

## Education for Balance and Resilience

by Jeff Tunkey, with contributions from the faculty of Spring Garden Waldorf School

Why do Waldorf Schools devote so much time – and salary lines! – to specialty subjects like Eurythmy, languages, handwork, woodwork, gardening, form drawing, painting, music and games? On top of that, why is the first twenty minutes or so of the daily main lesson devoted to movement and singing activities that seem sort of non-academic... and then why does the noontime usually include up to an hour for lunch and outdoor play? Let's put a pencil to this question: a typical school week will comprise 32 to 35 hours in school; then subtract a typical 12 hours for specialty classes and 5 hours for lunch/recess. Answer: about half the school week is spent on other than the "Common Core" of math, science and English language skills (although the foreign language classes must be counted in the 'Academics' column).

I believe that in looking at almost any such question, our Waldorf movement can be strengthened when we read and re-read Rudolf Steiner's foundational lectures, and at the same time assiduously look to more modern research and writings to find parallels or further verification. Keeping "up to date" with newer approaches will give us a vocabulary that can help us speak with our wider communities in accessible terminology, and also to avoid the pitfalls of unexamined adherence to Doctor Steiner's printed lectures from a century ago.

So, let's look at those time allocation questions from both ends – the past and the present.

### On balancing academics – from 1921

All true learning requires inner movement; therefore inner composure and physiologic readiness are vital. Rudolf Steiner indicated that our primary task as educators is to "teach the children to breathe." I'm quite sure he wasn't recommending yoga or the like in our classrooms.<sup>1</sup> So perhaps for our modern times this might be better translated as "help the children learn to self-regulate, to be able to find balance in daily life." In the series of lectures collected as "Education for Adolescence", Steiner had this to say:

"Essentially our lessons consist of two interacting parts. We instruct, we exhort the children to participate, to use their skills, to be physically active. Be it in eurythmy, music, physical education, even writing or the mechanical processes in arithmetic—we try to engender activity. The other part of our lessons is concerned with contemplation. Here we ask the children to think about, to consider the things we tell them.

Although these two aspects always interact, they are fundamentally different. It is not generally appreciated how much the teacher of a contemplative subject, such as history, owes to a colleague who is more concerned with skills and aptitudes. Concentrating merely on contemplation leads the children to a stunted, prosaic adult life, with a tendency to boredom. They will have a superficial view of life, will not feel inclined to observe accurately, will not pay attention to events around them. ... We really owe a great deal, as teachers of contemplative subjects, to the teachers of handwork, music, and eurythmy. We can go so far as to say that the history teacher actually lives off the music or singing teacher and that, vice versa, the singing and music teachers live off the contemplative elements in history, and so forth."<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Waldorf schools are supposed to provide—month after month and year after year—a progression of academic content for which the students are, or almost are, emotionally and physiologically ready, and at the same

---

<sup>1</sup> Jaimen McMillan, the founder of Spacial Dynamics, contributes this thought: "Yoga is one of the oldest of all paths of spiritual development. It is a modern misconception and disservice to Yoga, to believe that it is possible to merely 'do Yoga for exercise', and that there will be no spiritual effects of practicing this highly-developed discipline. Like all such time-honored disciplines, Yoga will be honored as the powerful tool that it is, when an adult individual is aware of the spiritual path that she/he is treading, and consciously chooses to follow it, with deference for its transcendent goals and effects, and with appropriate guidance and accompanying discipline."

<sup>2</sup> Lecture One in the series, June 12, 1921

time helps them take the next step. (I would underscore the “almost are” because some challenge and even frustration is a necessary part of learning.)

Thus, a cycling between active and contemplative moods throughout the day has been a bedrock principle since the beginnings of Waldorf Education. The active subjects help prepare receptivity to synthesis; the contemplative subjects help create readiness for experience, observation and analysis. In the early grades, the rhythm of quiet to active and back again may be several times within an hour; by the upper grades, students have built up enough balance and resilience to be ready for lengthened cycles.

