them so that their unique way of being in the world and of caring for young children may flourish. We create a space for them to feel whole, valued and understood.

Listen to the new teacher. Listening is perhaps the most important thing you can do. Let the new teacher tell her story and encourage her in the telling. This is the story of preparation, questions, new ideas, struggles, concerns, worries. Be genuinely interested and try to resist the urge to tell her how you handled those problems or the temptation to sort it all out for her. And when you listen, listen; don't take notes.

(Trevor Mepham, *Teachers Helping Teachers)*

Trust in the mentor will make it safe for the mentee to speak honestly. According to one experienced mentor, it is crucial that the mentor not have a "hidden agenda" in the conversation such as wanting to bring attention to a specific defect or issue that she thinks is causing difficulties. The mentor's attitude needs to be one of interest, and of not knowing what the other wants, feels or thinks. The mentor cannot assume or presume what the other will bring. This atmosphere of openness allows the mentee to be vulnerable in her feelings and creative in her thinking as she speaks. In turn, the mentor may hear something profound that she needed to hear at that moment, coming from the person being mentored. "If we concentrate our hearing until we are filled with the sound of another's voice, then an intimate encounter with the essence of the speaker can come about." (Zimmermann)

Attentive listening means we consciously work to withhold judgment and comparison. We withhold our responses, our thoughts and our expectations. In this process of holding back, we make space for the other and thus become truly available to them. We become aware that another's approach, though different from our own, does not necessarily need to be corrected or changed. When asked what would be helpful from a mentor, a new teacher said, "Before you make a judgment, ask us 'why did you do it that way?' Even though you may be more experienced, please remain open to our new ideas."

"In committing ourselves to listen, we have a chance to dissolve old forms and prejudgments, to loosen ourselves from our thinking and acquire a different kind of knowing—that which comes through our feeling and willing—our impressionable receptivity." (Georg Kühlewind, *Star Children*)

In "Self-Education as the Basis for the Art of Mentoring" (Chapter I) Andrea discusses how mentors need to "forget" what they know in the interests of serving the growth of the mentee. ". . . Before entering the classroom of our mentee, we allow our carefully built-up concepts of 'how things are done' to dissolve, so that the possibility is created for something altogether new to appear."

The mentor listens with all her senses. With her ears, she hears the words and tone of voice. With her eyes, she perceives the other person's eyes, facial expressions, body language and gesture. If we listen to another person as though to a piece of music we will get to know their "composing style" and give them space to express this style freely. Through deep, empathic listening the mentor becomes aware of the mentee's vision and how she is striving. The quality of the mentor's listening will draw out and confirm what the mentee already knows. The mentor observes and listens to ascertain the purposefulness in the mentee's decisions and actions. She may be able to encourage a gift the mentee may not fully appreciate in herself. For example, in listening to the mentee tell a story to the children, the mentor may see through an awkward presentation of the story to experience the mentee's enthusiasm and real gift for creating imaginative pictures in her storytelling.

Keen listening will allow the mentor to ascertain if the mentee is speaking out of her own understanding, or is borrowing from someone else. Perhaps the mentee is expressing what she thinks

the mentor wants to hear; perhaps she is saying what she thinks she "should" be saying as a new teacher, or what she has heard other teachers say. With sensitive questions and empathy the mentor can guide the mentee toward authenticity, self-confidence, and true creativity.

The Role of Speaking

"Improving our ability to converse means improving our ability to interact socially. We can give our partners-in-conversation opportunities to develop themselves, arrive at insights, find solutions and feel supported, or we can use conversation solely to develop and validate ourselves." (Zimmermann)

With this in mind, a mentor's listening will inform her speaking. Through open and fully-attentive listening, our speaking will arise naturally as we seek to clarify what the mentee is saying. Our thoughtful questions will support the mentee in discovering her capacities and developing herself as a teacher.

In moving from listening to speaking, asking questions is most helpful when the questions serve to develop the themes brought forth by the mentee. Bringing an attitude of warmth and empathy to her questions, the mentor seeks to hear more about the mentee's ideas. We may be able to remember how difficult it can be for a new teacher to express intentions and impressions to a seasoned teacher. "Remember not to patronize. The new teacher is intelligent, skilled, inventive, sensitive, and she may have something to teach you. Draw ideas and possibilities out of her through questions and observations and don't give easy answers. Have the tact to let her discover her own answers." (Mepham)

As mentors, we may need to remind ourselves that in order to understand another, we "stand under" them with a respectful and learning attitude, remembering that it takes years of teaching to discover one's own style and learn to be comfortably oneself with the children. Else Goettgens, a long-time mentor, says, "Before I go into a teacher's classroom, I first remind myself to look for something which that teacher can do better than I. What can I find to truly admire in the other adult?"

Establishing a Relationship and Asking Helpful Questions

Building a relationship with the mentee is a pre-requisite for having a fruitful conversation. Early in the mentoring process, the mentor will need to ask the mentee, "What do you want, hope for, and expect from the mentoring relationship?" We can then clarify, if necessary, how we see our role as a mentor. (For specific suggestions about gathering demographic and other practical information from the mentee, please see Chapter III.)

Both mentor and mentee will find it helpful for the mentee to complete a self-assessment before the visit. This should include self-perceived areas of strength and weakness, and any concerns the mentee has in her work. When asking the mentee to prepare such a self-assessment prior to the visit, the mentor may help the process by asking the mentee to consider the following:

"What part of your work gives you the most joy and satisfaction?"

