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Chapter 7

COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND OUTREACH

Community relations defines a very broad area both operationally and conceptually. Because of this it may seem abstract, remote, unnecessary, ethereal and diversionary, and not relating to the “true” function of a school, especially a Waldorf School! Such an attitude is perilous, and will be ever more so as the American public awakens to the need for a deeper, more comprehensive and effective relationship with education altogether. It (the public) will demand greater participation in mainstream education, and those forms of education which have been proven over time to be successful and relevant to the needs of children and nations. Waldorf Education and all its exponents will wish to respond to and encourage such a dialogue, such an involvement. This dialogue will include the area of community relations!

Every Waldorf School is an important member of the surrounding community. Each day the school receives important people from the community through its doors, and each afternoon it sends important members of the community back to their homes. This daily breathing relates a Waldorf School in the most direct fashion to the community it serves, through the children it serves, and through all the people who are closely connected to the children that a Waldorf

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School serves. The issue of community relations is important for every single Waldorf school. The issue of public relations for the school movement as such is a related but slightly different issue. The potential for the Waldorf School Movement to become an active and contributing part of the larger issues within the educational environment of this country is both substantial and exciting.

Public or community relations is much more comprehensive than a narrow program of periodic interfacing with the media or surrounding locality. Indeed a true public relations encompasses and relates to many of the other areas within the life of a school addressed by this book. In this sense community relations is a fundamental component of every Waldorf School. It connects areas of admissions, parent and Board relations, and fundraising.

Community relations begins at home. In any service organization *everybody* is involved as a bearer of the message of the organization. The stronger the co-ordination among the bearers of the message, the more powerfully can the message usually be conveyed. Furthermore, the greater the message itself is believed by its bearers, the greater is its credibility.

Community relations need not be reactive. It can be a powerful, proactive expression of the impulse of Waldorf education and the specific impulses of a particular school in a particular location with particular strengths and unique challenges.

Community relations is as much an **attitude** as an **activity**. It is as much tolerance, interest, openness, confidence and sharing as a laundry list of school functions, open houses, enrollment teas, press releases and public service announcements. This attitude can perhaps best be approached by considering community relations as a **dialogue**, a conversation – which is mutual and two-way. Community relations is **not** a desperate push to project, at all costs, your message onto an unsuspecting, illiterate and hostile "real world". It is not merely generating and delivering public service announcements and developing recruitment brochures. It is not a single function for a "hired gun" or an endless random string of events. It is, much rather, an invitation to relate, to participate in the life and growth of your community and its educational realities and needs.

None of us, either as individuals or as organizations, exist in isolation. We need and want interaction, common cause and mutual involvement. Community relations, at its simplest, is the activity of avoiding isolation.

Reciprocity and mutual influence between the inner exigencies and outer conditions of a school is a critical issue for the effective integration of the Waldorf School in the community. A Waldorf School *needs* to have a reflection of its activity within the larger community. It needs a mirroring and a response. And while we are generally clear about our ideas (pedagogical, social, etc.) we are also tentative and often inartistic about their idiom. Thus to some extent, community relations can also be seen as the attempt to develop the appropriate idiom for our ideas. Occasionally, others do this much better for us, than we can do ourselves.

For example, several years ago, then Secretary of Education, William Bennett issued a small booklet called, **What Works in Education**.¹ It described basic educational ideas. It used "conventional" language. Much of what is contained in this booklet is a description for what Waldorf Schools actually do or would advocate! However, very few people seemed to be aware of the publication of this booklet, and its coincidence with some of the ideas of Waldorf education.

Returning to the element of dialogue or conversation, we come to the basic image of community relations, which is best conveyed through the lemniscate or figure-eight. In this magical flowing line, the inwardly turned gesture of an organism (school), achieves a crossing point by which it becomes available, displayed, public in an outward and generous posture.

The lemniscate demonstrates a profound harmony and equality from one surface to another. In like manner, the meditative work of the college and faculty, and the pedagogical work performed by the school community will have a relevance, connection and parallel that includes the larger community.


1. **What Works – Research About Teaching and Learning**, U.S. Department of Education, 1986.


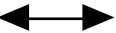
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To summarize – community relations is an **attitude** of participation, of being a contributing, part of a larger function. It is not an attitude of isolation self-righteousness or missionary zeal. It involves **everyone** at the school – secretaries, faculty, all helpers – and can never be effectively delegated or remanded to a "PR coordinator" (just as an effective longer-term fundraising effort cannot be vested solely in a Development Coordinator)

Community relations is a dialogue, represented by the wonderful form of a lemniscate. It has both inner and outer surfaces – indeed one is the extension of the other. Community relations is comprehensive and permeates many facets of a school's general administrative involvements.