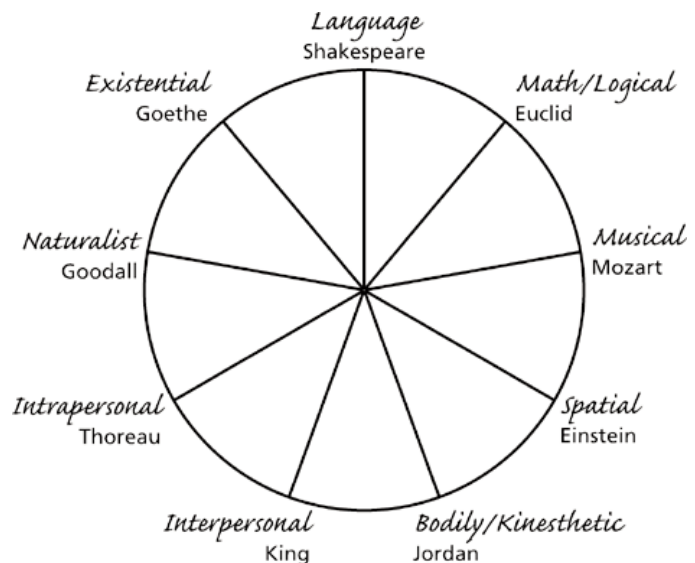
### On balancing the definition of academics – from today

Ever known a math wiz who can't jump rope? Or maybe you know the world's most competent linguist who is tone deaf or cannot balance his checkbook. Our daily experiences demonstrate that “smart” is not defined by a single measure. Howard Gardner, American developmental psychologist and Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, developed the theory of multiple intelligences that has revolutionized the way educators think about learning.

Gardner's research and writings on this topic began as a reaction to the incomplete picture of students provided by SAT and IQ tests. The idea of one “general” intelligence ruling someone's abilities has become an outdated notion since Gardner first published his theory of multiple intelligences in 1983. He has continued up to the present with a number of best-selling and academically acclaimed books in which he has set forth and followed a strict scientific approach, defining “an Intelligence” as: (a) A set of skills for solving of genuine problems; (b) Able to create an effective product; (c) Having the potential to find or pose problems; (d) Important/valued in a cultural setting somewhere; and (e) The presence of geniuses, and/or loss of skill caused by trauma (i.e., a stroke diminishing

language ability).

So, from Gardner and many others who support his approach, Waldorf educators can also draw ample inspiration and justification for providing the most rounded possible experience. Waldorf educators can feel a strong kinship with Gardner, who said: “I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want



As depicted in the graphic above, Gardner has re-defined intelligence to include nine facets of human capacity. This list suggests some fields in which particular strengths will be useful:

1. *Language intelligence* - poets, playwrights, lawyers, preachers
2. *Math/logical intelligence* - mathematicians, engineers, philosophers
3. *Musical intelligence* - (obviously) musicians
4. *Spatial intelligence* - architects, navigators, team athletes, fine artists
5. *Bodily/kinesthetic intelligence* - athletes, actors, dancers
6. *Interpersonal intelligence* - teachers, politicians, sales people
7. *Intrapersonal intelligence* - poets, philosophers
8. *Naturalist intelligence* - scientists, gardeners, farmers
9. *Existential/spiritual intelligence* - (hopefully) all of the above

them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions. An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do... Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves.”

The blog created by the staff of Spring Garden Waldorf School provides a rich and detailed look at how each subject addresses the spectrum of human intelligences.<sup>3</sup>

### **The values of the subject classes**

As a now long-time Waldorf teacher, I can share that one of the more frustrating aspects of being part of the Waldorf movement is hearing the impression that many outsiders have that our school is “artistic” or that core academics seem to be less valued. I believe, rather, that the wide variety of daily activities provided by the class teachers and the specialty subject teachers proves that we value academic standards, if anything, even more, because we go to greater lengths to be sure the foundations are laid for emotional and physiological readiness for a classic academic curriculum.

### **Balance and resilience**

Waldorf educators, following the impulses of Austrian scientist and philosopher Rudolph Steiner, have been focusing on the education of the whole child since 1919. Balance and resilience are inseparable qualities. The possibility of a balanced life can only be enhanced by an education that helps each student in the learning community come to find his or her areas of strength and enjoyment, while at the same time providing a setting for widened exploration... and even unexpected achievements won by overcoming antipathy or adversity. Finally, a key to meeting life’s challenges in a resilient way is knowing when to take a deep breath and think things through, and when to act.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://blog.sgws.org/waldorf-education-subjects-multiple-intelligences/>

### **See table...**

*The table on the following page provides an outline of classes found in most matured Waldorf schools, and a brief guide to how each one supports the whole.*