"What do you find especially difficult?"

"What are your priorities for this year?"

An experienced mentor suggested that if something is hard for the mentee, the mentor can encourage her to narrow down the area of difficulty. For example, if the mentee is challenged by circle time, the mentor may help her pinpoint the challenge. The mentor can begin by asking what parts of the circle go smoothly. From an awareness of the mentee's strengths, the mentor can better help her approach the problem.

It is important to ask open questions that encourage the mentee to become more conscious of what she already knows. A mentee is likely to appreciate questions that focus her awareness. During the mentoring visit, such open questions might include: "What do you think are your strengths?"; "In what ways have you grown since you started working with young children?" In helping a mentee to clarify her communication with us, we may offer a comment such as, "Let me see if I understand what you are saying." Then the mentor may reflect back as clearly as possible what she has heard. Clarity will enable the mentor to validate and support what the mentee is expressing.

In helping the mentee to reflect on the day, the mentor may find questions such as the following useful: "How was the morning for you?"; "What parts of it do you think went well?"; "What parts of the morning were most challenging?" In supporting and respecting the growth of the mentee, a mentor might need to guide her away from labeling or blaming a child or parent in a difficult situation A mentor may be able to offer a new approach that focuses the mentee on what positive actions she might initiate to help resolve a difficulty. The mentor can help the mentee to expand on her self-observation by asking questions such as:

"Can you tell me more about that?"

"Can you think of any way you might be contributing to the problem?"

"Have you thought about a possible plan of action?"

By asking the mentee to describe the areas where she feels most competent, the mentor acknowledges her abilities and reminds her of why she has chosen this work as her vocation. In addition, by allowing her to talk about her challenges, the mentor creates the opportunity for the mentee to place her pride, vulnerability or embarrassment into the chalice of conversation.

Additional Aspects of Conversation

There is another kind of conversation to pay attention to during the mentoring visit: the daily exchanges the mentee has while she is working. How is the conversation between teacher and children; the conversation/relationship between teacher and assistant; and the conversation/relationship between the teacher and the parents? Are the children being heard and are the children hearing the teacher? The mentor will be looking for the quality of these "conversations" even though they may sometimes be non-verbal. Is it a fruitful exchange, and is there understanding? Does the assistant feel acknowledged; do the parents feel appreciated? What is the quality of the exchanges between the mentee and the people she relates to every day?

A mentor may be asked for help with the mentee's relationship with the parents of the children in her class. She may suggest that the mentee approach the teacher-parent relationship as one would approach a conversation: that is, by setting aside pre-judgments and expectations and offering an open and empathic atmosphere for an exchange to take place. The mentor may remind the mentee of the importance of fully-attentive listening when interacting with parents, so that she may experience with them, as she does with the children, the love that grows out of interest. The mentee may need to be encouraged in embracing and respecting the parents' central role in their child's life. It can come as a surprise to a beginning teacher how much of her work will be with parents. Mentors can have an important role to play in helping new teachers find ways to include parents in the life of the class. Occasionally, the mentor may be asked to help the mentee plan a parent evening. By active listening and reflective feedback, a mentor can encourage the mentee's enthusiasm and help her focus her plans for sharing her ideas and observations with the parents. The mentor's experienced perspective is valuable in this area and can serve as a reminder to the mentee about how much she can learn from the parents.

Sometimes a mentor may enter into a mentoring relationship with an experienced teacher who is resistant to feedback or deeply entrenched in particular patterns or habits of relating to young children. The mentor may then approach more deeply the *intention* behind the teacher's actions, asking, "What is the thought behind the action?" She may pose the question to the teacher, "What are your reasons for doing it this way?" "Is it having the effect you hoped for?" "Have you ever considered trying. . . ?"

Occasionally a mentor will encounter a mentee who is wondering if she should be pursuing teaching as her career; or the mentor might have this question. It might be helpful to inquire about the mentee's biography and why she chose to enter the field of teaching. The mentor may help the mentee perceive if she is experiencing a temporary difficulty or if a bigger question exists for her. This situation calls for honesty and tact from the mentor. A question such as, "Does teaching nourish you as a life's work?" may be helpful.

Some Practical Considerations

Just as the children's activity is nourished by a healthy environment, the mentoring conversation is affected by surrounding circumstances. Is the setting private? Is it quiet enough to allow for focus and concentration? What time of day is it? Are the participants hungry, tired, or needing a break? In some teacher education programs, it is the mentee's responsibility to ensure that the conversation is given the necessary respect within the framework of the day so that a fruitful exchange can take place. In this case, the mentee will be expected to attend to the practical details of arranging an appropriate setting as well as allowing for adequate time. For example, the mentee might need to schedule a substitute to cover for her if she has afternoon faculty duties. One mentor noted the difficulty of conducting a mentoring conversation while sitting at a picnic table on a windy winter afternoon during the mentee's playground duty.

Sometimes the planning may be the responsibility of the mentor. The mentor will be prepared to ask the mentee to "make time" for the conversation during the school day. Eating lunch together after a morning observation may help the transition into a more relaxed conversation. Ideally,

there would be some time between the observation and the conversation to allow both to collect their thoughts and digest the morning's experiences.