Community Relations:

- 1) Image of the Lemniscate –


Dialogue  **Relationships**
- 2) Reciprocity/Correspondence between inner & outer functions
- 3) Outer gesture also mutual, give-and-take
- 4) Idiom  ideas
- 5) An attitude of bridging
- 6) Everybody is involved

There are no fixed recipes for community relations, no prescriptions. Public relations is not a one-time, splashy happening. To assume an inflexible rigid "program" of events would be not to understand that each school is inserted uniquely into a unique community. Real involvement in the life and affairs of the community, at various levels through a diversity of means indicates real community relations. Interest, confidence, sensitivity, flexibility and perseverance are appropriate "ingredients" to undertake the joyous and fulfilling tasks of community relations.

Focussing the Effort:

Any community relations effort will best be served by planning and forethought. There are different ways to consider your events. First and foremost, determine your goals and purpose. There are generally three broad areas which occasion "community relations":

1) Enrollment

Goal – to introduce parents (and their children) to your school and Waldorf Education to increase the student population. This is an ongoing, annual task – albeit with different emphases.

2) Fundraising

Goal – to deepen existing donor relationships, introduce and cultivate new prospects to the school, and to Waldorf Education; to share plans, ideas goals with an identified constituency with the eventual goal of generating gift income. There will be different emphases depending on the actual situation, sources and nature of gift income.

3) Community Participation

Goal – to present your school, and Waldorf Education for professional participation in workshops, colloquia, conferences, discussions to a broad spectrum of your local, parent and professional community.

The audience and specific purposes of such events will vary greatly – from basic public lectures, to weekend workshops, to larger scale conferences. The expected "return" is to be a contributing and participating member of the community, and foster a greater level of understanding and insight into the work of the school and Waldorf education as such.

Each of these three areas involve events and activities specifically suited to achieve its goal. The clearer one can be regarding the needs and purpose of the activity the more suited, and thus effective will it be. One can obscure and confuse the primary, "bottom line" intent of the activity through assumption and

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lack of categorization or planning. If goals are neither clear nor articulated, they will not be met. Mixing up goals frequently leads to disappointment.

For Example: Area #1– Enrollment – Consider, and take note of, enrollment activity and inquiry cycles. When do inquiries come most frequently? From where, what part of town? What kind of people inquire and in what form? Compile some basic statistics as the "raw data" from which you will develop your recruitment and enrollment activities. You may find that serious inquiries (and interest) come most frequently from mid-late August thru October (Cycle #1), and again from March (Easter) thru June (Cycle #2). November through February may be slack times regarding **Enrollment**.

Focus and develop your enrollment activities during these cycles – with one major activity per month. Use the interim times (Nov - Feb - June - July) to develop efficient, prompt, friendly and convincing responses to inquiries (phone calls, interviews, packets etc, see Chapter 6 **Admissions**). Utilize the evidence of your raw data to help you effectively plan this timing and focus of your activity.

For Example: Area #2 – Fundraising and Development – This is a complicated area, with numerous dimensions, needs and opportunities. A school may have four areas of income – two of major importance: tuitions and gift income. Of (usually) lesser significance are (unrelated) business income (gift shops, school stores etc.) and endowments.

Fundraising and Development are ongoing responsibilities – with annual appeals, capital campaigns, and all the innumerable auctions, craft fairs, car washes, bake sales, holiday sales and so on that serve as community functions while raising urgently needed dollars.

Most charitable giving occurs towards Christmas/Hanukkah time. The annual appeal and events related to it will be scheduled during December. Very often the major Bazaars, Sales, Craft Fairs, etc. take place in late November, or early December, complemented by a second major event in early to late Spring.

Thus we may generally observe Community efforts related to Area #2, taking place in early winter and mid-spring. The preparatory activity in fundrais-

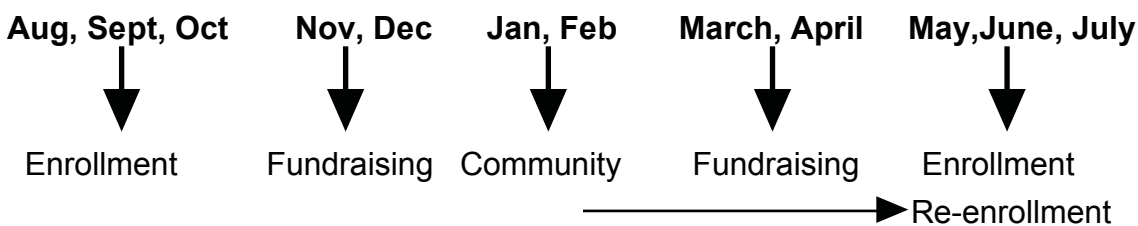
ing is critically related to the success of the solicitation. Again, timing is of major importance.

