IV

Working Together in Groups and Communities

All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.

– Martin Luther King

Conversation

We take a mystery of life for granted, the mystery of conversation. Reflect on how an impression in your consciousness—"the beauty of a San Francisco spring morning with the fog blowing off the Bay"— is translated into concepts and then into audible speech, involving all the complex muscles of the throat and mouth. Your friend hears these words through the membrane of the ear and understands them, internalizes your thought and then speaks. One aspect of the mystery is how we are able to turn consciousness, the non-sensory, into audible speech and visible gesture. Another is how the other is able to take the sounds expressed and make sense of them. A third is how in dialog, in conversation between two or more individuals, something new, an idea, meaning or decision arises.

In conversation, we can recognize three parties: I, you and that which arises between us. We can also become aware of three central processes: of speaking, of turning ideas into audible speech and visible gesture; of listening, taking the others meaning into oneself; and third, of understanding, individually and together.[1] Each process requires consciousness and attention. The more focused our consciousness, the better the result.

For speaking, we can ask ourselves: What are the essential elements I want to communicate? What examples and images will make it intelligible to the other? What words or images will make sense to her or him? Can I be brief so the other doesn't get lost?

In listening, we can ask: Can I be still? Can I focus on the thought, words, gestures of the other? Can I not react until they are finished? Can I really be present with loving interest? Can I ask questions for clarification before I respond?

For understanding, we can reflect on: Is it clear for me? Am I being understood? Can I see where there are similarities and differences in how we see the question? Can I bring an attitude of mutuality, of joint creation to the conversation and notice that which is new?

Types of Groups in Relation to Dominant Activities
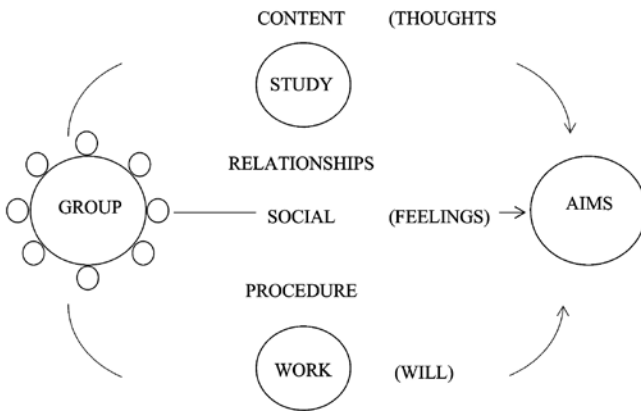
In the process of speaking, listening and understanding we are externalizing our soul being, we are sharing who we are. This involves more than words and ideas; it includes our feelings and intentions. So we are creating a kind of soul music in conversation, the melody of our thoughts and ideas, the feeling content of harmonies, disharmonies, crescendos and pianissimos and the rhythm and beat of our willed intention. Our ideas are usually most conscious, our likes, dislikes and feelings less so, and our intentions least conscious.

The more we are able to put our full being, our whole soul at the disposal of the present moment without preconceptions and a lot of

agendas, the more we are capable of being social artists, allowing the magic of conversation to work between us.[2] I used to meet frequently with a friend over lunch in order to share what was happening in our lives and to talk about our process of inner development. The topics ranged from work, our children and marriages to questions of meditation. He listened so well and was so present that the conversation was always alive, spontaneous and enriching.

If we pay attention to what happens to our consciousness in conversation, we can notice an ebb and flow between being awake to ourselves, to our ideas and feelings when we are speaking and then, in listening, being more awake to others and less conscious of ourselves. In speaking we are in ourselves, busy with the task of articulating our thoughts, feelings and intentions, and in listening we leave our own soul space and enter into that of the other. For most of us true listening is infinitely more difficult and tiring than speaking, for it asks us to silence our inner chatter and attend to someone else.

Rudolf Steiner describes a meeting, a conversation between two individuals as the archetypal social phenomenon, suggesting that it is the essential building block of community, of society.[3] We are always part of a language community, whether it be English, Spanish, Chinese, Yoruba or Balinese, and through our cultural upbringing we share a universe of meaning. Police stations are not coffee shops, nor schools dry-cleaners; at least that is not their intention. Within the context of language and meaning we engage in acts of social creation—buying a shirt, renting a car, planning a parent evening or starting a school. We carry out these acts by and through dialog. By attending to this dialog, to conversation in all its forms, we can learn more about that mysterious process of social creation which results when two or more human beings meet together.[4]

Different Types of Groups

Conversations happen in structured and unstructured group settings: refreshments after a school festival, the finance committee meeting or a study group on Waldorf education. It is important to know what kind of a group we are attending and to be clear about mutual expectations. It doesn't do for me to explore my interests in

planetary cycles and the phases of human development in the finance committee meeting or for you to insist on a set agenda and clear decision by consensus in a study group.

Study groups share written or spoken material, exploring themes of mutual interest: 19th century novels, birds of the northwest or the challenge of raising children in the 21st century. Participants come together mainly to enrich each other's insight and experience, not with the intention of agreeing on some point or doing a common task. Social groups are mutual support groups; they are there to understand, enjoy and support each other, whether in the form of a 12-step program or through a weekly game of cards between friends. The purpose is the meeting and the sharing between people. Work groups on the other hand have discrete tasks external to the group: planning the Christmas fair, preparing next year's budget or evaluating candidates for next year's first grade.

While all groups have a content (study) element, a social relational element and a task (work) dimension, they tend to be focused on one area more than the others.[5]

In any group it is important to achieve mutual clarity on the purpose of the group, its particular aims and the format and style of the meeting. Discussing the purpose, aims and responsibilities of groups avoids countless problems later on because it harmonizes expectations.