If the mentee has an assistant, or is an assistant, meeting for half an hour with both individuals before meeting alone with the mentee, can be helpful. In this way, the mentor has an opportunity to ask how the morning went for each of them, separately and as a team. By creating an atmosphere of trust and empathy, the mentor gives each a chance to speak openly about working together. If there are struggles between the two, the mentor can normalize or provide neutral ground to the struggles between teacher and assistant, likening them to the struggles in any close relationship. She may need to affirm how important it is for the children to experience an atmosphere of respect and caring between the two. The mentor may need to help the pair to have realistic expectations of one another and of their relationship.

It often helps to put a mentee at ease if mentor and mentee are able to socialize outside of the mentoring conversation. They may have a meal together or take a walk, or the mentor may stay at the mentee's house. The casual time that mentor and mentee spend together outside of the classroom in an informal setting may lead to expanded or enhanced conversation and deeper understanding of one another. If the mentor stays at the home of the mentee, she may have the opportunity to meet the mentee's spouse or family and gain a greater awareness of the mentee's life situation. This broader perspective will allow the mentor to offer a greater depth of support, compassion, and encouragement.

The passage of time is a mysterious element in the mentoring relationship. The quality of conversation will change as mentor and mentee come to know one another. As trust develops, conversations will ripen and yield more insight. Another aspect of time the mentor may notice is that often it will not be until the next day or the next week that the significance of a question or comment will surface. The mentor may find an opportunity to mention these insights or ask additional questions in a follow-up phone conversation or visit.

Qualities to Cultivate; Additional Thoughts

Through the ages, people have sought wise counsel from those who are more experienced. As a listener, a guide, and a mirror, our role as mentor is profound. Foremost for the mentor is facility in the art of communication. As experienced teachers, we come to the mentoring role with a wide variety of skills and an abundance of gifts to share. In order to be truly effective in aiding the self-development of the other, we have a responsibility to hone our communication skills through workshops and study (see Chapter I).

Often a mentor can spend much time and energy in conversation with a mentee and wonder if there was a positive effect. It may be helpful for the mentor to create a way for the mentee to give feedback regarding the mentoring experience. Such feedback could be sent to the mentor and/or initiating body. This information could provide valuable insights for the mentor's self-evaluation and bring to light aspects of the mentor's listening and speaking that need more awareness.

It is worthwhile for the mentor to review the balance of listening and speaking after a conversation, and to ask herself about the quality of connection. "How was the understanding between us?" As mentors, we need to develop the self-knowledge that informs us whether we should

learn to listen more or to speak more. What is our natural tendency and how do we cultivate the other capacity? A mentor must be able to practice reflection on her own motives, strengths and weaknesses, asking, for example, "How do I respond to criticism or praise?" Our ability to be helpful as a mentor is grounded in who we are and who we are striving to become. If we remain open to the possibilities for growth, mentoring has the possibility of transforming the mentor as well as the mentee.

This chapter began with the quotation from Brenda Ueland, "*When I am listened to, it creates me.*" As mentors, let us strive to cultivate the capacity to listen in a way that makes this thought a reality.

VII. Pearls of Wisdom: The Role of Advice in Mentoring

Nancy Foster

The mentoring relationship offers a golden opportunity for mutual growth and learning, and a forum for collegial exploration of questions about pedagogy and human relations. As one mentor asked somewhat plaintively, however, "Is it *ever* appropriate to offer our 'pearls of wisdom'?"

It is important that a mentor be a good listener, and that she enter the mentoring situation with openness and a readiness to support the mentee's goals rather than impose her own preconceived ideas. On the other hand, there also exist certain essential qualities of Waldorf early childhood education, as described in Chapter IV. Isn't it important that the mentor carry a commitment to these essentials into the mentoring relationship and bring them to the mentee's attention if the mentor feels something is lacking? And what if the mentee is asking for advice: "What should I do to make snack time more peaceful?" Is it wrong for the mentor to offer a tried-and-true approach she has developed from her own experience? After all, a teacher or caregiver becomes a mentor when she has developed skills and capacities from her years with young children and their parents, from study, and from inner work arising from Anthroposophy. She is, to be sure, still actively engaged in a path of continuing development; but she is also something more than simply a peer of the mentee.

Is there a way to acknowledge the mentor's greater experience without creating a situation of hierarchy—without an implied judgment of the worth of either person's potential as a teacher or caregiver and as a human being? Can a mentor offer advice in a way that still leaves the mentee free to find her own path?

Possibilities, not Rules

Years ago, our school arranged for several European master teachers to visit us, one each year, to offer an intensive course on early childhood, and to visit our classrooms and meet with us. These teachers brought a wealth of knowledge and experience. I remember that after their visits, we always noticed that our classrooms became somewhat chaotic and unsettled. We soon realized that this chaos reflected our own inner condition; our work with these master teachers had brought new and stimulating ideas, and we were questioning many of our classroom practices. Of course the children sensed this off-balance condition and reacted as children usually do. Understanding the cause, we were able to take this in stride and soon order was restored as we worked through our questions inwardly.

We were grateful for this experience with a variety of master teachers. We perceived that each teacher was deeply rooted in Anthroposophy and the understanding of the young child; yet they had arrived at quite different practices in classroom work, from the rhythm of the day to festival life to the details of watercolor painting or rest time. This was an invaluable perspective for us—the realization that in Waldorf education there can be no "one right way," but that each of us must strive to deepen our connection to the source of Waldorf education, to learn from those with experience as well as from each other, to question, and gradually to find our own way. This perspective can help to illuminate the question of advice-giving in the mentoring relationship.