# How the Waldorf grade school subject classes help develop all of the nine intelligences

Intelligence	EURYTHMY	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	GAMES/GYM & GYMNASTICS	HANDWORK	MUSIC	PRACTICAL ARTS, GARDENING	WOODWORK
<b>Visual/Spatial</b>	◆◆◆ Large-group choreographic forms; angles of movement	◆ Recognition and identification of pictures; movement & gestures	◆◆◆ All movement is space/time related	◆◆◆ Design, patterns, beauty; ability to move between 2 dimensions and 3	◆ Musical notation, instrument fingering patterns, awareness of surrounding musicians	◆◆ Form and detail	◆◆◆ Balance of form, function and beauty
<b>Math/Logical</b>	◆◆ Dance elements support math*	◆ Grammar/logic connections; counting and applying 4 operations	◆◆◆ Lower senses as foundations for math*; sequencing, rules	◆◆◆ Success in math requires neat and orderly processes	◆◆◆ Notation requires knowledge of basic math; internal counting in all music	◆◆ Measurement, ratio, project steps, garden grid	◆◆ Measuring, leveling, calculating; geometry of parts; steps sequence
<b>Language</b>	◆◆◆ Language made visible; stories, poetry, rhythmical and picture language	◆◆◆ Enhancing vocabulary abilities through constant stimulation	◆◆ Links between movement development and speech articulation	◆ Learning technical vocabulary; asking process questions	◆◆ Lyrics, prose, poetry & music from different lands builds literacy	◆ Terminology for tools and processes	◆ New vocabulary for technical aspects
<b>Intra-personal</b>	◆◆◆ Whole being becomes vehicle of personal expression	◆ Sense of accomplishment in mastery of foreign language	◆◆ Opportunities for self-evaluation and actualization; life sense	◆◆ Meeting oneself in the work and adjusting for personal abilities	◆◆ Listening to oneself; bringing inner to outer	◆◆ Awareness of personal capacities; overcoming obstacles; patience	◆◆ Awareness of capacities; reaching beyond expectations; patience
<b>Inter-personal</b>	◆◆◆ Coordinated and cooperative group movement	◆◆ Learning to communicate effectively with new conventions of thought	◆◆◆ Cooperative and coordinated movements; gaze and teasing; sportsmanship	◆◆ Helping or being helped; appreciation for others' abilities	◆◆◆ Being "in harmony"; give and take with other voices; staying in unison	◆◆◆ Collaboration, taking turns, helping others, service to community	◆◆ Projects usually require group effort; or can be compared
<b>Bodily/Kinesthetic</b>	◆◆◆ Physically very demanding – lightness, agility, awareness of own and group motion	◆ Classes include games to help students who are movement-style learners	◆◆◆ Widest variety of movement	◆◆◆ Eye-hand coordination, eye tracking, fine and gross motor, posture for work	◆◆ Postural control; fine & gross motor for vision, speech, and playing instruments	◆◆◆ Fine and gross motor skills; stamina	◆◆◆ Fine and gross motor; tools as extensions of hand and eye
<b>Nature</b>	◆ Many forms (stars, spirals, etc.) drawn from nature	◆ Interaction outdoors Cycle of nature through poetry, prose and music	◆◆ Outdoor classes	◆◆ Use of natural materials	◆ Songs to celebrate seasons, life, growth and humanity	◆◆◆ Outdoor work, natural materials (wood, seeds, beeswax, clay, etc.)	◆◆ Finding beauty "hidden" in a block of wood and other materials
<b>Musical</b>	◆◆◆ Melody, beat, different voice tones	◆◆ Rhythmic movement to sounds, singing in rounds and in harmony	◆ Circle games, folk dance, games with sequencing and rhythm elements	◆ Rhythm in movement of stitching "creates music in the soul"	◆◆◆ Music promotes whole-brain learning	◆ Rhythmic movements in many tasks; sequencing; singing at work	◆ Rhythmic movements in many tasks; sequencing
<b>Meta-physical</b>	◆◆◆ Language and movement become soul experiences; the universe in movement	◆◆ Furthering understanding of the world and others	◆◆ Experiencing the beauty of human movement	◆◆ Projects that help awaken the intellect	◆◆ Experiencing the beauty of the tone world	◆◆ All work is good for the soul; service to the earth and mankind	◆◆ Morality of finished projects

KEY: ◆ = Somewhat ◆◆ = Quite a bit! ◆◆◆ = Tons FOR EXTRA CREDIT: add a column for lunch and outdoor recess and see how many diamonds you can add!  
 \* To learn more about the reasons that math abilities arise from and are strengthened through movement in general, through folk dance, and through the lower senses, see "For Teachers: Conferences and Seminars on Arithmetic" by Karl König – available online at [www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/pdf/Arithmetic.pdf](http://www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/pdf/Arithmetic.pdf)