The Cycle of Mutual Learning

All too often learning in groups happens outside of the meeting— in a hallway between friends or on the way home in the car. "That was a great meeting! How come it was so dead?" "Carl continued to monopolize. Why won't he learn?" "We wasted a lot of time, didn't we?" The learning is not shared by everyone and often not by those we wish would change. Worst of all, by informally evaluating, we don't take responsibility for the success or failure of the meeting, often feeling it's the responsibility of the chairperson or the convener. So it is good to follow a basic principle with all groups, but in particular with work groups: Plan together first, then have the meeting and then briefly review together in the group.

On planning

Make sure the room is properly set up and everyone is present. Then begin with a moment of silence or a verse to center consciousness. Then you can check: What is our agenda? Which points are for discussion, which for decision? Can we allocate time according to the importance of the topics? Do we have all the relevant information for each topic under discussion? Who will chair the meeting? Who will take notes?

In the meeting

During the meeting make sure that all the group members have the opportunity to speak and be listened to by everyone and that there is a reasonable balance between speaking and listening. Take time for decisions especially if you are working by consensus.

In review

Then allow five or ten minutes to review the results and process of the meeting. Some questions to consider are:

Mood: How was the mood of the meeting? Where were the high and low points and why? Were there tensions and how were they worked with?

Procedure: Were we clear about the agenda and the aims of the meeting? Did we accomplish what we set out to do? Where did we get lost? How was the decision-making process? What did we do well, what less well? Did we use our time efficiently?

Speaking and listening: Were people able to speak? Did contributions build on each other? How was the listening? How was participation and engagement? Did sub-groups dominate?

Leadership roles: How was the chairing? Was there help with the process from others? Who played what informal roles?

Learning: What are two things that we could do better in future meetings? What can we learn about group work from this meeting?

There are of course many questions one can ask in reviewing meetings and many ways of doing it. One can rotate responsibility for reviewing meetings as long as the reviewer asks questions rather than making pronouncements or judgments. A good way of starting is always to check in: How was it? What went well? What can we improve? I sometimes ask group members to describe their experience in a weather picture or a landscape and then ask them to explain the sunshine, the thunderstorms or the mountain pass that was successfully navigated.

The Action Learning Cycle

LEARNING (4)

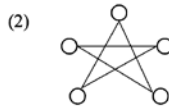REPLAN(5)

PLAN (1)

REVIEW(3)

DO (2)
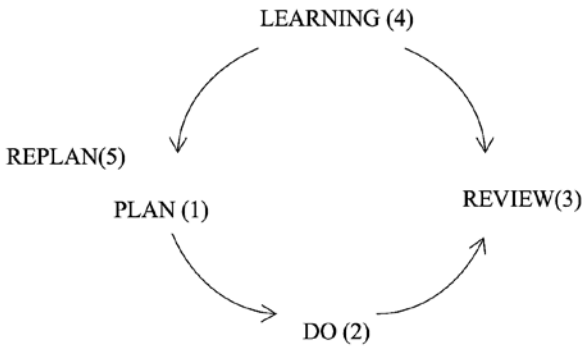
Development in groups or teams happens best through mutual learning. It is important to follow a simple learning cycle of planning, doing, reviewing, learning, and then re-planning. In this way a group or committee will gradually increase its skill and sensitivity, becoming evermore adept in the art of conversation. The team will also acquire confidence in itself and a higher level of trust because common learning reduces the need for gossip and allows difficult situations to be discussed with ever less fear.

Group Leadership

Frequently groups think of leadership as consisting of the chairperson, ignoring the multitude of leadership functions which a successful team, committee or group needs to exercise. If leadership is seen as residing in one person, all too often the outcome is determined by the skills of that person. In mature and effective groups, all team members feel responsible and exercise some leadership.
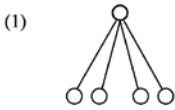
(1)   Single Leadership   (2)   Shared Leadership And Responsibility

In Waldorf school meetings—faculty, Board and major committees—I suggest three formal roles. There is the *chairperson*, who prepares the agenda, begins and chairs the meeting and helps the group to achieve its goals. This role is one of guiding and facilitating the meeting, not controlling or coercing the conversation. The best chairpeople are those who have a clear head for procedure and a good process sense, moving the meeting along and yet making sure everyone has the space and the encouragement to speak. Generally speaking, it is not a good idea to rotate the chairing function between meetings for standing committees or groups because someone needs to feel responsible for the agenda, and chairing is a learned skill which not everyone has. Allow a person to chair for one to two years before exploring who else in now suited to take on this important task. Discuss the role together and the qualities needed to fulfill it and then ask someone to accept this responsibility. Do not rely on volunteers because then the group is unable to explore together who is the right person for this task at this time.

A second formal function is that of the *process advisor or coach*, a role which can be rotated between meetings. Because the chairperson is busy chairing the meeting, it is important to have someone feel responsible for the process—sensing when things are stuck or why someone feels hurt. They can either be part of the meeting or observe but in any case if they are too engaged in the discussion or the decision, they lose their insight and objectivity. The process coach observes the quality of relationships, the speaking and listening and the procedure and evolution of the meeting. He needs to have the right and responsibility of asking questions or intervening to support the development of the group during the meeting. Typical observations include:

- How is it going with time? There are still two significant items on the agenda.
- Mary has been trying to speak for some time. Can we give her a chance?

- There is something going on between Helen and Larry that is affecting the mood. Can the two of you share with us?

Often the process coach can also guide the review process at the end because he or she has been observing and listening carefully.