The answer to the question, "Is it ever appropriate to offer our 'pearls of wisdom?'" must be, "It depends." It depends in part on the spirit in which these pearls are offered. Can the mentor find a way to give advice which does not proclaim rules, but rather opens possibilities for another approach to a situation or suggests a new way of thinking about a question? Can the mentor describe her own way or point of view, at the same time sharing her reasons and mentioning alternative ways? Such advice will support the mentee in taking another step in her development, while respecting her need to explore a question and ultimately make her own decisions.

Those master teachers who visited our school did not hesitate to give advice or to tell us how they did things. However, they always gave this advice or information in the context of the reasons for their approach. Invariably they would say, "This is how I do it, but of course there are other ways too," or words to that effect. (Of course, it was sometimes clear that they wondered how anyone could *possibly* want to do it one of those other ways!—but their intent was clear. They wished to leave us free to think the matter through.) Often they would ask a teacher they had observed, "Why did you do it that way?" If the teacher had a good reason, that was all-important. This approach to giving advice is, obviously, quite different from saying, "Rest time has to come before circle time;" or "never give children only one color to paint with;" or "you should always cover the windows with drapes."

Anchors in a Sea of Uncertainties

A very different—almost a polar—relationship to advice was demonstrated by another visiting teacher, a warm and positive person, who met with our faculty to discuss a particular element of the weekly rhythm. Wanting to avoid any appearance of authority and to leave us free to find our own way, she warded off all our attempts to ascertain what she thought or how she approached the work with the children, instead asking us, "What do *you* think? How do *you* do it?" This was extremely frustrating! We were interested in *her* ideas, and wanted her to trust that we would be able to think about them and reach our own conclusions. A mentor who never gives advice or takes a position on an issue could be equally frustrating to a mentee, leaving her to flounder without a sense of direction.

The answer to the question about offering advice also depends on the particular situation and the particular mentor/mentee relationship. If the mentee is a new teacher or caregiver, for instance, and is experiencing many challenges, she may need more specific advice as a sort of "first aid" while she is learning to find her way. A limited number of firm suggestions may serve as anchors in a sea of uncertainties. There will be time in future years for her to work through to her own ways. A more experienced person, or a former assistant who has moved into a lead position, on the other hand, is at a different stage in her professional growth. She may benefit more if the mentor spends time helping her to clarify her questions and sharpen her observations of her own work and its results.

Some mentees present the mentor with many specific questions, perhaps involving individual children she finds challenging. She may want "recipes for success," possibly feeling insecure or wishing to avoid looking at underlying, more deep-seated causes for the challenges she is encountering. In such situations the mentor may be tempted to fall into a question-and-answer mode. The recipe approach, however, is full of pitfalls. A recipe-seeker may attempt to apply a piece of advice to every situation which appears similar, failing to realize that the essential factor is the particular child or group of children along with the particular teacher. Thus a mentor who is confronted with this kind of questioning will probably wish to find a way to help the mentee find her own answers. Such an effort is not a "quick fix" but will in the end be of more help to the mentee.

Tact and Discernment

In contrast, some mentees seem to resist any sort of advice, always seeking to justify their own way or offering reasons why the advice would not work. This is sometimes the case even when the mentee seems to be asking for help. In such a situation, it may be possible through conversation (see Chapter VI) for the mentor to get to know the mentee better and come to understand how best to offer the help and support she needs. "Ask, don't tell," was the rule of thumb of one experienced teacher educator I know. Tactful but persistent questions may help the mentee to see what is needed. In some cases, a sharing of perceptions of the mentor/mentee relationship may be worthwhile. The mentor may say, "It seems as if you might prefer that I not offer specific advice. Is that the case? What would be more helpful?" The mentee may not be conscious of her resistance, and such an observation and question may bring this to light for her and allow her to share her needs and perceptions more fully with the mentor.

A mentoring situation where the mentee is in a non-Waldorf setting requires special tact on the part of the mentor. It would be very discouraging for such a mentee if she were made to feel there is only one right way to do things. This circumstance can provide a wonderful opportunity for the mentor and mentee to explore together the essential qualities of Waldorf education and try to see how these can be approached in a setting which necessarily limits the possibilities. This can be a challenge and a learning experience for the mentor as well as the mentee.

In conclusion, we might answer the opening question, "Is it ever appropriate to offer our 'pearls of wisdom'?" by saying, "Giving advice can be a good thing, *if*. . ." And we might complete the sentence with the following considerations: *if*. . . a) the mentor has first tried to discern the real question or need; b) the advice is offered with humility; c) the advice arises not from a recipe or dogma but from taking the actual circumstances into account; d) reasons for the advice are shared; e) a context of other possible approaches and their *pros* and *cons* is given; and f) the mentor offers the advice in such a way that the mentee is given space and time to consider and work with the idea, leaving her free both inwardly and outwardly to find her own way.

VIII. Accountability: Written Records

Nancy Foster

A record of a mentoring visit goes to the mentee and to the initiating body, which may be an early childhood education program or a school committee. The written record of a mentoring visit serves at least three purposes:

- The record is primarily for the benefit of the mentee. It provides an objective view of her current work, support and encouragement in her striving, and a mirror of her questions. It may also include "homework" for the next observation, as well as specific suggestions for her work.
- For the mentor, writing the record allows time for reflection, for review of the mentoring conversation, and for working with the sleep process to reach a perspective of warm objectivity, so as to offer the mentee both support and suggestions for further development.
- For the director of a training program, or for a school committee, the record offers an account of the visit and a picture of the mentor's perception of the mentee's work and development.

