THE DESIGN OF LIFE
The Design of Life: Human Development from a Natural Perspective

Norman S. Rose, Ph.D.

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What is this book about?

This book is a description of a paradigm and an ideal. The paradigm relates to human development in alignment with natural design. The ideal is a vision of how humans would learn, think, and act if they did develop in that way.

Who is the audience?

This book is written for students and instructors at the college level, for teachers and parents of young people, and for those who work with children or adults in need. It is meant to supplement theories and books on human development, education, psychology, and child rearing.

As a supplementary textbook, it lays out a fresh approach to the study of human development. It offers a perspective that often parallels the writings of Piaget, Bruner, Erikson, Jung, Maslow, and others. But it differs from those writings to present an image of human development that focuses on what would be both healthy and natural to the design of life.

As a supplementary book for teachers, parents, caretakers, and counselors, it is meant to engender thought. It is not meant to give answers, but rather to offer ideas that might lead to new perspectives on working with individuals at any stage of life.

Above all, this book is meant to inspire readers to begin their own search for what is natural in thought and expression, and to embrace those things and make them a part of daily living.
FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the late 1970s, I met a remarkable man. John Waskom was an enigmatic sort: tallish, somewhat gruff-looking, black hair with silver streaks. His accent was Deep South. Altogether, he presented a visual and auditory image of a slow and sullen man. But his manner was careful, as were his words, which were sometimes humorous and almost always penetrating. The school dropout who became a Ph.D. The angry young man who ran from his psychologist father – and later bested the old man in insight on human behavior, even though his chosen field was geology!

I became John’s protégé from a distance, absorbing his ideas and practically memorizing his talks – talks that wove together the math and physics of the cosmos with Why-didn’t-I-think-of-that applications to parenting and teaching. Even the titles were intriguing: The Magic of Life, The Sex Life of Rocks. Then I began adding my own insights, and I accompanied him often to give weekend workshops for parents and teachers. But our paths diverged after a few years. Living in New England in the 1980s, I heard of his untimely death. He had never gotten around to writing his book, and his family did not seem to be getting around to it either. So in the late 1980s I asked for his audio tapes and notes, and his widow Sara graciously loaned them to me for several months. I organized the work into charts and theories and self-published a small book, which all of about a dozen people ever read. Later, in the publish-or-perish world of university employment, I had two successes in getting John’s ideas into journal publications. I got requests for reprints from a few professors in the United States and about 20 from the Baltics, France, Israel, Cuba, Poland, and elsewhere. Now I have the opportunity to bring the work to fruition in a published book.

You may ask, “Did John Waskom practice what he preached?” Yes, he did, after asking himself these essential questions: Why did I have to leave home to grow up, and does it have to be that way in families? He and Sara had five children: four boys and the youngest a girl. And I can testify that I have never met young people with more poise, assurance, and humility. They even exhibited a fair amount of grace passing through their terrible teens.

So after some years of sitting in a closet on sheets of paper and computer disks, here’s your book, John. I won’t always be specific about which ideas are yours, which ones I modified, and which ones are mine. But I’m sure you would agree that isn’t what is important anyway. The main thing is to make these ideas available to the professional and parenting worlds.

I also wish to acknowledge others who contributed to this endeavor: my wife Sierra, who shared her genius about the parenting process, and my parents, who provided me with a firm foundation and (unknowingly) a lifetime supply of questions about humanness.
There is a design, and it is a design for us.

We live within that design, and the design lives within us.

It is a design that rules the cosmos, as well as the atoms that make it a universe.

It is a design that, when fulfilled, reveals perfection.

So when we harmonize with that design, our lives take on a trajectory toward perfection.
PART ONE: THE TREATISE
NATURAL DESIGN

For centuries, many scientists have followed a basic assumption in their search for truth: that every set of complex questions has a simple, unifying answer. This has inspired scientists to create theories of simplicity and unity, and it has challenged them to seek new simplicities and unities when old theories became bulky and strained.

For a well-known example, look at the history of astronomy. Ptolemy proposed that the sun and planets revolved around the earth, and in the next few centuries this was the accepted scientific "fact." However, as observations became more refined, calculations of planetary movements had to be altered to fit the evidence. It took enormous mathematical effort to uphold the theory of an earth-centered system, because planets often did not behave in ways that made sense in a universe with the earth at its center (so it is no wonder that the word "planet" comes from the Greek word for "wanderer"). Kepler tried a new and simple approach: putting the sun at the center of a living universe. The calculations for planetary movement worked very easily under this theory. Of course, this caused ripples throughout the scientific and religious communities, but eventually it became the accepted fact.

The search for simple, natural design has fueled theory and research for all of recorded history. As the example above shows, sometimes the "discovery" or theory is erroneous. But sometimes the discovery makes evident an elegant truth. The ancient Egyptians and Greeks came upon such a mathematical truth that became the basis of their science, art, architecture, and music, and to this day the truth still holds. That truth is a number: 1.618…. It is an irrational number with no finite end, and it is symbolized with the Greek letter phi (Φ or φ).

Before explaining how phi could be so useful to so many fields, it would be wise to explore this number a bit. First, it has a unique inverse. Dividing 1 by phi (i.e., 1 divided by 1.618) yields 0.618. Phi and its inverse are basically synonymous – quite impressive, considering that no other number does that. There is definitely something special about phi.

Now, take a standard-size credit card and measure its sides (preferably in metric units). Divide the length by the width and you will find a close approximation of phi. Why? This is because modern graphic artists have learned something from the Greeks: the phi proportion has a pleasing visual effect on humans. (Consider: If your credit card is pleasing to the eye, it’s just one more incentive to take it out and use it!) The Greeks called this special proportion of height to width the Golden Mean, and they used it in their designs for temples and other structures. (It is also interesting to note that the astronomer Kepler was also aware of this mathematical ratio, and he called it the Divine Proportion.)

But why is the Golden Mean so pleasing? Why does it make the Parthenon, the Mona Lisa, and the United Nations building beautiful works of art? The answer most likely lies inside our own bodies. Measure the human face, from the bottom of the chin to the hairline. Calculate 0.618 of that length and measure up from the chin. You will arrive at the spot between the eyes—the bridge of the nose. Measure down from the hairline and you arrive at the tip of the nose. (Of course, there are variations, but these measurements work on average for the human face.) In fact, the Golden Mean can be found in many proportions of our bodies, such as in the relation of finger and arm joints, indicating where various features will be.

The innate nature of phi appears in human behavior. When a young child draws freehand, without conscious effort or outside influence, the product will be full of phi proportions—an example of the natural (but unconscious and unpolished) genius of childhood.

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1 And how alive is the universe? Our ideas of what is alive are based on what scientists have told us and what our eyes and ears tell us. So when Waskom titled a talk "The Sex Life of Rocks," he got many raised eyebrows. But now, we have Jeremy England of MIT (englandlab.com) working on a theory that matter itself—in molecular form—may have a kind of cognizance and ability to change and adapt. So when a young child says a rock is alive, be careful about "correcting" that!
In the drawing below, the nose is approximately at 0.618 of character’s height. The character’s height is approximately 0.618 of its width.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_art#/media/File:Child_Art_Aged_4.5_Person_2.png

In the drawing below, the length of thick lower splotch is approximately 0.618 of the length of the paper; it is anchored at approximately 0.618 of the paper length.

The length of upper scribble about 0.618 of height of paper; its “center” about 0.618 of paper height.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/Child_scribble_age_1y10m.jpg
A rectangle with the phi or Golden Mean proportion can also be called a Golden Rectangle. A series of these can be constructed by using the width as a new length. When the corners are connected with arcs, the result is a spiral, as shown in the figure below.