The third formal role is that of the *scribe or note taker* who will note the decisions made and who has taken on what responsibilities for action. For Board, College and Faculty meetings, it is important to have typed minutes which can be reviewed briefly at the beginning of the next meeting.
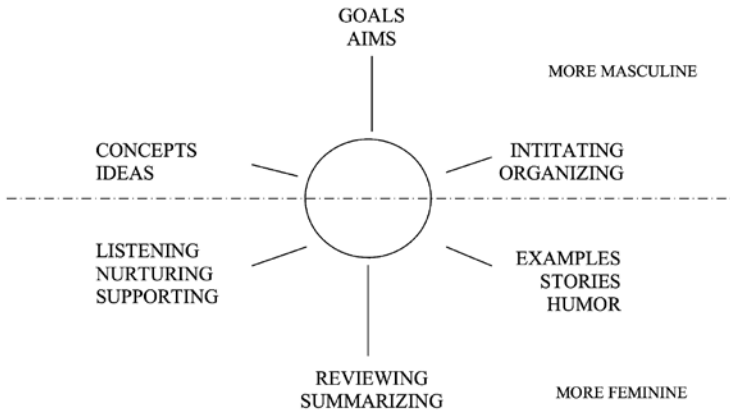
Individuals bring a variety of qualities into a meeting. If we liken a conversation to a concert, then we each play an instrument—some a clarinet or flute, others the violin, drum or trumpet. The instruments in an orchestra are grouped in sections, the string section: the violins, violas, and cello; the wind instruments: flute, clarinet, oboe; the brass section: horns, trumpet and trombone. In larger meetings of the full faculty and staff, I think something similar happens. While we each have our own instrument—our unique combination of personality, soul orientation and temperament—we play together with other instruments in sections. A number of people are quite talkative with a strong sense of procedure. Another group is quieter but strongly oriented toward listening and supporting, while a third initiates, speaks a lot and drives the meeting forward.

We have previously noted that a group works at three main levels:

1) the content level of ideas, concepts, examples, stories and argument (thinking)
2) the relational level of feelings, values and attitudes (feeling)
3) the procedural level of aims, goals and intentions (willing).

If we examine each of these dimensions more clearly, we can see that each contains a polarity. With content, the polarity is between ideas and concepts (abstract) and stories and examples (concrete). With relationships this polarity is expressed between speaking/initiating and listening/supporting/nurturing. With procedure it is aims/goals and review/summarizing—where are we going and where are we now?

GOALS
AIMS

MORE MASCULINE

CONCEPTS
IDEAS

INTITIATING
ORGANIZING

LISTENING
NURTURING
SUPPORTING

EXAMPLES
STORIES
HUMOR

REVIEWING
SUMMARIZING

MORE FEMININE

Qualities of Group Leadership/Soul Orientations

A healthy, balanced conversation needs all of the qualities expressed in these polarities. If there is too much speaking and initiating and not enough listening, chaos results. If there is too much listening, nothing happens. If there are too many examples and not enough combining ideas, we get lost in the woods. If the group is too goal-oriented or reviews too much, life is squeezed out. The effect is like asking a bicycle rider how he is able to pedal, steer and stay balanced all at the same time.

Most groups will have all of these qualities distributed among their members. In my experience, we have all of them in our soul but have one dominant and two secondary qualities. It is interesting and important to bring to consciousness which of these qualities we naturally possess and therefore can offer to the world. Some people have a strong organizing (Mars) orientation, combined with goal awareness (Saturn) and a lot of humor and stories (Mercury). Others have a listening/healing orientation (Venus) as dominant, combined with conceptual clarity and a love of ideas (Jupiter) or an ability to hold on to things, to summarize or ask where a group is (Moon). If groups recognize that each of these qualities is important to healthy functioning, then they begin to recognize that each person has an important leadership role to play. To strive for balance, the harmonizing Sun influence then becomes a joint responsibility.[6]

These leadership and planetary qualities are soul orientations which we possess as individuals and can offer to the group. We also, of course, have our temperaments and our unique personalities, so how we bring these qualities into the conversation will vary. The qualities of ideas, goals, and initiating—Jupiter (God of Wisdom), Saturn (Father Time) and Mars (God of War)—have a more masculine aspect while listening and nurturing (Venus, Goddess of Love), summarizing, reflecting (Moon) and humor, stories and examples (Mercury, Messenger of the Gods and God of Thieves),have a more feminine side. A way of reviewing meetings is to explore the balance between these masculine and feminine qualities.

In working with different groups, I have had the chance to observe both all-male and all-female groups. It always strikes me that groups of women, when doing a task, spend a good bit of time creating life and establishing relationships before moving to the task whereas for men doing the task defines life and relationships. Both are equally effective in accomplishing a goal, but the road taken is very different.

Chapter IV Exercises:

Soul Qualities in Groups: What are my dominant qualities? (40 minutes total)

Take a sheet of paper. Reflect on what qualities you typically bring into a group conversation and note them. See if you can distinguish one dominant and two or three subordinate qualities. (10 minutes)

Then share your thoughts with a friend or colleague and listen to their self-assessment. You are free to comment on each other's views. (10 minutes)

Each person shares what they have come to in the whole group; allow some discussion. (20–30 minutes)

Group Review: Qualities of Leadership (35–40 minutes)

At the end of a meeting use the qualities of group leadership to review the group process. Give individuals 5 minutes to note the balance between masculine and feminine qualities and to describe

which qualities were strongly present in the meeting, connected to which group members, and which qualities need strengthening in the future. Share and discuss in the whole group. (30 minutes)

Playing the Symphony: Group Decision Making

Let me return to the orchestral metaphor. We are each an instrument (a certain combination of soul qualities) and we tend to play our instruments together with other violins, woodwinds, or brass instruments (sections or sub-groups). We have a chairperson (the conductor) and a first violinist (the process coach). In conversation we play notes (the content: words, ideas), and we create melodies (the harmony or disharmony of our likes and dislikes) according to a certain rhythm (the procedure).

