

WALDORF (STEINER) CURATIVE EDUCATION

“Essentially we do not really have the right to talk about normality or abnormality in a child’s inner life, nor indeed in the inner life of human beings altogether.... One does not gain much from such labeling, and the first thing to happen should be that the physician or the teacher rejects such an assessment...”

Rudolf Steiner

Waldorf Curative Education was initiated by Rudolf Steiner in 1924 and further developed later by others. In addition to specific techniques using color, movement, sound and form, it offers a broad philosophical (spiritual) understanding of human development.

The Waldorf Curative Educator acknowledges the pure, limitless soul/spirit of the individual even as the earth-born special needs and challenges (sometimes significant) require special methods and means to naturally release hidden potentials.

Always, when studying various other programs, I have kept awareness of the richness of Steiner’s encompassing insights. Especially important is the concept of balance that brings proportion and harmony of the opposites in every aspect of life--physiological, emotional, mental and spiritual--so that they rest in equilibrium between the push and pull of conflicting tendencies.

While the mainstream thinks of balance in terms of the vestibular system, the Waldorf Curative Teacher thinks in terms of life balance. She notices whether someone is “heavy” (given to gravity: metabolic processes) or “light” (the nervous system and thinking; levity); dry (as in skin or outward expression) or wet (such as anxious as in sweaty palms); thick-skinned or thin-skinned, dreamy or active; prone to liking (saying “yes” to the world) or disliking (saying “no” to the world), etc.

The “rhythmic system” sits between the “metabolic system” and the “nerve-sense system” and balances them. This “rhythmic system” includes the flowing in and out breath; the lymph and blood moving to the cardiac and cranio-sacral pulses.

The Waldorf Curative Educator also thinks in terms of Steiner’s 12 senses (though I have come to understand there are even more).

These 12 senses are:

- Physical body: the senses of touch, life, movement, balance
- External world: smell, taste, sight, hearing, temperature
- The immaterial world: spiritual speech, thought, ego
- Nerve sense; limb-metabolic; rhythmic (relates to sense of balance in the larger sense)

Each of these 12 senses can be considered in much further depth so that the sense of touch (always associated with skin) includes what is inside through the membranes of cells, through rhythms of the body, the processes of organs, in addition to what is on the outside of the body.

The sense of life is also known as the “well-being” sense and gives information on drowsiness or arousal, feeling energetic or tired, thirst and hungry.

The sense of movement is more familiarly known as the proprioceptive system. It includes conscious and subconscious awareness of the body in space; as well as not only the ability to move but also restrain movement. Self-containment would be considered part of this sense.

The sense of balance has two meanings: the first being the commonly known vestibular system balance involving the semicircular canals. It presupposes a healthy gravity line or midline. It also refers, as indicated earlier, to the balance of life and being able to be centered, in equilibrium.

The sense of hearing is intimately related to the sense of balance (as is vision)

The sense of sight also contains two distinctions, (intangible) seeing light, dark and color, and also the tangible ability to perceive form and movement. Vision, hearing and balance are connected through the vestibular system.

The sense of smell has a strong connection with memory.

The sense of taste is closely related to the sense of smell in the physical world, and can be extended metaphorically to the emotional as in a “foul” experience, a “sweet” one.

The sense of warmth is considered in Waldorf Education as a gateway to higher senses. There is both a physical and emotional quality to this sense. Of course it involves the distinction of temperature, but can also relate to enthusiasm or lack of it; and a warm or cold feeling towards others, life in general, material things and creative self-expression.

The sense of speech, also known in Waldorf circles as the sense of the word is about understanding the words of others. This sense requires inner stillness to quiet thinking and self-talk in order to really hear another person.

The sense of thought or of concept relating to understanding another.

Through the sense of other (as in Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*) there is a relationship with the entirety of self to the entirety of another person.