![Golden Section Diagram](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golden-Section.png)

The spiral, then, is another expression of phi which appears all through nature. Note pictures of spiral galaxies. Then check the arrangements of pinecones, various seashells, and sunflowers.

![Spiral Galaxy](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/54/NGC_1637_galaxy.jpg)
It should be apparent by now that there is a natural design at work in the universe. Randomness is just an illusion when
the design reveals itself. And just in case there is any question about how far the design goes, consider this: the phi
proportion has even been found in the ratios within the double-helix "ladder" arrangement of the DNA molecule, the
chemical structure that encodes hereditary traits. It also has been found at the sub-atomic level in quantum physics. So
from the macro to the micro, the design is in place, and we humans are gloriously caught in the middle of it.

But how does all this relate to human function and human development? To start answering that question, let's turn
again to mathematics.
NATURAL PROGRESSION

A mathematician of the Renaissance, Leonardo Fibonacci, discovered a unique sequence of numbers. He started with 0 and 1 (a natural starting point) and added them to get the next number. Now he had 0, 1, 1. Then he began to add the last two numbers of the sequence to produce the next. This is what appeared:

0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233...

It turns out that these numbers appear in natural design, such as in the number of concentric spirals in a pinecone or sunflower, and the number of seeds in each spiral. But here is the significant thing about it: as you move up the sequence, the relationship of any two consecutive numbers gets closer to phi. For instance, 34 divided by 21 yields 1.61904; 55 divided by 34 yields 1.61764; 89 divided by 55 yields 1.61818. So with the Fibonacci sequence, we can describe the Golden Mean not only as a natural proportion, but also as a natural progression. As you look at how the numbers increase, you can imagine them taking on a spiral shape:

(As a convenience, the Fibonacci numbers will be presented as linear and equidistant for the remainder of this book. However, do not forget how the numbers actually depict natural design in a spiral or logarithmic progression.)

Using the idea of progression, view the Fibonacci sequence again, and imagine that each number represents the beginning of a new cycle or set. This would mean that the number immediately previous to it represents the end or completion of a cycle or set:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End of old cycle</th>
<th>4 \ 7 \ 12 \ 20 \ 33 \ 54 \ 88</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start of new cycle</td>
<td>0 \ 1 \ 1 \ 2 \ 3 \ 5 \ 8 \ 13 \ 21 \ 34 \ 55 \ 89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Music provides some good examples of this idea. An octave, by its very name, is made of eight notes. However, the first and last notes are really the same, only in different registers. In fact, the sequence we call an octave is complete with seven notes; the eighth note is actually the beginning of a new octave or cycle. Compare that fact with the chart above. A chromatic octave, using the white and black keys on a piano, is considered to have 13 notes. However, the first and last are the same, so here the cycle is complete with 12 and restarts with 13. Again, this matches the chart. Finally,
count the number of keys on a piano. Whether conscious of it or not, piano builders traditionally complete the cycle just where natural design and progression would predict – at 88 keys.\(^2\)

Using the Fibonacci sequence, a natural progression of human development begins to reveal itself. Look again at the chart above with the two rows of numbers. Imagine these numbers as ages in a person's life. Notice the numbers on the bottom row that represent beginnings of cycles and ages. Then notice the numbers on the top that represent ending or completions. Do you see some familiar patterns? The ages that have traditionally marked early and middle childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are readily apparent. Thus it can be stated: The numbers that mark the milestones of human life are the same numbers that express the perfect proportion found in all nature.

So how might this natural sequence or rhythm define natural development at the various stages of human existence? That is, how can the Golden Mean, phi, and Fibonacci numbers help parents, educators, counselors, and caretakers discover and foster what is natural and healthy at each stage of life? The rest of this book will be devoted to addressing these questions. And to start the journey, we’ll look at two major themes of humanity: the purpose of life and the “circle” or rhythm of life.

\(^2\) Actually, there is more "design" to the 88 keys on the piano than meets the eye. Start with the lowest note, A\(_0\), and play the octave up to A\(_1\), using minor tuning. Then move down a 4\(^\text{th}\) and play the octave that starts on E\(_1\), up to E\(_2\). Keep repeating this pattern, which will take you through the entire "circle of fifths"—until you reach the octave that starts on D\(_6\). That octave ends at C\(_8\), the top key of the keyboard. There is no D\(_8\) to finish the octave, but then D\(_8\) would actually be the beginning of a new cycle. So with 88 keys, you can cover the entire "circle of fifths" in all keys.
PURPOSE: THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

Doesn’t it seem reasonable that theories and texts on human development would discuss the meaning or purpose of life? After all, why lay out psychological constructs about human existence and not even hint at why humans should bother going through all the motions? Not that writers on development should presume to have answers to this most essential subject. But developmental theorists should address meaning and purpose, if only so the reader can get a sense of the perspective of the writer, and thus understand the underlying basis and implications of each theory.

So what perspective does this book take on the purpose and meaning of human life? Since the theory contained here is committed to all that is inherent and natural, the answer is simple:

The purpose of life is to fulfill its natural design and progression.

This is a good start, but its meaning needs to be filled out. In expanded form, it means that each form of life, at each stage of its development, is urged to perfect its equipment, according to its design. Crystals are bound to the expression of a simple geometric design and symmetry. Plants must fulfill their geometry, too, plus a life cycle of growth and reproduction. Animals must fulfill their geometry and their life cycle, as well as fulfill instinctive and learned behavior patterns. In all these cases, there is an imperative. Failure to do these things will jeopardize the individual and the species. In other words, design and progression must be fulfilled.

For humans, fulfillment of design and progression likewise includes bodily geometry and symmetry, life cycle progression, and instinctive and learned behavior patterns, plus imperatives toward mental, emotional, and spiritual or transcendent fulfillment. In sum, this set of imperatives could be described as movement toward ever-increasing levels of self-awareness and self-efficacy. In short, it is the development of character.

How does fulfillment of the human design occur? It occurs through senses. As a human develops keener and keener senses, the mental, emotional, and spiritual faculties increase. Thus, human character is individuated and perfected.

What senses are humans capable of perfecting? There are all kinds, but they can be placed into three categories:

- Basic senses: five senses, plus balance, hunger, thirst, sexual appetite.
- Subtle senses: sensing of internal and environmental signals.
- Metaphorical/transformative senses of discernment, e.g., sight transformed to insight or envisioning. (This topic will be discussed in greater detail in a later discussion.)

Of course, purpose cannot fulfill itself in an instant. It needs a set of skills to be able to articulate and develop. This is the importance of child-rearing and education: to help each individual develop the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual tools—senses—to reveal personal purpose and discover how it fits in the social whole.

Seeing the enormity and complexity of life and its purposes, we may sense the importance of harmonizing with the natural life cycle, from conception to birth through maturity. But what would a truly natural progression of human life be? This is tantamount to asking, “What should human beings be thinking, feeling, and doing at each stage of life? What are they designed to do as they develop?” That may seem like more of a philosophical question than a developmental one, but using natural design and natural progression, we are very well equipped to answer. In fact, we may be the best equipped to answer.
THE TREATISE

THE CYCLE OF CREATION

Before we can explore what humans should do at each stage, it is important that we have a vocabulary to describe change and development along natural pathways. So we will diverge for a moment to find appropriate descriptors.