The planning of the meeting is important because it determines the particular score we are playing together. Without a common score or piece of music, we create chaos.

The chairperson (conductor) helps us to enter at the right time (regulating speaking and listening) and keeps us to a proper tempo (procedure). Just as a piece of music, a symphony let us say, has particular parts to it, so too does the meeting of a Board, faculty or a committee. The clearer we are about the phases of this conversation, the more successful the concert. The *19th Century Symphony*, for example, has four main parts: the overture, which sounds the theme; a first movement in which the theme is elaborated in different ways; a second, usually quicker movement in which variations and sub-themes are developed; and then a final movement. Similarly a group conversation has four main parts: the planning phase in which the topics and aims of the meeting are explored and clarified; an informational part in which we illuminate the question under consideration from various points of view, bringing together all relevant facts; a judging, weighing phase in which we explore relevant criteria and values; and then a concluding phase in which we state conclusions or make decisions. At the outset it is important to know whether we are seeking to arrive at a conclusion—why the teacher evaluation policy was not followed in this case—or making a decision—we will modify the policy by adding a new step to the process. Conclusions are past-oriented while decisions are future-

oriented, asking us to translate the decision taken into deed. Many groups who are not sufficiently aware of procedure will jump from describing a problem to a discussion of options for solving it before they have properly explored causes. Or more commonly, some members of the group will be looking for causes while others will be exploring remedies, causing confusion in the group.

Problem Analysis: Causes (Past)
Planning (Creating Focus and Warmth)
Topic: The Winter Fair
Aim: To understand why there was a 20% drop in revenue in 2010 from the previous year (Causes)

Picture Building / Brainstorming (Gathering information—Light)

- "It rained on Saturday."
- "There were fewer items made by the parent craft group."
- "The more expensive items were displayed at the back of the hall."
- "Publicity was late."
- "There wasn't a raffle."

Judging / Weighing (Sharing values—Water)

What is the most relevant information and why? "The raffle brought in $1800 last year. Its absence hurt us."

- "I think the poor publicity and the lack of salable items made the difference."
- "There wasn't as much enthusiasm this year because fewer parents were involved in making things."
- (Publicity and enthusiasm were considered key criteria.)

Conclusion: Late publicity and less involvement of parents were the key causes of decreased revenue.

Review of Meeting

- Decision making—Future

Planning:
Topic: Winter Fair
Aim: Steps to increase success

Information Sharing: Alternative Decisions
- Require all parents to make things.
- Increase the size of fair committee.
- Begin the parent craft groups work in early September.
- Have publicity out by the middle of October and have a follow-up a month later.
- Create a separate raffle committee.

Judging Effectiveness of Alternatives:
- A discussion of the relative merits of different proposals
- Judgment criteria: changes with maximum impact, least drain on community.

Decision
- Start craft groups earlier and have at least one per grade.
- Create raffle subcommittee.
- Begin publicity in late September.

If we reflect on the four stages or movements of group decision-making, we can notice that they really describe the qualities of any creation process. First we need interest and enthusiasm for writing the paper, doing the painting or starting a school. The quality of commitment, of enthusiasm, of fire is needed. Then we gather information and resources. We begin experimenting with different colors, gathering central thoughts or quotes and writing or, in the case of a school, acquiring insight into the marvelous qualities of the Waldorf curriculum (light). Then we enter a phase of judging or weighing, a watery uncertain time—the painting needs more form and more red, the ending of the essay is weak, should the school be downtown or in the suburbs, and when will we have enough money to begin? Finally we come to a conclusion or decision—the red fits there and now I'm finished, or I will end the essay with the quote and retype it, or St. James Episcopal Church has a perfect space for us, enough for a kindergarten and four grades and we can begin next September. The

creation process has gone through the fire of will through light, to water and finally come to earth, manifesting in deeds.

> Planning—Fire—Enthusiasm
>
> Information Gathering—Light/Air
>
> Judging/Weighing—Water
>
> Concluding/Deciding—Earth[7]

Part of the reason that reports from committees in a larger meeting are dead is because we convey only the conclusion or decision, the earth element, without all the life that went into it. So it is best to keep reports to a minimum and to add a comment or two about the process in getting to the conclusion or decision.

Decision Making by Consensus

In any group process it is the differences of opinion about what went wrong or what we should do now that generate tension and disagreement. It is in this judging phase that our differences in viewpoint and values become manifest. When we make decisions by voting, there is no opportunity to explore these differences and the majority carries the day. In that sense voting is a way of legitimizing conflict. While the expectation exists that the minority will play along and not be bad sports, in collegial institutions like Waldorf schools there is no clear hierarchy that can function as an enforcer, and controversial decisions have a way of not being whole-heartedly carried by the full faculty and staff. It therefore makes sense, practically as well as philosophically, to work with a consensus process of decision-making, a process in which everyone has an opportunity to speak to the issue and to clarify their reasons for a particular viewpoint. After both working with and observing consensus decision making for many years, I think it is important to be aware of the following principles:

1) Use a formal consensus decision-making process for all important decisions. For minor issues, just check in—is it okay to proceed in this way?

2) As you enter a consensus process, remind people that everyone will have a chance to speak and that having spoken, each person will decide whether he or she supports the decision, whether they have

reservations but would not block or whether they will block because they cannot in good conscience go along with what is being proposed.

3) In a consensus process it is important to recognize three distinct steps in the consensus process itself. This does not negate the need to consider the four phases of procedure referred to previously.

