



Essential Characteristics of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education for the Child from Birth to Three

The first three years of our life are unique. The child is totally open and trustful towards the world, therefore dependent of how his/her needs are met. Care for the child under the age of three needs very specific qualities. It requires adults who are constantly striving to develop their soul and spiritual qualities.

By understanding and respectfully meeting the needs of the child we can consciously build up daily life. This understanding must penetrate our attitude and activity. The adult has to be aware of what it means to be a role model, because the child lives in imitation, as his/her main way of learning. It is important to develop a close and continuous attachment between the caretaker and the child.

Through conscious daily rhythm the child is guided into life, which should be based in authentic work. We also have to consider that child needs plenty of time for exploring the outer world, meeting others, meeting himself, developing all the senses, especially the senses of touch, life, movement, and balance.

Educational principles

1. The attitude of the adult:

It is important to cultivate an attitude of trust, openness and gratitude towards the child and life. It is necessary to understand the importance of meaningful activities, both for oneself and one's own development of skills, such as work (cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening, ...) and walking and exploring nature.

2. The environment of the child:

In order to meet the needs of the child, the environment has to be quiet, simple, warm, peaceful. It has to allow safe exploring. Toys should be simple and made out of natural materials.

3. Rhythmical daily life:

Rhythmical daily life is permeated with an understanding of the child's need for:

- quality and quantity of sleep in a good environment
- Healthy nutrition
- Movement and exposure to nature including walking as a daily activity.
- Caretaking filled with warmth, presence of being, and joy.

This makes it possible for the child to feel safe and secure, and thus develop healthy self-esteem

4. Encounters between adults:

The child learns to meet the world through relating to others. For this reason, any encounter has to be respectful, caring and professional, whether with children, or adults.

Healthy child development unfolds most fully in the context of a community with healthy social relationships among parents, teachers and children. Waldorf educators strive to create such conscious, collaborative communities around the children in their care and their activity as a part of a worldwide impulse.

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See also “Essential Characteristics of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education” and “The Universal Human Spirit of Waldorf/Steiner Early Childhood Education”

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