We are asserting that human design and purpose are revealed through the development of senses. Since this takes place over time, we have to think of development in terms of process. What happens when a process works clearly, in accordance with natural law? We might assume that it creates natural and functional forms. Many traditions have noted this and have sought to describe the process of natural outworking over time. We can look at these descriptions as a way to conceptualize the process of natural development as it moves through its stages or rhythms. And for convenience, we need a name for this process of natural unfoldment. Hereafter, it will be called the creative cycle.

The entire life span is a setting for a creative cycle, as is each stage within it. These are natural cycles, each with design and purpose. The question is, how effectively do humans move through these natural cycles? And how effectively can they move through the cycles or processes they initiate themselves? The answers lie in our ability to sense the rhythms of these cycles and act in harmony with them.

Here are sets of words that have been used to outline the rhythms of the creative cycle, matched with familiar cyclical occurrences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stillness (Awaiting)</th>
<th>Connection (Synthesis)</th>
<th>Action (Unfolding)</th>
<th>Creation (Fulfillment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winter</td>
<td>spring</td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormancy</td>
<td>germination</td>
<td>growth</td>
<td>harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conception</td>
<td>birth</td>
<td>development</td>
<td>maturity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Bear in mind that creative cycles do not jump from segment to segment. However, making these divisions helps us get a sense of the different rhythms that occur as they move along.)

The first two stages are subtle, being mostly invisible or subconscious in essence—what Chinese tradition calls Yin, the feminine element. You can think of this as a quiet and reflective time, a gathering or womb time, just as winter and early spring harbor life in preparation for later growth. This part of the process can be difficult for many people, for there is a tendency to jump into the process and start doing with great passion. But this is not yet the time for doing. The earth knows and all of nature knows that. People in tune with the creative cycle know that as well – consciously or unconsciously.

The latter portions of the process, Action and Creation, represent the active stages, essentially visible and conscious, or what the Chinese tradition calls Yang, the masculine element. There is achieving, and finally there are results and fulfillment. Many individuals can have trouble here, too. Some want to jump to the fulfillment as quickly as possible. Others want to avoid the fulfillment and just keep achieving beyond what is necessary. And still others want to fiddle with the results until there is no recognizable fulfillment. As in the first part of the process, timing is everything.

The invisible and visible (yin and yang) combine in the rhythm of the creative cycle. As each element of the process completes itself, the creation begins to appear. The result is always in accordance with how favorably each element was allowed to work. For example, if in the gestation of a fetus the mother’s nutrition or emotional state was less than ideal during the first trimester, the newborn infant will only be as healthy as can be expected under those conditions.

The word “want” is often key to understanding what goes wrong in creative cycles (or why it goes from creative to destructive). Because of emotional ties, we may often want the process to go in a certain direction or at a certain pace.
This is especially true at moments of intensity. Whether in relationships, business, or art, this can be disastrous, for we are contending with natural design, and the results will likely be less than fulfilling.

To illustrate the need for understanding cycles, rhythms, and intensities, let us use childbirth as an example. During labor, the mother comes to the transition phase, when her contractions reach maximum intensity and maximum discomfort. If she is not aware of this, she may begin to panic, imagining that the intensity she feels will continue to increase and become overwhelming. Her inner tension can make muscles tighten, causing more discomfort. Then she might call for anesthetics, which can have adverse effects on the child and on her participation in the process.

However, if the mother is aware that she has entered the phase of transition, she knows that the intensity has reached its peak, that she will not have to endure anything greater, and that she will soon see her child delivered. She can be induced to relax as much as possible and fully participate in the birthing process.

Like the uninformed mother who feels panic, there is a tendency in people to fight or walk away from intense situations, especially when they are unclear or in transition. “Walking away” from intensity can take many forms: blaming others for one’s discomfort, becoming depressed or self-critical, numbing oneself through drugs or depression, or even abandoning the situation for others to clean up. Through such patterns of reaction, many creative cycles in peoples’ lives get impaired or aborted. And just like the example above, it is all the more tragic because it tends to happen just before the “birth” of something new.

Knowing in advance about rhythms of rising and falling intensity can be reassuring and strengthening. And by handling all the little creative cycles of daily living, we prepare ourselves to meet intensity in larger and more critical situations. This is part of “growing up.” Even the most detailed advance notice of what to expect in a situation cannot take the place of simply being a substantial “grownup” – one who has a sense of assurance and willingness to see a cycle all the way through, because there is trust in the creative cycle.

It could be said that stewarding the creative cycle is simply dealing with what is obvious. There is purpose waiting to be fulfilled, and that can only be discovered by working with natural rhythms rather than forcing or avoiding events. Sensitivity to where one is in the sequence (and keeping check on how one feels about it) is the key to success. This applies to parenting and education, as well as professional endeavors and personal growth. Everything from marriage to capital expenditures has its right time and place and rhythm. Managing oneself, then, becomes the most important element in stewarding creative and effective results.

Perhaps the discussion of purpose can be revisited now. Earlier, these questions were posed: “What should human beings be thinking, feeling, and doing at each stage of life? What are they designed to do as they develop?” The answers point to this: Humans are designed to fulfill the creative cycle in daily action and in their larger cycles of development. Sometimes that can be done unconsciously, and sometimes it must involve conscious awareness of internal and external processes.

In the coming pages, this is important to keep in mind. As the stages of human development are laid out, remember that each stage has a rhythm and each is part of a larger rhythm. Think of stages as processes rather than just categories. This can help bring understanding of what is natural to each stage, what is unnatural and can cause deviation from natural design, and what can be done to help individuals return to their natural progression.
NATURAL CYCLES OF MATURATION

What follows is a chart that depicts a natural progression of human life through stages of development. These stages are based on the Fibonacci sequence, although they conform in many ways to popular divisions outlined in human development textbooks. The chart is not meant to be a finished product. It has undergone refinement for a number of years, first by the late John Waskom, then by the author.

The educational aspects of the chart may be somewhat culture-bound, but the idea of a balanced curriculum is universal. Similarly, any culture-related items in the areas of character development or community involvement can easily be retranslated as needed. Indeed, this outline of human development is meant to be more than cross-cultural; it is intended to transcend culture.

The pages following the chart will fill out its meaning. First, there will be a consideration of basic life themes and an explanation of terms used in the chart. Then there will be consideration of the life stages, following the chart down its columns.

Bear in mind that this chart is not just a group of ideas compiled by artful theorists. It is based on years of observation and interaction with individuals of all ages, especially ones who have begun to reveal the clarity and health of natural, undistorted progression. Because there has been some sensitive, intelligent parenting and teaching harmonized with the creative cycle, there are living examples who demonstrate natural wisdom and vitality. Without such parents, teachers, and their products, this discussion would be only pleasant theory. Because of them, what follows is a description of what has been demonstrated as possible.
### NATURAL CYCLES OF MATURATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation/Gestation</th>
<th>Conception/Early Childhood</th>
<th>Middle Childhood</th>
<th>Adolescence</th>
<th>Young Adulthood</th>
<th>Middle Adulthood</th>
<th>Elder Adulthood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fibonacci No.</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Age</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Birth–7</td>
<td>8–12</td>
<td>13–20</td>
<td>21–33</td>
<td>34–54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fundamental Themes
- Control
- Open Heart
- Subconscious
- Design
- Open Mind
- Conscious
- Metaconscious
- Decreased tone and energy level

#### Physical Attributes
- Parents’ health in body, mind, relationship
- Developing body; awareness of world
- Walk (birth–2)
- Talk (age 3–4)
- Think (age 5–7) pattern begins
- Eyes, teeth, bones finish forming; thymus atrophies
- Puberty, sex drive, muscle development
- Full growth, peak of strength
- Stamina, changes in metabolism