- The initial discussion of the question.

- The formulation of a proposed action or decision by the chairperson or someone else skilled at capturing the "sense of the meeting."

- A speaking to the proposal by everyone in the room, stating whether they approve, question or oppose and their reasons for doing so.

4) Before checking where people stand, it is good to remind everyone that people are here to act in the best interests of the school and the children. It is also appropriate at such times to have a moment of silence and to ask for spiritual guidance from the spiritual beings who accompany and bless this school.

5) Do not rush the meeting for a decision. Allow up to three meetings for important decisions.

6) Have a policy in place which allows you as a Board or a faculty to move forward with a decision in the absence of consensus after two or three meetings. It could be that you say we will proceed with consensus minus 2 or 3 or that you will resort to a ¾ majority vote on such occasions.

7) Be careful not to demonize the dissenting voice. I have on a number of occasions witnessed an opposition of one person to consensus which by the next week was seen to be fully justified. Equally, recognize that you cannot block too often. If the same person is repeatedly blocking consensus, the chairperson, convener or process observer may need to convene a special meeting to explore with the individual what it is that is happening to him or her in the group.

A consensus decision-making process entered into honestly and with understanding will build community and commitment. It is a way of honoring both the members of the school community and the spirit of truth as it manifests in each of us.[8]

Group Development

All social creations—relationships, groups, institutions and societies —share a developmental cycle of birth, growth and transformation. In the case of working groups, I experience three main levels of development. The first is a meeting and adjustment phase. We arrive as a new member on a board or a committee, perhaps with a few other new members, and we look around. The image I have of such a situation is like a medieval tournament, the knights wearing their armor for protection and the ladies multicolored scarves for allure—except that we are all knights and ladies being both protected and on our best behavior. In such situations we ask ourselves who is here, do I fit in, will I be liked, who do I get along with, am I needed, do I have something to offer and a host of other questions. Over the course of a few meetings we develop a sense of our own place, who we naturally align with and who we regard as sensible, who is awkward or difficult and what issues tend to be contentious. Informal sub-groups tend to form and we acquire a set of habits as a group—we all come five minutes late, chat quickly and draw up our chairs on similar sides of the table. Tom chairs the meeting, Sally is the first to react on any issue, Helen waits until we are almost done to raise a point of objection and so on—all of this is semiconscious.

In this first phase of development we are individually aware of relational issues, of likes and dislikes, of personality conflicts in the group, but we are content and procedure-oriented, avoiding the emotional issues in the interests of getting on with things. We have become an *adjusted working group* in which the interesting learning and review, as well as the emotional venting happens with our friends in the car on the way home or later on the telephone but not in the group itself.

Most working groups never move beyond the task orientation of the adjusted working group, bearing the existing limitations stoically, not realizing there are other possibilities. The emotional relational dimension, while visible in hugs, jokes, disagreements, scowls or angry outbursts, is avoided because the group doesn't know how to deal with it. If the group reviews its process regularly or has a skilled chairperson or a good outside facilitator, it will be able to cross the threshold into the domain of feelings and perceptions. When this step becomes

conscious, the group enters a second major phase in its development in which relational process issues are dealt with in the group rather than outside of it. If the first phase could be described as the adjusted working group, I would call this phase the *experience group*.

Perception-Sharing Exercise

As a help to opening the relational dimension in a conscious way, I often recommend having every group member consciously prepare and share their perceptions of other group members, using the following kinds of questions:

1) What do I admire about how you work in the group (1 or 2 qualities)?

2) What would I have you do less of or transform?

3) What new quality or gift would I give you?

Have the whole group write down the answers to these questions for each other before sharing, preferably a day or two before. Then go one by one, all eight or nine group members address one person, then the next person, until everyone has received the perceptions of the others. There is no discussion. I have never known this to be anything but a positive experience when consciously prepared because we judge ourselves more severely than others do. It is almost always uplifting and brings warmth and caring.

The quality of the experience group is that it is able to handle task and relationships at the same time. If two people are at each other, the group can stop the process, facilitate an exploration of the issues and then move on. It develops the skills and confidence to touch on the feeling dimensions of group life. In such a group, reviews are honest, feedback is direct and there is limited gossiping outside the group. Experience groups typically create a strong sense of commitment among members because their relational issues as well as task issues are worked with consciously.[9]

The ability to move into this phase of development in groups involves meeting more deeply and crossing a threshold of fear. We fear both the perceptions and opinions of others and the need to be responsible for and public about our own likes and dislikes. Yet the

practice of caring involves becoming aware of our likes and dislikes and dealing with them responsibly when they affect our working together with others in negative ways. When we are in meetings full of semiconscious animosities and hurts, do we really think that positive working spiritual beings can work? The space becomes psychologically and spiritually polluted, asking us to acquire the ability to do spring cleaning so that the sun can shine through the windows. Doing spring cleaning means that all of the group members have the freedom and the responsibility to stop a process that is emotionally damaging by asking for a pause and asking the individuals involved to speak clearly about what is going on for them, using "I statements" and not blaming others. This can clear the air in five minutes if limited to the issue at hand, and then the meeting can move on. It is also in the realm of relationships and feelings that the practice of a good review can be enormously helpful and that the process advisor or coach is essential as an impartial observer and helper.

Through the ability to work with relationships more consciously, the group develops warmth and commitment to each other. We stop criticizing each other in the hallway or on the way home, and we develop more interest in each other. Often sharing parts of our biography can support a deepening interest. Spending five to ten minutes each meeting allowing one or two people to address a biography question can increase mutual understanding.