An early childhood education program or a school may provide a recording form with specific points for observation and comment; or it may give broader guidelines for a narrative record. In essence, the written record is a summary or overview of what was discussed in the conversation of mentor and mentee following the classroom visit. In most cases, the mentoring conversation and the record might include the following components:

- A brief description of the classroom setting and demographics of the class
- A description of the mentee's responsibilities in the class
- Areas of strength and capability observed
- Areas where further development is suggested
- Particular questions or concerns carried by the mentee
- "Homework" suggested by the mentor: a goal to be met, a new approach to be tried in a particular aspect of the work, an inner exercise, a child observation, etc. A valuable role of the mentor's visit, which can be reflected in the report, is to leave the mentee with a question which will stimulate and support her development, both personally and professionally.

It will be worthwhile for the mentor to notice whether she and the mentee are seeing the same things in the mentee's work. That is, are the mentee's questions and concerns in accord with what the mentor observes as areas of greatest need? If not, the mentor may ask questions and offer observations during the conversation in order to bring more awareness to the mentee. The mentor will also want to listen carefully to the mentee's concerns and take them seriously. Detailed consideration of the mentoring conversation is found in Chapter VI.

Two aspects of a teacher's or caregiver's work which are of paramount importance but which may be difficult for a mentor to observe are work with colleagues and work with parents. Some indications may surface in the course of conversations or interactions, in which case these may be discussed and mentioned in the record.

It can be a valuable support to the mentee's professional development if she is asked to take some notes during the mentor/mentee conversation and then to write an account of the mentor's comments, questions, and suggestions. This requires an active involvement of the mentee's will forces in the process of digesting and putting into writing what she has heard. The mentee's account would then be sent to the mentor soon after the visit; the mentor could add to the report as needed to clarify points or fill in any missing thoughts, returning the final version to the mentee as well as sending a copy to the initiating body if this is part of the process.

If, instead, the mentor writes the record of the visit, a copy should be sent to the mentee, who then has a chance to confirm that the record gives an accurate overview of the mentoring conversation. Since all substantive aspects of the mentoring observation should have been addressed in the conversation, the record should not include observations or concerns that the mentor and mentee have not already discussed. The mentor and mentee should, however make sure that the record expresses the perceptions of both parties. Again, the final version should be sent to both the mentee and the initiating body.

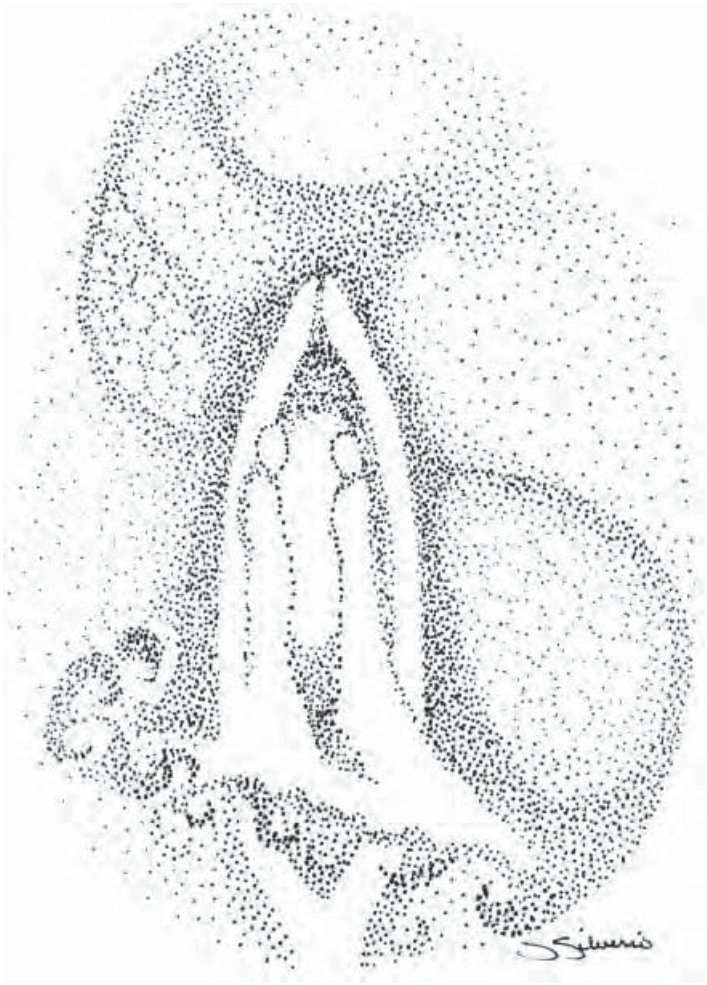
In either case—whether the initial report is written by the mentor or the mentee—both mentor and mentee will contribute to the final record which goes to the program director or school committee.

It is important that the mentoring record for an early childhood education program be kept confidential. It is not intended for the school where the mentee is teaching, though she is free to share it if she wishes. The mentor is responsible only to the mentee and the training program, not to the mentee's school. In the event, however, that the mentoring visit has been initiated by a school, the mentor is responsible to the school as outlined in Chapter V in the section "Clarity of Expectations."

It is important to bear in mind that a mentoring record is not an evaluation (see Chapter II). The record is, rather, an account of a conversation which has taken place between a mentor and mentee—a conversation with the purpose of fostering the mentee's personal and professional growth.