#### Metasense Urges and Developmental Goals
- Choice
  - Timing, patience
- Imprinting
  - Sound, light, “matrix of the possible”
- Will
  - Control of basic senses and control of impulses, leading to autonomy and self-purpose
- Feeling
  - Refine senses to transformation into character, e.g., confidence, competence, honesty, resilience, etc.
- Thinking
  - Make sense of world, ideals and concepts; metacognition which leads to discernment
- Connection (Outward)
  - Sharpen discernment of right relationships in work and intimacy
- Service (Forward)
  - Facility with adult world and creative cycle; sense of service and finesse
- Fulfillment (Upward)
  - Sensing life essences and rhythms; integrating accumulated knowledge

#### Sensory Skills for Character and Moral Development
- Influence of parents’ character and climate: stability, patience, assurance, purpose
- Observation and imitation; negotiating impulses through simple choices; basic pattern recognition
- Memory and pattern recognition; decision-making; social sensitivity; self-regulation
- Monitoring thoughts to process and evaluate internal and external environment
- Initiate/follow creative cycle in personal and work life; evaluate values and behaviors
- Poise and productivity; acting with sense of fitness and integrity; evaluate and in-fill voids
- Integrate previous stages as path to self-wisdom and acceptance; releasing attachments

#### Curricular Themes and Settings for Sensory Skill Development
- Parenting and birthing education and preparation
- Imitation and repetition, using rhythm, movement, music, touch, play, nature, simple chores and routines
- Nature, food production to learn science, math, relations; chores; speaking, dramatics, then reading, writing
- Academics, plus arts, vocational and life skills; following an interest to expertise
- Social skill development for use in relations and work
- Administrate and mentor in work, family, and social life
- Learning for enjoyment and perspective; creating, mentoring, befriending

Ritual/ceremony at each transition, incorporating celebration, symbolism, and challenge, with representation of family, community, spiritual guidance.
**FIBONACCI NUMBERS AND HUMAN AGE**

[Above the lifeline on the chart, there are two rows of numbers. The upper one shows the Fibonacci progression, and the bottom one shows corresponding human ages. Obviously there are going to be individual variations, depending on physical, neurological, and character factors.]

A question often comes up when the Fibonacci progression is matched with human age: “How do you account for having two number ones? Humans only have a first birthday once in their lives.” The answer to that requires this understanding: The Fibonacci numbers are whole integers and only approximate the Golden Mean. So, using 0 as the moment of conception, the first 1 approximates the moment of birth. The second 1 represents the first birthday. (It is interesting to note that according to traditional Chinese reckoning, a child is considered a year old at birth.)

The first interval, from 0 to 1, is the time of gestation, culminating in birth. The next interval, through age seven, will be included in early childhood. Experts often subdivide the early childhood stage, as Erikson (1982) did in his infancy, early childhood, and play stages. This can easily be accommodated by using the Fibonacci numbers 1, 2, 3, and 5. Some subdividing discussion of young children will be presented in this book, and certainly there is room for others to present more detailed discussion on those subdivisions. However, for the purposes of this book, and to keep the discussion as concise as possible, all these years will be grouped into one stage. (Keep in mind that Erikson defined his stages of childhood, in some measure, to match certain Freudian concepts and phases, such as the issue of shame related to toilet training. These concepts are not relevant to the discussion of childhood in this book, which is based on the idea of sensory growth and refinement, not Freudian coping mechanisms of sublimating urges and avoiding neuroses.)

Age eight begins middle childhood, which ends at puberty with the beginning of adolescence (Fibonacci 13). Adulthood has no obvious physical demarcation, and we traditionally use Fibonacci 21 as its starting point. Middle adulthood seems to begin in the early or middle 30s, corresponding to Fibonacci 34. And the beginning of the elder stage (Fibonacci 55) matches fairly well with our traditional ideas of the onset of senior years.

It is interesting to note, on this idea of subdividing stages, that Waskom speculated on the occurrence of “nodes” within stages. For instance, within the middle adult stage, there would be nodes at phi points along the 21-year span. A node might occur at 13 years into the stage, another at 8 years into the stage, etc. These nodes would indicate minor demarcations or challenges during the overall stage development.

**FUNDAMENTAL THEMES**

[On the chart, these are overarching themes that permeate the entire development cycle, often spanning two or more stages. They give a sense of natural goals humans would meet under ideal conditions of nurturance and guidance.]

**CONTROL–DESIGN:** The initial stages of human development are rightly concerned with the establishment of a pattern of control. The best way to think of this is to see control as a matrix or foundation, like a skeleton. Design is the “fleshing out” of the foundation. By having a solid foundation of control, the design can accurately reflect the purpose that is intended, just as the muscles and flesh give final definition to the structure of the bones.

Much of the control for human function is automatic, especially at the physical level. But careful external control is needed to guide the way for the natural design to take form. This is the role of parents and educators: to maintain a
control that respects and complements the natural controls and processes of young people, so that development is as ideal as possible.

OPEN HEART–OPEN MIND: In the early stages of life the child bonds with parents. This establishes the sense of trust, which leads to an affirmative perspective that the world is a safe place to explore. We witness this in the open-hearted expression of young children. This needs to last for as long as possible, because this is the optimum state for absorptive learning—learning that is effortless and barely conscious. This kind of learning is essential for a firm foundation, so that in later childhood and into adolescence, the individual can develop an open mind, unhampered by fear or prejudice or uncertainty.

SUBCONSCIOUS–CONSCIOUS–METACONSCIOUS: Life begins with little conscious awareness of self. As stated above, this subconscious state is perfect for the open heart, for it creates a space for effortless learning. This time can be full of heart, as shown in simple feelings of exuberance and wonder during the early years. By adolescence, this gives way to self-consciousness, which is the beginning of conscious function. Although the transition is fitful at first, this is a natural progression, for it allows for a burst of intellectual growth and the initial sensing of wider possibilities in life. Conscious function develops through early adulthood, becoming more and more facile. When middle adulthood arrives, the progression can lead naturally to a state of metaconsciousness, or “conscious of being conscious.” This is the full flowering of self-awareness, for it involves the recognition of purpose, how one’s life fits into a larger pattern, and how one can best activate purpose within the social whole.
STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

[These are the topics which will be discussed under each stage of development. They are grouped in three major headings: (1) Physical Development, (2) Psycho-Social and Character Development, and (3) Socialization and Guidance Processes. Within each heading are subheadings which further describe development at that stage. Following are the headings and subheadings that will be used.]

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Growth Patterns: Some stages are marked by obvious physical changes, such as adolescence. The others have unique physical traits, but they may not be so obvious or immediate. This book will not deal heavily on this topic, except as it relates to natural design and health.

Nutrition: On the chart, there is an important message concerning proper nutrition. This is an area often neglected in the study of development, except as it concerns pathological disruptions. Here it will be treated somewhat differently, since the disruptions most often created by nutritional practices are quite subtle and often pass for normal.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks: Within each stage of development, there is an underlying urge, task, or essence. It is an impulse that guides both physiological processes as well as attitudes and behaviors. How often have we heard that it is important not to break the spirit of the child? Although we would tend to agree with that, do we know what that spirit is? Let us think of the urge or task of each stage as the spirit that the child is compelled to express through a unique personality. Then we can begin to see patterns of behavior as either accurate or inaccurate reflections of natural urges.