For Example: Area #3 – Community Participation – These events serve a variety of needs and connect your school to people, issues and concerns in a multitude of ways. Some are:

- a) Lecture Series/Adult Education – for parents, the community, professionals, civic and social clubs.
- b) Workshops – Professional Development – other Waldorf colleagues, interested educators, parents, etc.
- c) Conferences, colloquia, etc. – Professional Development, Research, etc.

One can observe that these and other events conspire to create their own annual calendar. Each focus area calls for outreach in a specific direction to a specific audience for a specific reason. Each has a different purpose and will be organized differently. Planning and evaluation are two critical components in making any event a success and might include a team or multi-disciplinary approach to achieve the broadest perspective.

The activity calendar slowly suggests its own natural rhythms, based on the statistics (raw data) or needs you will have identified in the planning stages. Identifying the primary goal will suggest an appropriate event in timing with cycles suggested by your own information and experience. As you begin the year you may wish to project your activities according to the areas outlined above, or add your own categories.



Focussing the effort, regardless of the activity area, is a determination and refinement of your objectives. This may also be called developing a strategy or

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marketing plan. There are numerous, and sometimes conflicting approaches to this area. One approach and one of the simplest, recommends:².



The "market" may be comprised of different elements:

- 1) *Demographic*– what age range, social-economic status, etc. is your group?
- 2) *Geographic*– where is your market located?
- 3) *Behavioral*– what are relevant and supporting patterns, habits, interests, acquisitions etc.? Think of a profile, or likely candidate.
- 4) *Volume* (usage) – what frequency, or kind of involvement, are you looking for? Parents, donors, volunteers, participants for events, board members? How often will you want their involvement?

Consider this a sketch which you can amend, alter or "flesh in" to suit your particular orientation. However breaking down and analyzing your constituency by function, type or other characteristic may facilitate developing appropriate relations and achieving your school's goals.

In considering your constituency, you will also want to reflect on what you wish to offer – and how it may match your community's needs. Product, price, distribution and promotion are the four areas commonly considered in developing

²Eugene M. Johnson, Developing a Marketing Plan for a Non-Profit Organization, **Non Profit World Report**, Vol. 4, No. 5, pg 28 -30.

a marketing strategy. Although these terms reflect a business imprint it can be helpful to apply a dissimilar and unusual paradigm to your considerations. All four areas are important for the healthy unfolding of a Waldorf School. Perhaps we rightly overemphasize "the product" – for without such an excellent one what would we be working so hard for? Yet an excellent and unique "product" can languish and falter if its delivery and price is inconsistent, boorish and over-inflated.

Planning your annual calendar will help you to maximize the effectiveness of your activities. Naturally, there will be other events conflicting with your schedule – yet slowly you will notice and confirm a rhythm to your community relations work adjusted to the three major areas of outreach. Over time this will become a foundation for additional activity or variations appropriate to the biography and development of your school.

The Process Of Community Relations:

Community relations has technical aspects as well as procedural issues that may enhance the overall effort. The participants in the process of community relations are of immense importance. The process of developing events itself may reflect a sensitivity to a larger circle of people. Most people will respond positively to a genuine invitation to become involved in an activity. This allows your school to develop a critical support base – the volunteers.

Volunteers:

Individuals, both parents and friends, may wish to contribute to your school in different ways. An often under-utilized and over-looked resource are people with talent in your community who can offer skills, time, involvement, enthusiasm, and will! No school can afford to neglect the invaluable role of the volunteer. The volunteer can carry a crucial function in the cycle of events that bridge the school to the community.

Volunteers will need explicit instructions, clear mandates and specific and real responsibilities, with reasonable time frames, realistic parameters of involvement, and reachable goals. They will need ongoing support, evaluation, encouragement and recognition. Frequently, the last two elements are not properly carried out. It is easy to use volunteers and expect great results without

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supplying them with the necessary tools to accomplish their tasks. Volunteers are donating real assets to your school, and should be thanked and acknowledged. Volunteer development and, perhaps even more importantly, volunteer retention requires commitment, consideration and time from your school community. These can be formal occasions which will confirm to the volunteer the value of his/her involvement with your organizational efforts and goals. An "Award Ceremony" or "Thank You Dinner" are two of many options.