IX. Meeting at the Eye of the Needle—Mentoring on the Path of Adult Learning

Susan Silverio



And so they meet—two early childhood teachers/caregivers.
Perhaps one is retired from classroom teaching.
Perhaps one has just begun her first Waldorf kindergarten class, or a home-based LifeWays center.
Or perhaps both are seasoned teachers seeking further development
and the inspiration to continue.
Both are united on behalf of the young child and the future of human development.
At this time, one is called to serve as a mentor.
We will call the other the "mentee" for now.
Although one is designated the mentor, both are on a path of self-education and adult learning.
What are the various paths of adult learning and what are the processes involved?
And how might these relate to mentoring?

In *Awakening the Will—Principles and Processes of Adult Learning*, author Coenraad van Houten describes three learning paths. One is learning for life, in a scheduled course of study and training, imparted by teachers, often in institutes and schools organized for higher education. The second path is *learning through life*. "Everyone is constantly faced with a discrepancy between their inner faculties, strengths and weaknesses, on the one hand, and what comes towards them as necessities, questions, and challenges of life, on the other. This is the situation of Destiny Learning." The third path is *learning to live in the reality of the spiritual world*. Rudolf Steiner illuminates this path: the modern path of self-knowledge. He points out that instruction and counsel are helpful, but the task is to find our Teacher within. In van Houten's words, "The highest learning objective that exists is: to become ever more a human being, to be able to experience our true being in the cosmic worlds of our origin. This is so we can become better able to fulfill our tasks here on earth."

It is the adult ego that integrates these three learning paths. All three paths work together as the adult develops the lively art of nourishing the young child's unfolding will forces in the work and play of daily life through the seasons. As Steiner-based education cares for the entire human being—body, soul and spirit—early childhood is recognized as a time when the incarnating soul and spirit are taking up residence in the earthly form, surrounding the physical body with a cloud of life forces and recreating it in order to take up the individuality's life purpose. The being of the child is completely open to her surroundings, including the thoughts and feelings of the adults who relate to her. The child devotes herself to absorbing all she encounters. It is essential, therefore, that the adult is protective of the young child's life forces and is striving to be worthy of the young child's imitation. This includes harmonizing our thoughts and feelings as well as our speech and movement. If we are honest, we recognize this work as a lifelong path of learning and development.

Becoming a mentor is also a process of learning as the mentor moves from her own experience and her own incarnating of the essentials of Waldorf education, to meet the mentee who is moving into the future on her own paths of study, life experience and inner work.

So perhaps it would be worthwhile to reflect on exactly what the processes of adult learning might be. We know that the young child learns through imitation—through empathy with his environment and the actions and inner qualities of the teacher; the grade-school child's life of feeling is being carried and developed through the "beloved authority" of the teacher; and the high school or college student works with ideas, still seeking the star of his individual self.

The adult learner, however, is now able to call upon his own Spirit Self to navigate into life, to consciously direct and integrate experience into knowledge and capacities. At the age of twenty-one, the very life forces that we strive to protect in early childhood are freed for self-education.

Van Houten works with the seven processes of adult learning, based on the seven processes of life described by Rudolf Steiner ("The Riddle of Humanity," lecture of August 12, 1916) in explaining all of biological life, including human life processes and perception. On a biological level these seven processes are: 1) breathing, 2) warming, 3) digesting, 4) eliminating/absorbing, 5) maintaining, 6) growing, and 7) reproducing. The first three processes involve taking something in from outside as physical nourishment (air, warmth, and food). The *fourth process* is the turning point of transforming these substances internally. The last three processes involve bringing forth something from within (sustaining the body, growing, and giving birth).

"Adult Learning is based on the use our ego makes of the life processes that were originally involved in the forming of our body. Our available etheric forces, energized by the ego, produce Adult Learning." (p. 43, van Houten) The seven natural *life* processes become available to the adult as the seven *learning* processes: 1) perceiving, 2) relating, 3) digesting, 4) individualizing, 5) practicing, 6) growing faculties, and 7) creating something new.

The first process, ***perceiving***, is observing the world through the senses. There is a breathing quality, in that something is taken in, internalized, and needs to be breathed out as well. Outer sense impressions do not simply stream into the adult, as is the case with the young child. An adult must be *attentive*. "Only then does one *hear* a speaker, *read* a book, *perceive* a sound, color, movement, etc."

The second process, ***relating***, requires a person to form a connection with what has been observed. An inner activity of interest is required to warm up (or cool down if need be) what has been perceived. For example, a monotone presentation would require a listener to consciously engage the ego in order to discover the essentials being presented. The individual ego would also need to be engaged in order not to be carried away by a fiery speaker.

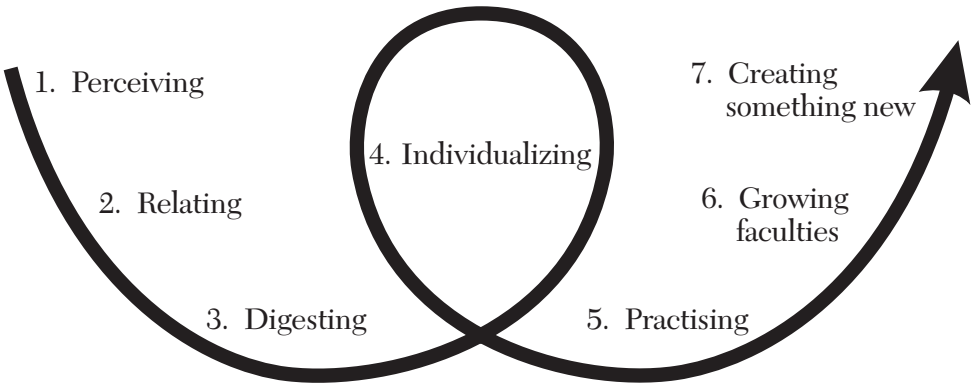
The third process, ***digesting***, is to assimilate what has been taken in. Just as food must be completely broken down in order to be digested by the physical organism, so also adults must digest what has been seen and heard before it can provide spiritual nourishment.