Sense Development: How many senses are humans capable of developing and using? Although there is common talk of “the five senses,” we know there are more—both basic ones, such as the sense of balance, and more subtle ones, such as the sense of appropriateness, or “common sense.” As you will see as the life stages are discussed, the basic senses are not just valuable tools; they are preparatory for the development of the subtle ones. This is critical, for although well-trained eyes and such are useful, there may be nothing more valuable than the ability to “read” situations and people and to sense the right action to take. This is sensing at its finest.

Well-developed senses can allow the urges and tasks of each life stage to be fulfilled. They act as “feedback” mechanisms for the developing person, reporting on the quality of his or her interaction with the world. Development of the senses is not an academic task, nor is it always teachable in the normal sense. However, it can be encouraged through proper guidance, once the “trainer” understands the urges and tasks of the age being worked with.

Character Development: This is a theme that gets little more than lip service in present educational practice, perhaps because it is difficult to measure, not readily marketable, or too closely tied to morals and religion. However, in a natural progression of human development, character is the cornerstone. The development of character is not philosophically nor religiously based, but grounded in the notion that purpose is trying to fulfill itself and can only do so through a character that is strong, sensitive, and clear. Primary to the development of character is the ability to work with and through the creative cycle in an age-appropriate way.
THE DESIGN OF LIFE

Educational Approach: The development of character and the sensing mechanisms must happen in context. This necessitates some consideration of curriculum. The educational approach that would encourage natural maturing may be somewhat different from the standard academic curriculum, which concentrates so heavily on intellectual growth. Remember, the intent here is to bring human beings to a sense of personal purpose, self-knowledge, and social integration, not just to develop the ability to survive economically and professionally.

SOCIALIZATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESSES

Parenting Patterns: Just as the child is guided by inner impulses or urges, so parents have subtle mechanisms that compel them to take on specific roles at the various stages. The wisdom of parenting can be discovered along the way as adults ask themselves, “What would be the appropriate attitude here? How would that translate into action that will guide the child into a greater sense of self-mastery?” This kind of questioning may sound simplistic, but it is highly effective when done with sensitivity and emotional stability, especially when feelings and circumstances are intense. The answers that come from such questioning will be discussed for each life stage.

Responsibility: Who is responsible for stewarding the process of maturation, for helping to bring out true character? Each stage has its requirements, and different people can play critical roles at different times. Since the goal is self-responsibility, it would be ideal for adults to be sensitive to how and when they should play their part in young people’s development.

Society and Community Involvement: Various members of the larger community can play significant roles in the life of a growing person. These people may not be responsible for the actual character development of the individual, but they have an influence in matters of health, well-being, and self-esteem. They are the supporting cast in this drama, and their roles can be crucial at times.
THE TREATISE

FOUNDATION STAGE

[A note on terminology: In this book, the word *preparents* will be used to describe couples who are preparing for pregnancy and birth. Normally, this would be a hyphenated word. However, in this form it can be interpreted and pronounced as *pre´-parents* and as *prepare´-ents*. That is, while they are not yet parents, they are preparing for their parenting roles.]

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Growth Patterns

In Foundation, preparents can influence their future child’s health through the quality of their own health. A woman who is physically and nutritionally fit will tend to have a relatively easy pregnancy and birth. She will most likely have less discomfort, more energy, and more emotional stability during this time, and she will pass on greater health and disease immunity to her child. A man who is nutritionally and physically healthy will have a higher quality and quantity of sperm (which leads to better “selection”). He will also be more apt to hold up to the rigors of the gestation, birth, and beyond, both physically and emotionally.

Physical health is not the only factor for preparents to consider during the foundation stage. What is the “health” of their relationship? This is absolutely crucial to the matrix upon which the child will emerge. A strong and resilient partnership is essential, and until this is established, pregnancy might well be avoided, for this and their physical health will set the tone for the pregnancy. (This topic will be discussed in later paragraphs.)

Nutrition

Some nutritionists will tell you that the most important years in a child’s nutrition are the two before birth. Both preparents have a profound influence on their child by the way they eat. It affects their mood and the subsequent atmosphere between them. It affects the health of both sperm and uterus. It affects their ability to hold up to the rigors ahead. So although no rules will be set forth here, it suffices that preparents need to consider this area before conception and all through gestation.

One very important point needs to be made. Biochemists are very concerned about the depletion of the earth’s topsoil, particularly in heavy farming regions like North America. The depletion in quantity and quality of this precious resource has great bearing on the nutrition of all age groups. Preparents may need to consider how they and their future child will receive vital nutrients, particularly trace minerals that are fast disappearing from our soil. Coupled with the possibility of contamination from insecticides, radiation, and chemical preservatives, sweeteners, etc., this concern has vast ramifications, and it may necessitate re-evaluating the family lifestyle. Perhaps convenience foods should be the first to be curtailed or eliminated. Perhaps there needs to be a monitoring of the sources where foods are being purchased. Perhaps nutritional supplementation needs to be considered. The choices made at this point may well influence development for years to come.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

When does the child’s individuality begin to manifest? At birth? At conception? Before that? Without going off into realms of speculation, there are some important considerations that can be made in the light of natural progression.
During this stage, prepators are making choices that will determine what kind of behavioral patterns they will have to handle. In a sense, they are determining the quality of love their child will be able to receive and give, just by their choices in diet, attitude, home atmosphere, etc. These conscious decisions made by prepators at this time should be sufficient to allow a natural, healthy pattern at the outset.

Sense Development

- As couples prepare for parenting, they can address some issues which will have a tremendous bearing on the atmosphere in which the child will develop the various senses. Besides monitoring their physical condition and lifestyle, prepators can take time to check the state of their own consciousness in regard to these items:

- About 50% of U.S. pregnancies are unintended. The worldwide percentage is a bit less. So it might be important to ask: Does each preparent really want a child consciously? Subconsciously? Are there any feelings of imposition, obligation, or guilt associated with the idea of parenting at this time? Is there adequate communication about these feelings?

- How does the man feel about the woman? Is he willing and able to encompass her physically and emotionally during the rigorous time ahead? Is he secretly dependent on her, which might make him resentful when she must soon rely so much on him?

- Has each one begun to integrate the male and female aspects of personality? Is each one getting comfortable with the entire spectrum of feelings that are possible? Are they getting comfortable with each other's full range of expression, even when it does not fit the stereotypes or expectations men and women may have for each other? Are they becoming comfortable with their own and their partner's sexuality?

- What is the quality of their interrelatedness—the portion of their lives that define their connection to each other? How sacred is it to each of them? How do they protect it? (After all, it is the place where the child will live.) And do the prepators respect and support the portions outside that mutual area?

- What is the quality of their relationships with their parents?

  - What was/is the man's relationship with his mother? What emotions/triggers does the man have about his mother? About women? What if the man was raised mostly by his mother? What are the possible implications of having been raised by a single mother?

  - What was/is his relationship with his father? How much presence, warmth, encouragement has been in that relationship? What are implications?

  - What was/is the woman's relationship with her father? How much presence, warmth, encouragement has been in that relationship? What are the implications? What emotions/triggers does the woman have about her father? About men?

  - What is her relationship with her mother? What are the implications?
THE TREATISE

• What is the quality of their relationships with their partner’s parents? How do those relationships affect their core relationship?

These are critical issues, for they set the tone and quality of the home setting. If these issues are met and resolved before conception, the couple is free to focus their energies on the creative cycle ahead, rather than on their own psychological needs.