Some Biography-Sharing Questions

1) How did I come to Waldorf education?
2) What started me on my inner journey?
3) Share a picture of yourself at age 6: your favorite room, clothes, person.
4) Who were your heroes and heroines in adolescence?
5) Describe three people who have played significant roles in your life.
6) What were the spoken or unspoken commandments in your home when you were an adolescent, and how do they live in you now?
7) What gives you joy in your work now?

It is good if everyone can work with the same question and after you are done find a new question to share. The opportunities for such structured sharing can be created easily and will add life and enjoyment to the meeting. The faculty, Finance committee, Board or Parent Council, once it has acquired the ability to have effective meetings in which both tasks and relationships can be worked with well, will notice growing interest in how the needs of both the individual and the school community can be met. This mutually supportive relationship between the individual and the community was clearly expressed by Rudolf Steiner in The Motto of The Social Ethic:

> The healing social life is only found when in the mirror of each human soul the whole community finds its reflection and when in the community the virtue of each one is living.

When people are met and seen in the group and community, the individual feels called upon to serve the community with her or his talents, as the community is then experienced as the soil in which we can each realize our deepest intentions. Entering into the level of the will—what can we do together to serve the whole and what can we do to serve each other's development—becomes the third basic level of development in the group. I would call this the *creative maturity* of the group. In working with a few groups who have achieved this level of caring, energy and creativity, I have noticed high commitment, joy and an amazing ability to get work done. Such groups can function as a blessing for the whole community and for their members. They help each other find new direction in life, and they dream and do tasks beyond the task descriptions of their particular mandate.

Thinking Level—Adjusted Working Group

Feeling Level—Experience Group

Will Level—Mature Creative Group

I need to also mention that when groups disband or when there is a large shift in committee, faculty or Board membership, then it is helpful to plan a conscious ending, to review the work accomplished and to give thanks to each other for the experience of being together.

A different but similar framework for looking at stages of group development was proposed by Bruce Tuckman in 1965. He describes four stages, forming (beginning and adjusted group), norming (adjusted working group), storming (experience group) and performing (mature group). These terms are easy to remember and can help us to identify where we are in process.[10]

There are a number of activities which can help groups to move forward and to enjoy each other. One of these is working with the arts. Eurythmy and singing are particularly helpful as they bring to consciousness a strong community element—in moving together and in combining our individual voices to create a harmonious whole; in a round, a simple melody or a four part choral piece. Rudolf Steiner suggests that the sculptural arts teach us formative principles in building institutions, that painting and eurythmy bring us into the realm of relationships, whereas the musical arts help us to experience the essential nature of community life.[11]

Games serve a complementary function to the arts in developing humor and playfulness. They allow us to experience each other in less serious ways, to be children and to practice trust and cooperation. Adapting children's games for a five-minute refresher—such as elbow tag or musical chairs—creates both breathlessness and new energy after sitting too long.

The importance of sharing biography work and exercises has already been described. In addition, developing group norms or practices can bring more consciousness to the process of working together. I once worked with Wainwright House, an adult education and conference center in Rye, New York. They adopted a list of receptive listening practices which included: Listen with Trust, Listen with Empathy and Listen with Patience. Speak from I, Share the Floor and Maintain Confidentiality. Each group can develop its own norms and practices which can then be used periodically in the review of meetings.

Authentic Conversation and Spiritual Communion

I have explored the psychological, technical and more external aspects of dialog and group work. Now I would like to touch on the interior or spiritual dimension of working together in community. A

starting point is to recognize that there is no social situation devoid of psychological and spiritual realities. If we can accept this, then the challenge for all of us in Waldorf school communities becomes one of how to work together in such a way that a temple is created in which positive working spirits can be present. These beings are deeply interested in our activities and long to be able to converse with us in new ways. Positive working spirits can do so only if we are active co-creators with them, for they need to safeguard our freedom. Rudolf Steiner describes this new possibility of co-creation in the following way:

> Thus human associations are the secret places where higher spiritual beings descend in order to work through individuals, just as the soul works through the body.[12]

I believe there are two main paths for groups seeking to enter into a conscious dialog, a conscious communion, with the spiritual world. The first is sacramental communion, practiced in a variety of religious and church settings in which a priest or religious person invokes the spiritual world through a prescribed set of ritualistic acts. The other is spiritual communion, in which the group works together in such a way that their words and deeds lift human experience to a higher spiritual level. In describing the differences in these two paths, Rudolf Steiner stated:

> I would put it thus—the community of the cultus (sacramental communion) seeks to draw the angels of heaven down to the place where the ritual is being celebrated so that they may be present in the congregation, whereas the anthroposophical community [or Waldorf community] seeks to lift human souls into the supersensible realms so that they may enter into the company of angels.[13]

The sacramental ritual of the Christian churches proceeds from the reading of the gospel (revelation of the divine world) to the offering (of physical bread and wine), to the transubstantiation (of the bread and the wine into Christ's body), and finally, to communion (into the community of Christian souls through the taking of the bread and

wine). This is a powerful and ever-renewing act for a community of believers.

Spiritual communion or authentic conversation can also be seen as occurring in stages. The first stage is one of initially coming together, let us say on a Tuesday evening at 8:00pm in the sixth grade classroom. We may enter full of the business of the day, tired and slightly out of sorts, but we also can stop for a moment and recognize that we are entering a potentially sacred space and take a moment to collect ourselves. Then we can quietly behold each other and be aware that we are divine as well as earthly beings. To recognize, to remember that each of us is a revelation of the divine, now clad in the cloak of this particular body and with this personality, can give us both patience and reverence. It is not easy to create this mood in ourselves, especially toward those whom we regard with dislike. But with practice and interest we can experience this mood and this possibility with every person we encounter.