The fourth process, ***individualizing***, is the central and crucial process of the seven. This is the internal turning point where there is a sorting out of that which the individual may transform for his own use, and that which must be eliminated. This is the "aha!" moment of adult learning, when something is experienced as new, as if born from within and truly one's own. In order for this to occur, there needs to be time and space for this transformation to happen freely. This process can only take place if the ego has been active in working with the first three processes of observing, relating and digesting. Someone whose ego does not take up and work with material may continue to "do her own thing." This would be individual*ism*—remaining in old habits and attitudes or acting merely out of personal preference. On the other hand, someone could take up new material and adhere to it blindly, without working it through with her own ego, neglecting the step of digesting. This could lead to a kind of rigid dogmatism. These polarities are balanced only when the adult ego is engaged in all of these learning processes.

Once a new insight or impulse is gained, the final learning stages are *practicing, growing new faculties* and *creating something new*. The fifth process, ***practicing***, allows what has been realized to take root. There may not necessarily be a feeling of immediate success. One needs to have the courage and perseverance to practice what is being learned and to find a way to practice that renews vitality.

In the sixth process, ***growing new faculties***, all of the preceding work needs to "go to sleep" so that it can reawaken as an inner capacity.

Finally there is the possibility of the seventh process of ***creating something new***, something more than the sum of the parts.



(Diagram used with permission of the author)

This sequence of seven processes describes something more than the acquiring of a skill or a method of teaching. It describes, rather, the development of new capacities. For truly human development, the middle step of *individualizing* is essential.

An example of this learning sequence would be a beginning teacher who works out of imitation of another teacher. As she enters her second year of teaching she may have a dawning realization that there isn't necessarily one "Our School" way that requires that a child's birthday be celebrated in a specific manner. She had assumed that what her colleague described to her was what every teacher did. Her mentor assures her that it was fine that she had done things, in her first year, just as her fellow teacher described to her. Gradually the new teacher develops the feeling that this way doesn't feel quite right; she begins questioning, trying to discern what fits, etc. Finally the teacher begins to find and clarify her own way. This is never a finished product, rather always a process of development, but now arising out of her Self rather than imitation.

It is valuable for a mentor to acknowledge the gifts as well as the challenges of the mentee. Strengths may be cultivated while challenging areas may be developed more slowly over the course of time. For example, a teacher may rely on her natural storytelling ability while taking a number of years to explore puppetry and to learn to sing in a way that nourishes the young child.

This sequence may take a shorter or a longer time for an individual teacher, and some areas will proceed at different paces than others. The experience of individualizing can sometimes be precipitated by contact with a self-realized person who exemplifies the last three stages of practicing, growth and creativity. The teacher may then discover that it is not so much *what* is done, but *how* it is done.

Although the processes of learning are sequential, they are also simultaneous. A mentor may meet a mentee in any of these processes and offer encouragement to continue to explore, to study, to deepen, to make the work one's own, and to practice, express and create.

This is a challenging path and resistance can easily develop on the level of either thinking, feeling or willing. Van Houten offers the following approaches. If we encounter resistance on the thinking level, it can be met with interest and objective observation. If there seems to be resistance on

the level of feeling, we can practice deep listening. If fear seems to be offering resistance to the life of willing, movement may be encouraged through artistic activity.

Resistance may originate at an unconscious level out of past experiences, temperament, or hidden antipathy to the mentor. Resistance may also be seen as an indication of a question that wants to be asked. A mentee may be able to articulate a question if a mentor can foster an open and inquiring manner. Some mentees may have a desire for the direction of an authority while others may resist or resent any kind of suggestion. Even while the mentor may hold deeply the essential ideals of Waldorf Education (and perhaps the principles and practices of LifeWays Care or RIE as well), she needs to recognize that even these must be temporarily set aside in meeting another who is in the process of adult learning. Instead of giving directives and advice, a mentor may come to meet a mentee as she stands at the eye of the needle by asking a question such as, "What are you working on now?" The question may engage the ego of the mentee, and stimulate quiet contemplation.

"Human beings really are aware of much more than they know about in their daytime consciousness. Their higher beings know, their conscience knows. In their subconscious soul-regions a large amount of wisdom is stored." (p. 60, van Houten) From these recesses, something of a breakthrough may occur. What we *know* becomes *understanding* or a *new way of sensing*. Very often this process of *individualizing* sets off a will impulse. An understanding becomes an intention or decision. This process is encouraged and reinforced when a mentor works with questions instead of answers.

It may be helpful for the mentee to work on one thing at a time. A mentor can offer encouragement along this challenging path of learning as an adult by sharing her own questions, challenges and joys as appropriate.

A mentee may have questions to pose to a mentor as well. Experienced mentors have relayed that these questions have been an opportunity to bring to consciousness and to articulate their own intentions and understandings. Such questions may even prompt changes in the mentor's own practice.