Character Development

If the child is going to develop a character that is grounded in assurance and alignment with the creative cycle, it begins with preparents who possess the same qualities. This is only possible when the couple has proved trustworthiness and stability with each other. Then hearts are relaxed and the creative cycle can be a living reality in the home—and in that atmosphere character can develop solidly.

Educational Approach

Couples who are considering a family would benefit from specific preparation. Useful topics might include the stages of child development, infant care, the creation of a proper home atmosphere, financial planning, development of a support system, etc. Some of these topics might not be covered in a formal class setting, but can be addressed in the presence of a wise and experienced person who would offer guidance and support.

SOCIALIZATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESSES

Parenting Patterns

During this period, couples merge life perspectives in a new relationship with a new purpose. As partners learn to share life and accommodate each other’s unique personalities, they need to be patient and not assume readiness for parenthood just because finances or some other factors are in order. Patience is required to sense what areas still need addressing in preparation for parenthood. And it is required to sense when conception is proper. Lack of patience at this point could lead to bringing a child into a home that is not fully ready to receive it, thus setting off a series of missteps.

Responsibility

No matter who may be advising or guiding the couple at this stage, it is they themselves who are responsible for what has been put in motion toward having a child. It is important that the preparents learn to “tune in” to themselves and communicate with each other, so they can begin to sense the depth and duration of the responsibility they are taking on. This is especially so with the couple’s first child.

Society and Community Involvement

When a couple decides to become parents, family and friends can play the vital role of giving acceptance and support. This can take many appropriate forms. The couple is supposedly basing their decision on a firm foundation of love and a clear-headed vision of their responsibilities. So the main thing they need from family and friends is a welcoming for their decision and the offer of whatever support is considered mutually acceptable.
Although formal education is likely over for the couple, there is a great need for counseling and guidance during this period. This may be best kept outside the family so that there can be someone on hand with an objective view. Clergy, birthing centers, and psychological counselors are often asked to take on this role, which may be fine. Whoever fills this role must be equipped with more than pamphlets and techniques and advice; this person must have some understanding of how the creative cycle can be managed through any confusions, doubts, and fears that might arise. This person would offer a safe space for looking at all the factors in play, so that the couple can gain perspective and discover their own answers.
GESTATION STAGE

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Growth Patterns

The physical traits of the child during gestation are well documented in words and photographs. However, there is an additional point that is pertinent to our discussion.

Sensory awareness begins about midway between the beginning of the fetal stage and birth. Up to this point, all “messages” received by the child have been through the mother’s placenta (blood supply and exchange). Now there is sensitivity to sound, light, and touch from outside the womb, the importance of which will be discussed below.

Nutrition

Expectant mothers often say, “Now I’m eating for two!” In many ways this is true. She must provide nutrients for both herself and her child. Body-building at this stage is the same as when the child is out of the womb: there is a need for high-quality protein and an ample supply of vitamins and minerals. Supplementation is often recommended by physicians, knowing that the mother’s body demands high nutrition that would normally require enormous amounts of food to supply. Natural food supplements can help the mother prepare her body for the long-term strain of pregnancy and later lactation, while helping the child get critical nutrients. In this way she can get a dietary boost without having to consume more calories than necessary.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

While in utero, the child experiences the deep, automatic, subconscious processes of the womb while the mandates of life are being carried out. As gestation unfolds, two processes are at work: accommodation and assimilation. At first, these are largely physical, as the child accommodates its environment and assimilates nourishment. Later, these processes expand. The child actually begins to sense and learn from the environment outside the womb, both directly through budding sense organs and indirectly through internal messages in the mother. (Piaget used these two terms to describe early childhood cognitive development processes. He just had no idea the child had been doing them before birth as well.)

Sense Development

As was mentioned above, sensory awareness begins about midway through the fetal period. With the sudden increase of stimulation from outside the womb, the child is more vulnerable and in need of a new kind of protection. But the child is also more “teachable” at this time. This is the time when parents would do well to speak in tones they want their baby to recognize and introduce music and other sounds that they want as part of the child’s sensory “vocabulary.”

Now the preparents can influence the child’s sense development through control of the external womb, i.e., their home.
atmosphere. The fetus is receptive to stimuli through placental interchange and through the sense organs, so even mood changes in the mother and in the home environment can be sensed. Preparents who are aware of this are careful to let their own senses filter the emotional content of the environment.

Character Development

Preparents would continue to maintain a relaxed and orderly atmosphere that will help the infant experience trust and security. This will be the first step in the development of strong character. The focus now is on the mother-to-be. The depth of her trust and relaxation in her husband and in the creative cycle will have a profound effect on the atmosphere of home, and thus the child.

Educational Approach

Couples anticipating a child would benefit from formal training in birthing procedure and atmosphere, proper care for mother and infant during and following gestation, infant behavior patterns and proper parental response, etc. At least some of this kind of training is attainable in many locations.

SOCIALIZATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESSES

Parenting Patterns

During this stage, preparents find themselves needing to exhibit single-mindedness. There are so many distractions that appear during pregnancy that it is easy to forget the primary task: to prepare the way for a special being to come into the world in the most easy and welcoming atmosphere possible. This certainly does not mean that expectant parents should be fearful and shut out the world, for the fear itself would destroy the atmosphere. However, it does mean that a focus must be maintained through mental and emotional stability.

Responsibility

The preparents continue to have primary responsibility. Whoever might be offering guidance shares in this to a degree, helping the couple stay “on track” with their priorities of physical and emotional preparation.

Waskom was fond of telling audiences that how the father feels about the mother will determine the quality of the pregnancy. This could be interpreted in either esoteric or practical terms. When the father feels loving and protective toward the mother (and glad of the pregnancy), she is enveloped in a safe space. That space is made evident in his attentiveness to her needs and to the overall need for a safe “nesting” place. Imagine the stress on a mother—and the effect on the pregnancy—if she had to do all the preparation and protecting on her own, because the father was absent physically or emotionally. So it is a simple truth, that how the father feels about the mother will determine the quality of the pregnancy.

Society and Community Involvement

During this period, family and friends best give the majority of their support from a distance. Unless called upon, they may inadvertently interfere with delicate cycles going on in the home. The preparents are concerned with atmosphere and with keeping a stability present in their lives. This is proper, and they should not have to deal with more stimuli
than necessary. At this time, the assistance of midwives and/or physicians can be invaluable, as long as they respect the atmosphere that is being nurtured. One way to think about this is to consider that the womb is not just in the mother; there is a virtual womb surrounding the entire situation. No one would intentionally disrupt the processes going on in the mother’s womb, nor should anyone disrupt the larger womb. The couple knows it is there, and they can make it more obvious to all as they intensify their own sense of attunement with it.
Growth Patterns

Notable physical traits of this stage include the “seeds” of tooth development at around one year and the beginning of a fascinating and recurring “walk–talk–think” cycle as described by Waskom. This cycle, in rudimentary form, completes itself during early childhood: the child learns to scoot, crawl, then walk during the first two years, then talk in words and later sentences from age two to four, then think with some conscious intention from about age four.

On a larger scale, this “walk–talk–think” cycle can be seen moving across the entire life span. Early childhood is a “walk” stage; middle childhood is a “talk” stage, and adolescence is a “think” stage. Then the cycle repeats at a higher or more metaphoric level on the life spiral: young adulthood is learning to “walk” in the world; middle adulthood is being fluent in the “talk” of the grownup world; and the elder years are a time to “think.” This may become more apparent in further discussions.