I stress this component of volunteer development because too often I have seen an emphasis on the receiving end of things – expending considerable efforts on getting gifts, getting resources donated, getting volunteers, etc., with an inadequate correspondence in the giving back end. We know that thanks and gratitude belong to receiving but somehow, with the numerous obligations and pressures, this aspect can be neglected. The result may be ineffective and unenthusiastic volunteers, or worse, a diminishing base of ongoing volunteer involvement.

The Goal:

Focussing and narrowing the purpose and expectation of an event or activity is a primary task in helping you achieve your needs. This aspect is often ignored or assumed – the goal may appear obvious. Usually, if it does appear too obvious, it is too broad or ambitious. An Open House should not, for example, intend to explain everything about Waldorf Education, display all the children's work over the years, boost enrollment by 100%, make the whole community ecstatic about your school, raise funds for your capital campaign, generate a series of media articles and introduce Anthroposophy to everyone who signs the guest book! "Well, of course not!," we may say (though secretly hope this will all take place).

Determine *why* you do something, and for *whom* it is intended. Wrestle with a few important priorities until they become clear. For instance, if you expect a visitor of some influence, try to determine what is enough, and what will be too much for the visit. People do become overwhelmed – and your eminent visitor with the glazed eyes may have been overloaded with all the innumerable things he/she has been exposed to.

Sorting out, identifying and refining goals is exciting, and necessary. It will suggest and help shape your activities.

1) Do you want press or media exposure? If yes, what kind? How will you approach the matter? What angle might work? What are your back-ups?

2) Do you want greater attendance at a public lecture? If yes, who do you want to come? What groups? How will you approach them? Will you go in person, call, or write to solicit their attendance? Will you speak to the group representative? What is your core group (of attendance)? Why do they come? Can they help you increase attendance? Who do they know? etc.

3) Do you want to increase student enrollment? Why? What consequence will it have? (This is a slightly different question, but it can be answered in relationship to the community relations perspective). If yes, what data will you be working from to focus your efforts? Where is the data? If it isn't there how can you get it? What does it tell you?

These are all basic questions – but it is precisely these basic questions to which we so often presume the answers. Try and answer, straight forwardly and simply, these and other such questions. Write your answers down. Become clear about them – and they will help you prioritize and plan. Developing priorities will help shape your policies. Knowing your operational policies clearly will make your tasks more defined, more accessible.

These are all tasks which should precede the often frenetic schedule of events for your community. Just as an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, a pound of planning is worth a ton of events!

Planning & Evaluation:

The pre and post analysis of an event is as critical as the actual execution. Planning and evaluation are potentially community-building processes through the inclusion of volunteer and committee members in the discussions. By including a larger group one fosters a sense of involvement, and develops a vested interest in the outcome of the event. People want to feel a part of what they are doing. Asking for advice (and listening to it) can be tremendously upbuilding. Include different elements of the community in your planning and evaluation.

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Take time to plan. Take additional time to evaluate. Make a (written) record of what went right and what when wrong. The evaluation should have different parts to it. Did you reach your stated financial, social, scheduling goals? This discussion should form a document which will be used as a planning tool and guide for subsequent events.

Sufficient effort and commitment should be made to properly include the planning and evaluation components as a basic element of any community relations event.

Planning (and evaluation) should be applied not only to single events, or events in succession, but to the year itself. Having some forecast of the year's events and needs reduces the random scheduling of occasions. Indeed, planning in longer-term frameworks can be integrated into the long-range planning and development needs of your organization. Planning does not eliminate spontaneity. It is not a binding directive – but a road map or blue-print to help you achieve your goals. The process of planning may also help formulate and clarify your goals.

For example, assume a school has successfully developed 8 grades. All is going well – the school is growing at an orderly rate. In two years time, however, new buildings will need to be built on recently acquired land – to accommodate the growth in students and increasing programmatic diversity. The question has been living silently for some time among faculty: "Should we move towards establishing a High School?" This question gradually comes into common discussion. It is a complicated, difficult question – with many different, and differing perspectives. A process is determined by which this question will be addressed. This process is slated to last for 24 months. Part of the process must include current parents of students in all classes, but especially those in grades 4 – 8. Potential new parents will also need to be included.