Truly the process of adult learning, as a mentor as well as a mentee, can be a lifelong path of learning and development. To consciously choose to remain active in this process of learning takes courage, but engenders life and brings one closer to the realm of the young child.

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Compiled by Celia Riahi

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About the Authors

Nancy Foster was a Waldorf early childhood teacher for over thirty years at Acorn Hill Waldorf Kindergarten and Nursery in Silver Spring, Maryland, where she taught kindergarten, nursery, and parent/child classes. She continues to lead parent groups and offer adult education talks at the school. In addition, she serves as a mentor for teachers and as a visiting speaker at Waldorf schools, offers workshops at Waldorf early childhood conferences, and is on the visiting faculty of Sunbridge College in Spring Valley, New York. Nancy has published two collections of seasonal music and verse: *Let Us Form a Ring*, and *Dancing as We Sing*. She is also the author of the book *In a Nutshell: Dialogues with Parents at Acorn Hill, a Waldorf Kindergarten*, which addresses questions frequently asked by parents about parenting and Waldorf early childhood education. Nancy and her husband, a professional musician, live in Washington, DC. They encountered Waldorf education and Anthroposophy while seeking a school for their two sons, now grown.

Andrea Gambardella is the program director of the full-time Early Childhood Teacher Education program at Sunbridge College. She was a founding teacher of the Waldorf School of Baltimore where she taught for many years. While in Baltimore she authored a parent-child program for underserved single mothers called "Bright Beginnings" through the Safe and Sound Campaign. She is an active board member of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America. In addition to Waldorf education, Andrea's background includes training with Resources for Infant Educarers (founded on the work of Magda Gerber and Dr. Emmi Pikkler) and Montessori teaching. She is a graduate of the AHE/Sunbridge Remedial Teacher Education Program. She is the mother of three grown children.

Susan Howard has been the Coordinator of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America since 2002. She was the Director of Early Childhood Teacher Education at Sunbridge College from 1984-2002 and continues to direct its part-time early childhood training program. She taught kindergarten at the Waldorf School in Lexington, MA, and has worked as a mentor, evaluator and advisor to Waldorf early childhood educators throughout North America. Susan also serves as Co-Coordinator of the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education and is a member of its Council. In addition, she is a founding board member and former director of the Research Institute for Waldorf Education, and is a member of the Leadership Council of the

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Carol Nasr Griset has taught young children for fifteen years, pioneering the nursery program at the Toronto Waldorf School and working in the parent-tot program. Later she led the Halifax Waldorf Playgroup, a home-based program in Nova Scotia. Also in Halifax she taught adults in an ECE program at a community college and led parent-child classes at a single-parent center. She currently lives with her husband in Orange County, California, where she teaches parent-child and parent-infant classes. Carol is training with RIE (Resources for Infant Educarers) and has completed RIE II. She mentors for Rudolf Steiner College in the early childhood education programs and for Lifeways. In addition, she works as a pediatric chaplain in a children's hospital and as a mentor to parents of young children. She is the mother of five grown children and has recently become a grandmother.

Kim Raymond has been involved with Waldorf Education for over thirty years and has the distinction of being a graduate of the first teacher training class at Rudolf Steiner College in Fair Oaks, CA. After many years of teaching kindergarten at the Sacramento Waldorf School, she moved to Santa Monica during a sabbatical year to help expand the early childhood programs at Westside Waldorf School. During her five years there she served as an officer on the Board of Directors and as Head of Faculty. For the past six years she has been teaching kindergarten on the beautiful island of Maui at the Haleakala Waldorf School. Kim is the WECAN Regional Representative for Hawaii and teaches early childhood education in the Summer Teacher Education program at Rudolf Steiner College. She has three grown daughters, all Waldorf graduates, and has recently become a doting grandma.

Celia Riahi has been teaching and caring for young children for most of her life. She began working as a nanny during her teenage years, and opened The Other Mother, a Waldorf-inspired home daycare program, when her only daughter, now grown, was fourteen months old. She ran this program for ten years and then taught at the Rudolf Steiner School in NYC for four years. She moved to Massachusetts in 1991 where she teaches kindergarten at The Hartsbrook School in Hadley. Celia is a Board member of the Rudolf Steiner Institute and manages their summer Bookstore. In addition to her activities as an adult educator and mentor, Celia has a passionate interest in both arts and crafts. She has worked as a jeweler, sculptor, and fiber artist, and has been studying painting at the Rudolf Steiner Institute. Celia lives in Amherst with her partner and her great aunt.

Susan Silverio is the director of the LifeWays Part-Time Early Childhood Training based in Freeport, Maine. She is also the lead teacher of Spindlewood Waldorf Kindergarten and LifeWays Center in Lincolnville, near the architectural studio and homesteads of her husband and stepson. She was the founding teacher of Ashwood Waldorf School. She also founded and directed Mid-Coast Hospitality House, a temporary and emergency shelter. Susan is a gardener and a beekeeper.

Connie White, an early childhood teacher for over twenty-five years, taught kindergarten in both the Ontario public school system and the London Waldorf School (LWS). Connie also initiated and taught the Parent-Child program at the LWS and served as the Enrollment Coordinator for several years. Now retired, she continues to give parent education courses in London and visits other Waldorf schools in Ontario and the United States as a mentor and evaluator for early childhood teachers and programs. She has recently accepted the position as the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America's representative for the Great Lakes Region. Connie has two grown children and two grandchildren.