In the next phase we begin a conversation, a dialog. Here we are called upon to understand the other, to listen to the melodies of different thoughts and feelings. To develop understanding we need to make an offering, to turn our attention to the other, to experience for a moment "I am thou." As I experience this stage of group conversation in myself, I have to open a space in myself, still my thoughts and reactions to let the other live in me. It is tiring because I need to be both still and focused on the other, not allowing my attention to wander. When I speak then, I need to know what is essential to be expressed, what is my truth and that of the group at this moment. It is another kind of offering—not saying that which pops into my mind but expressing that which is essential for the group to move forward. In listening, we sacrifice living with our own thoughts and feelings, and in speaking the essential, we give up the fullness and diversity of our inner soul dialog.

In *The Inner Aspect of the Social Question,* Rudolf Steiner describes an activity which captures the mood of the offering, of listening, of attending to the other out of the Christian tradition:

In whatever the least of your brethren thinks, you must recognize that I am thinking in Him, and that I enter into your feeling whenever you bring another's thought into relation with

your own, and whenever you feel a fraternal interest for what is passing in another's soul. Whatever opinion, whatever outlook on life, you discover in the least of your brethren, therein you are seeking thyself.[14]

In listening and speaking with genuine care, we create a mood of reverence toward each other which allows us to be freer, to act out of our higher selves, to say and hear things full of wisdom. Working in this way can overcome many obstacles between us and invites the participation and the blessing of angels.

The third stage of spiritual communion in community is achieved when, out of our mutual understanding and empathy, we are able to act toward each other and toward the whole group out of compassion and love. In his poetic book *Human Encounters and Karma,* Athys Floride writes:

This stage, which corresponds to the Transubstantiation, must be willed; to do so will take all the strength we possess. The perception of the other, of our bond with the other, now becomes deeper. We enter the realm where the forces of Karma are at work. Now we can strive to understand the impulses, the currents bringing us together with other human beings.[15]

This transubstantiation occurs when the members of the group—the faculty, Board or Parent Committee—each acknowledge in themselves that I am here with my destiny partners, and I am asked to give to the group and to each member what is needed for our mutual development. It rests on the deeply felt knowledge expressed by Martin Luther King and cited at the beginning of this chapter.

All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.

In having been part of the Sunbridge College Core Group for many years—the main spiritual and decision-making body of the College—I often had a sense of joy and recognition that I was part of a destiny community which asked me to give more of myself and out of a higher part of myself than would normally have been the case. At times this allowed us to act toward each other in ways which were deeply loving and yet not sentimental.

The fourth stage of a spiritual communion process is the experience of communion, the felt presence of the spirit. We have all had momentary experiences of spiritual communion in conversations and in groups, a feeling of magical presence, of a star-filled space.

When the previously described qualities and moods are present—the recognition of the divine in each of us, the offering of our attention through conscious listening and speaking and the deeply felt recognition of our karmic bond and mutual indebtedness (transubstantiation)—then we invite the presence and blessing of spiritual beings who offer us communion.[16] Such a development can take place over the course of many conversations or it can occur in one meeting, through grace.

While experiences of spiritual communion in conversation occur for individuals and groups through grace, it is also possible to cultivate an understanding, a sense for the attitudes, moods and actions which make spiritual communion possible in all Waldorf school communities and in other institutions seeking to serve the needs of this time. It is, I believe, a question of awareness and practice. An increasing number of groups are working consciously on the task of building spiritual community, including M. Scott Peck and the Foundation for Community Encouragement, Parker Palmer and Otto Scharmer, Peter Senge and Joseph Jaworski at the Society for Organizational Learning at the Massachusetts Institute of Techology (MIT). In addition there are the many dialog groups based on the work of David Bohm.[17] Scharmer in particular, in *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, describes seven steps in the U process, from downloading to seeing, sensing, presencing, crystallizing, prototyping and performing.[18] The four field structures of attention or consciousness which he describes, and which are most relevant to "spiritual communion," refer to how

we listen or attend in social situations, in particular groups. Scharmer states that "every action by a person, a leader, a group, an organization or a community can be enacted in these four ways."[19] The first field Scharmer describes as "I in me," or downloading where we hear and articulate our habitual pictures or judgments. The second is captured by the phrase "I in it," which signifies a willingness to see and understand others, to attend to the factual world. This type of awareness in a group leads to conversations characterized by discussion and debate. The third type of awareness is characterized by an open mind, by suspending judgments and truly meeting the other which Scharmer describes as "I in you," as empathic listening. This can create genuine dialog in which "we begin to see how the world unfolds through someone else's eyes. …We move from discussing the objective world of things, figures and facts into the story of a living being, a living system, and self." The fourth field is "I in now," speaking from the future and connecting to "the beings that surround us."[20] This activity, this conversation has the quality of presencing. If we look at the images and process of individual and group development which Scharmer describes, we can recognize again the four steps of spiritual communion, but couched in more evidence- based language and concepts.