This hypothetical situation will draw on many skills as it is a deep question of biography, development, organizational strengths – readiness . It is also a question of community process and community building. It will become a question of community relations. As the process evolves – a process lying at the very heart of the school and its unfolding life – the need for incorporating the com-

munity and involving individuals within it will become of paramount importance. Community activities will need to take place at the research, or early stages, of such a question. Thus one can see how planning can draw on and include the community in essential long-range issues of the school. The image of the lemniscate, once again, appears and we can experience the need for a mutually supportive modulation between inner questions and outer phenomena.

Every school can take steps and develop basic skills in developing their own community relations. Some steps are "action-oriented", some belong to the realm of planning – all require the attitude that your school needs the recognition and support of the community to thrive.

Some basic suggestions:³.

- 1) Develop effective graphics – consistent, unique, not overly complicated, compelling.
- 2) Implement strategies for getting media coverage (include variations of all kinds of coverage).
- 3) Train and support public speakers within your school community. Critique and develop a few individuals who will venture *out* into the community – as well as inviting audiences in.
- 4) Gain the involvement of well-established, recognized people in the community (ask directly, with reasons why, explanations what you need and wish to accomplish, and how you think they can help).
- 5) Encourage special events – use milestones, individual accomplishments, awards, honors, etc. Use such events for media coverage.
- 6) Develop a portfolio of photos that can be used for media and literature.

³. **Meridian Non Profit Strategist** (Vol. No. 11, Issue 4, Oct. 1990) Interview with Los Angeles PR Firm Terzian & Assoc.

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7) Build your mailing list by category, and don't be afraid to edit and cut the list from time to time. Bloated lists are expensive, unwieldy and intimidating. Who wants to send monthly "Lecture Announcements" to 6000 people?

Each of these areas is important and possesses complex ingredients in your overall community relations work. They should be researched and studied in greater length than this chapter allows. There are many ingredients, many techniques to making community relations work effectively. Most of these can be learned and assimilated quite rapidly.

There are, naturally, deeper and more fundamental issues of community relations which are by no means of a technical or practical nature. Some of these areas will point to the general structure of the Waldorf school itself, and may illuminate more profound elements within the school. For example, if the leadership and sense of overall vision and purpose is weak or confused the community will sense this quickly and intuitively. Strong leadership doesn't mean one strong leader – but a clear, convincing message coming without equivocation is crucial.

A vibrant, realistic sense of vision and purpose – issues which are deeply related to the life and health of a school – will emanate into the community. This too is community relations. If the inner life of the school can carry the strength of enthusiasm, the light of clear insight and common purpose, and translate this in confidence and openness to the community at large, the message will be convincing and effective.

It is important to:

- 1) Regularly define and refine your public relations activities and schedules.
- 2) Be consistent, and persistent! Planting seeds will hopefully become fruit. Find effective methods and build on them.
- 3) Vary your approach! This needn't be contradictory. There are numerous PR options. Explain, experiment – Community relations takes many forms.

4) Know your constituency. Identify your various groups, both existing and desired.

5) Involve everyone! Community relations is not for the few – it belongs to everyone. Your *whole* school community is involved and responsible.

6) Give it time to work! Community relations is a process; it will take time to build and solidify. Don't expect or press for results too early. All relationships are built over time, with multiple and varied exposure and opportunities.

The school community as an organism builds its own life-body and cycle over time.⁴ This interweaving flow of activity which gives a school its true identity and makes your school what it is, belongs to the most intimate part of the organization's biography. Yet it is just this life-body – wherein, over time, the institutional memories will lie – which needs to flow *out* of the school and into the surrounding community. This is a precious activity – yet the community itself will give back to the life-body of the school. It is this giving back which achieves the crossing point in the lemniscate we have chosen as the image of community relations.

The school does not just impart, or give away. In giving to the public it develops mutual interaction and receives support, advice and recognition as a dialogue of ongoing involvement. This interaction brings new life and activity to your school. Good luck!

4. For further discussion of this theme, see **Extracts – The Economic Basis for Waldorf Education**, Vol. 2, Community & Public Relations, Cornelius M. Pietzner, "Community & Public Relations" pg 7, 1990, Threefold Educational Foundation, and **Handling Public Relations– A Guide for Waldorf Schools & Other Organizations** by Cornelius M. Pietzner, 1984, Sunbridge College Press [available from the author at Camphill Soltane, Box 300A, R. D. 1, Glenmoore, PA, 19343, (215) 469–0933].