Nutrition

Young children are often thought of as “picky” eaters. There may be some good reasons for this. Perhaps they have a built-in sensitivity that monitors what their bodies can and cannot tolerate. However, sometimes the finicky-ness of young children is just part of a power struggle with parents who have been duped into over-indulgence. Giving a child choices (especially about food) from too early an age can set up a recurring scenario in which the adults end up catering to the whims of one who is too young to know what is really fitting. Give a three-year old unlimited choice for breakfast and you may hear anything from “popcorn” to “chocolate cookies.” Then when you try to back up and limit the choice, you have a tantrum on your hands. Why? Because you just gave the child power and then tried to take it away. The wise parent gives no choice, and later limited choice, until there is sufficient understanding of what choosing is all about.

Recently there has been growing concern about food sensitivities in children. Research shows that not all children are equipped to digest all foods. Take, for example, lactose intolerance and allergy to dairy products. Such conditions have biological and/or environmental origins. What does this imply? It means that we might give children foods they cannot process and which cause any number of symptoms, ranging from respiratory trouble to poor digestion to the multiplication of food allergies. Behavior may also be affected, which means that learning can be affected, too. Parents would be wise to monitor their child’s ability to handle foods for several years. It could save them enormous amounts of time, money, frustration, and embarrassment by preventing ill health or school-related disorders.

Another area for consideration (and this applies well into the adolescent stage) is the matter of blood sugar. This process is regulated by carbohydrates, especially those containing B vitamins. We now know that whole-grain carbohydrates are the most sustaining in both the short and long term. We also know that when B vitamins are depleted, blood sugar drops, and the body goes into a survival mode, giving the most nutrients to the lower brain, which regulates basic metabolism. Thus the upper brain, used for thinking, learning, and socializing, is relatively starved. This leads to behaviors which are classified as dull or anti-social. Parents who are sensitive to this will insure that their child has foods that will keep blood sugar stable and brain activity normal all day. This means offering a diet rich in whole grains, fresh vegetables and fruits, and a minimum of sweetened or refined foods.
THE DESIGN OF LIFE

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

In the first years of life, children are compelled to express the life spirit with great enthusiasm. As they accommodate and assimilate new information, there are two further behaviors that reflect this urge: absorption and imitation. The child absorbs behaviors (even subtle body language and attitudes) and mimics them as well as possible. Sometimes this leads to “cute” behavior, such as when the child parades around in parents’ shoes. It can lead to behaviors that give parents pride or consternation, depending on how they feel about the reflection being shown. Absorption also relates to attention span, which can be considerable at this time, if the child is allowed to explore objects without distraction or over-guidance.

Erikson divides early childhood into three stages, each with a distinct task that builds on the previous one. First, the infant is urged to find trust in the world. This starts with the bonding of the child with the parents. When this is successful, the child can later “bond” with other people and with the world in general—meaning that there will be trust that the world is a place safe for exploration. (There is considerable evidence that lack of bonding in infancy is causing a profound increase in psychopathic or antisocial behavior in our society. This is a topic that is so vital, yet often so neglected, because infants require a consistent care provider in order to “absorb” human patterning and gain trust.)

Erikson’s next stage involves the urge toward autonomy. This is the toddler time of “do it myself.” So much has been absorbed and assimilated, and now the child wants to prove a certain measure of independence and ability—and uses new verbal and locomotive skills to prove the point. When this stage is completed successfully, it leads to a sense of will or self-determination.

The third stage involves the urge toward initiative. Erikson associated this stage with play, which is a young child’s way to test new concepts and skills. Thinking is not a heavy mental task at this stage; it is more of a playful, almost dream-like catenation of ideas, as any preschool or primary teacher will testify. Yet, there is something quite serious going on under the surface. For when this “play” stage is completed successfully, the child gains a sense of purposefulness, of being capable of intentional action.

Sense Development

Assuming that trust has been established, young children have the impulse to develop the sense of will, which leads to autonomy and initiative. The senses that enable the will to develop include:

- touch, which relates to touching and being touched, the primary learning modality of this stage (hence the term sensorimotor learning);
- movement and motion, which relate to large muscle coordination and spatial sensing, as well as the beginning of the sense of rhythm;
- balance, relating to physical equilibrium, walking, hopping, running, etc.;
- the sense of life, which relates to the recognition of one’s own animating force as well as that of other forms—knowing that one is alive and has feelings, and so do other living things. (Children will even “charge” objects—such as dolls—with life, which gives them further opportunity to explore this sense.)

Learning in and with the elements of nature allows this entire process to be as effective as possible. In fact, outdoor education is essential at all stages for effective sense development, because the natural world contains natural challenges for learning within its patterns and cycles.
Character Development

As stated previously, the character of the child is initially grounded in the character of the parents and the atmosphere they create in the home. In practical terms, this means that the parents are able to maintain an air of “alrightness.” Thus the child lives with adults whose words, actions, tone of voice, and overall body language convey the message, “All is well. The grownups are in control of themselves and the situation.” When the parents convey this message, they provide assurance to the child. (And when parents do not convey this message, because they are reacting emotionally or erratically, the child loses assurance and either withdraws or rebels.)

This may seem like a call to laissez-faire parenting, but that is not at all what is required. Guidance of young children is a hands-on affair, needing constant vigilance and attention. However, if children are to grow up vibrantly, without distortions of character, parenting must recognize natural rhythms and give them clear translation. This means that manipulation and imposition—such as bullying, shaming, or causing anxiety—have to give way to loving, sensitive, yet firm attentiveness to the child’s natural compulsions and what the child needs to fulfill those compulsions healthily.

There is almost universal agreement that character and self-esteem are damaged by criticizing a child. But do we recognize the long-term harm caused by praise? Parents and teachers who use praise to get a child to behave properly are instilling a sense of dependence on external authority: the child will “perform” correct behavior only with the anticipation of reward or approval. This can lead to any number of character flaws, such as living by concepts and rules (“You should always do it this way.”) or manipulating situations (“What will I get for doing this?”). Such character flaws undermine genuine expression. Interestingly, the adults who trap a child in a praise mode become trapped themselves, for the child learns how to use situations to get reward or praise for even the simplest acts.

So what builds character in young children? Criticism will not, for it can tear down self-esteem. Praise will not, for it can create permanent addiction to external approval. Fine character tends to be built on meeting simple, straightforward expectations without reward attached. Children who feel the joy of doing what is expected will learn to value their own efforts without needing incentive or approval. This requires adults to give children routines as well as new experiences they can complete successfully. Children love a job or a challenge that is within their reach, and a warm acknowledgement of their contribution or effort is sufficient to let them know they did well and they are appreciated. Pride is best when it is self-induced.

This does not mean that adults cannot show interest or enthusiasm to a child, for that is not the same as praise. Think of a child presenting a drawing. An adult who says “This is good” is praising, and the child learns that drawings have value. Now the child may draw to please others or perhaps shy away from drawing creatively for fear of creating a “bad” picture. Either way, the child is no longer expressing genuine feeling in artwork.

An adult who says “What interesting colors!” or “Tell me about this!” is placing no value on the art and is not praising. Such statements place value on the child and on the child’s process of creation. In this way the adult is opening a door to interaction, creativity, and pride, all of which are character-building.

Educational Approach

Questions and Answers: Our present society encourages children to ask questions, to be curious. Yet some parents become suspicious of this in young children. This is no wonder, since often a small child cannot really understand the answer and is not really interested in the answers anyway. It may be just a way to get the parents’ attention and control the situation. Actually, by answering children’s questions, we may be doing more than just giving them control. We may be taking away their desire to experiment and explore and find their own answers.