Another very helpful and complementary perspective on spiritual conversation was developed at a series of conferences in the late 1990s on group synergy and collective intelligence sponsored by the Fetzer Institute and the Institute of Noetic Sciences. A summary report by Robert Kenny describes a clear horizontal and vertical dimension to spiritual communion, reflecting both a concern about the quality of human relationships and mutual authenticity between people (horizontal) and a joint commitment to working with spirit (vertical).[21] The conditions which he mentions include:

- A mutual commitment to each other and a clear and shared human and spiritual purpose
- Developing an atmosphere of safety, confidentiality, trust and respect
- Speaking from the heart and out of experience
- Inclusivity and respect toward different human and spiritual orientations

- A willingness to play
- An ability to deal with differences and with conflict
- Creating a sacred space open to guidance and inspiration
- A joint commitment to inner development and learning
- A meeting that is prepared, held and guided by a clear process and form of facilitation

When these conditions are met, a true chalice has been created through which group members can experience:

- An enhanced level of trust in self and others
- A sense of being known and seen
- A greater sense of authenticity and creativity
- A sense of spiritual presence and guidance
- Mutual encouragement
- Satisfaction at connecting inner values with life
- An increased desire to serve and contribute to a better world
- A greater sense of individual and community health[21]

These are also the conditions and effects of spiritual communion so clearly and simply described by Rudolf Steiner in the America or Threefold Verse given to Ralph Courtney, an early student of anthroposophy and one of the founders of the Threefold Community in Spring Valley, New York:

> May our feeling penetrate into the center of our heart and seek in love to unite itself with human beings sharing the same goals, and with spirit beings, who bearing grace and strengthening us from realms of light and illuminating our love, are gazing down upon our earnest, heartfelt striving.

The Practice of Community

True community is characterized by integrity, and integrity is not without pain. As M. Scott Peck notes in *The Different Drum*, community "requires that we let matters rub up against each other, that we fully experience the tension of conflicting needs, demands and interests, that we can be emotionally torn apart by them."[22] Without the experience of this pain and struggle we do not develop. Individual

development occurs most honestly in community, for it is here that we encounter our dark sides and practice knowing and caring for each other.

In this exploration of working together, we began by describing the mystery of conversation, of dialog, and then looked at the psychological and practical aspects of group work before turning to the question of sacramental conversation. Each level supports the next one: We need to be willing to engage in community, to suffer the pain of misunderstanding in order to enter the realm of conversation; conversation is the medium of group work; and working with consciousness and sensitivity in groups enhances the possibility of spiritual communion.

I often experience in Waldorf school communities a longing for spiritual community and a sense that when we meet we are trying to create a chalice for the spirit. Yet I also frequently experience a lack of form and consciousness in meetings, through a late start, unresolved personal difficulties and a lack of listening so that the blessings of positive working spirits cannot be experienced. Conscious listening and speaking, clarity of meeting focus, skilled facilitation and active participation are what we need to practice continuously in order to create a chalice worthy of grace, of spiritual presence.

Endnotes

1. See Heinz Zimmerman, *Speaking, Listening, Understanding: The Art of Creating Conscious Conversation* (Lindisfarne Press, Hudson, NY, 1996). Also the wonderful book by Paul Matthews, *Sing Me the Creation, A Sourcebook for Poets, Teachers and for All Who Work to Develop the Life of the Imagination* (Hawthorn Press, Stroud, UK, 1994). This book is full of helpful exercises to use, play with and gain wisdom from. Marjorie Spock has also written two important essays: "Reflections on Community Building" and "Goethean Conversation," both available from Rudolf Steiner College Press, Fair Oaks, CA.

2. M.C. Richards, *Centering: In Pottery, Poetry and Person* (Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 1964), p. 49.

3. See Rudolf Steiner, *Social and Anti-Social Forces in the Human Being* (Mercury Press, Spring Valley, NY, 1987).

4. See David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (Taylor & Francis, London, 1996).

5. Ibid., p. 65.

6. See Bernard Lievegoed, *Man on the Threshold: The Challenge of Inner Development* (Hawthorn Press, Stroud, UK, 1982), pp. 97–118, for a discussion of the planetary processes in the human being. The planetary typology described was first developed by co-workers at the Netherlands Pedagogical Institute (NPI) in Holland in the 1960s.

7. These stages can be compared to Old Saturn, Sun, Moon and Earth as described by Rudolf Steiner in *Occult Science, An Outline* (Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, NY, 1984).

8. Caroline Estes, "Consensus Ingredients," in *Context: A Quarterly of Humane Sustainable Culture*, Fall 1983.

9. See Coover, Deacon, Esser, Moor, *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution* (New Society Press, 1978), pp. 44–79. Also, John Adair, *Action Centered Leadership* (Gower, UK, 1973).

10. Bruce Tuckman, "Developmental Sequences in Small Groups" in *Small Groups: Studies in Social Interaction,* A.P. Hare, E.F. Borgatta and R.F. Bales, eds., (Knopf, New York, 1965).

11. Leo de la Houssaye, *Sozial Kunst und Ihre Quellen* (Verlag Freies Geistesleben, Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 44–76.

12. Rudolf Steiner, *Brotherhood and the Struggle for Existence* (Mercury Press, Spring Valley, NY, 1980), p. 9.

13. Rudolf Steiner, *Awakening to Community* (Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, NY, 1985), p. 157.

14. Rudolf Steiner, *The Inner Aspect of the Social Question* (Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, NY), p. 36.

15. Athys Floride, *Human Encounters and Karma* (Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, NY), p. 31.

16. Rudolf Steiner, The Hague, November 14, 1922.

17. See in particular the stimulating book by M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (Simon and Schuster, NY, 1981), pp. 86–106. Also Friedmann Schwarzkopf, in *Beholding the Nature of Reality: Possibility of Spiritual Community* (Rudolf Steiner College Press, Fair Oaks, CA, 1996), explores the nature of community from a very important cognitive perspective.

18. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from Future as It Emerges* (Society for Organizational Learning, Cambridge, MA, 2007).

19. Ibid., p. 11.

20. Ibid., pp. 10–14 and 271–301.

21. Fetzer Institute (Robert Kenny, Group Service and Group Synergy, Kalamazoo, MI, 2000). Also Fetzer Institute, *Centered on the Edge: Mapping a Field of Collective Intelligence and Spiritual Wisdom* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001).

22. Op. cit., Peck, pp. 77–78.