When we feel obligated to answer every question, we give the child a hidden message: “Knowledge and understanding are outside of yourself. Answers are always external.” This can rob the child of a sense of authority and true curiosity, setting up a pattern of being dependent on external authority. This is a far cry from the kind of character revealed by those who know the strength and assurance of their own authority, as exemplified by entrepreneurs and grass-roots
organizations—people who make use of their own resources and find their own solutions.

How should questions be handled and when should they be answered? That depends on the nature of the question, the circumstance, and the age of the child. Perhaps before answering a child’s questions, it would help for the adult to ask some internal questions: Does the child really need this answer? Is an external answer the best way to handle this? Could the child find out the answer by investigation or observation? Sensitive parents have discovered that children who are not provided with answers in every instance come into their later childhood and adolescence with a sense of authority and inquisitiveness. This is quite different from the young person who is apathetic or argumentative.

Physical Learning: Early childhood is the time for learning at a physical level. They need to touch and manipulate objects to learn their properties. This is obvious to one who observes young children, yet often it is forgotten at critical times—such as when they see a child do something deemed inappropriate, such as pushing another child or not sharing a toy. Often adults make a big fuss over such instances, seeing in them motives that are unacceptable in grown-up society. However, to a young child, this may be just part of physical expression. Getting children of this age to conform to adult protocol is a worthy goal, but it may involve inconsistent logic at times. Perhaps not sharing is perfectly natural; after all, adults don’t share their possessions freely and willingly. Perhaps an occasional push or shove is natural well. Perhaps children can work out many of their physical processes quite naturally without adult interference, without any physical or emotional harm. Adults can stand back and observe before rushing in to “save” or correct a child. And when there is a need to intervene, they can do it by example rather than by lectures or scolding.

Physical learning can enhance character development at this stage through learning and performing repetitive actions. When a child knows the proper procedure for setting a table or cleaning up after an art activity, a sense of pride and autonomy is instilled. Repetitive actions just for fun (such as singing and rhythm games) help build memory and logic, but when it also involves helping, the child gains the added advantage of feeling important within the family or group. This is not unusual in farm families and pre-industrial societies, where everyone has a job to do in the smooth working of the home.

Curriculum: Our society has many day care and preschool facilities. Curriculum varies, as does atmosphere, intent, and instructional practices. In light of the theme of this work, what would a parent look for to complement the sensing and character training begun in the home? First, there would be a recognition of the child’s primary learning mode, imitation, and how that requires the adults on staff to exemplify calm but interested behavior. Second, there would be emphasis on physical, active learning, with much time spent on art, music, dance, gymnastics, construction, and repetitive actions. Third, there would be a respect for the child’s intuitive abilities and tendencies (without catering to whims). In this way the natural instincts are encouraged.

The fourth area of the curriculum is vital yet so sensitive that it may have to “stay at home” and be handled only by parents. This is the area of touch. Children not only need to actively touch their world; they need to be touched as well. Just as learning to balance one’s body has implications for later learning, so does having one’s body touched or massaged relate to later development. How? Because the body and mind are part of one system, and when the young child’s body is massaged, the cognitive and emotional mechanisms are massaged through neural stimulation.

SOcialization and Guidance Patterns

Parenting Patterns

In the first years of a child’s life, parents very naturally carry a spirit of blessing. They feel blessed, and they give blessing to the little one in their care. But blessing is more than a loving feeling toward another. It includes the realization of one’s responsibility. After infancy, while the child is young, this takes the form of discipline. This is not to be confused with irrational punishment or a systematic plan of rewards. Discipline, as the root “disciple” infers, has more to do with teaching by example, naturally expecting the child to follow the course set by the parent, both in physical action
and in emotional tone. It allows for the unique personality of the child, but it does not let youthful whims and tantrums reverse the roles of who is in control. Remembering that children at this stage learn by physical contact, parents can calmly yet firmly give them physical messages (and later verbal ones) to bring the child back under control. Without anger or shaming, parents can let young children know who is in charge. This unconsciously reassures them that the design and control of the family is intact, which gives them a sense of safety: “Mommy and Daddy have everything under control—even me. So I know they can take care of me. If they couldn’t control me, how could I trust them to be able to take care of me?”

One of the primary ways in which parents offer both blessing and discipline is in their role of “guardian angel.” The young child has no real understanding of what information is useful and what is potentially destructive or fear-producing. There is an open heart that accepts everything, which in the world of today is rather dangerous. So it is up to parents to filter the experiences of the child, acting as guardian angels for the subconscious. Later, preschool and primary teachers will join in this. All caretakers need to stay aware of the need for protection and training before the child becomes his or her own guardian angel much later.

Another way in which parents can provide discipline, as noted earlier, is in offering limited choices, in regard to food or activities. Since young minds cannot use higher cognitive processes, such as considering consequences or weighing benefits, they should not be called upon to make choices that require such processes. Simple and limited choices give them the satisfaction of feeling autonomy, yet keep control in the hands of adults.

There is one area of choice that should be allowed by adults. That has to do with respecting the child’s intuition. The child will sense something about every person and setting, and that sensing can have a lasting impact. Parents can be sensitive to this, using their own sense of empathy to “tune in” to the quality of experience going on in the child, then offering protection or explanation as needed.

This can be critical when you consider how often adults put on a “front” in public. A child might sense that what someone says is not really how they feel, and this can be confusing. For instance, parents may tell the child that Uncle Fritz is special, deserving trust and love, but the child senses something about Uncle Fritz that is not wholesome or safe. If parents do not acknowledge this themselves, or insist that the child disregard such feelings, the child is being asked to ignore intuition. Enough of these kinds of episodes might cause the child to “turn off” the intuitive powers and become bland and unimaginative, or to withdraw and become skeptical, fearful, or guilt-ridden.

And what if the child is intuiting based on a misinterpretation, and is avoiding a person or place that is actually benign? There might not be any way to know for sure, so a few repeated exposures can be tried to see if the child “warms up” and changes. But even if the child is misinterpreting, there is no point in forcing a situation that only engenders suspicion or fear.

With this in mind, it is important for parents to have clarity within themselves and within their relationship. When there are no “hidden agendas” or mixed messages in the home environment, the child is free to use and develop intuitive powers. This can lead to psychological strength and assurance of character.

Responsibility

From foundation through early childhood, the parents are the primary caregivers. Even when they send their child to day care or preschool, they are actually responsible. Why? Because they are responsible for the choice of care outside the home, but more importantly they are responsible for giving the child a firm base of attitude and disposition. Remember, the child is basically mimicking parental response to the world. So even in away-from-home settings, the child has no real tools for acting except for what parents have instilled. No teacher, doctor, friend, or family member can be relied upon for supplying authority at these stages. Only parents know whether their atmosphere and behavior are equipping the child for the world “out there.”
Society and Community Involvement

At this time, family and friends can come closer; again, not for advice and counsel, but for support and friendship. Besides being sources of assistance, these individuals will give the child initial glimpses of the range of adult expression. This makes their role crucial, for they provide a safety net for the parents and an expanded world for the child.

At some point daycare or preschool may be considered. Sensitive parents will seek out the finest adults and settings possible for this. Again, atmosphere is vital, and it needs to be considered before any other aspect of the facility. It is wise to think of these as support mechanisms for parents, rather than settings for raising the child. Even the finest preschool can only foster what parents have established already, since the child is still mainly a reflection of that.
MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Growth Patterns

This stage is marked by some rather startling and noticeable changes. The adult teeth are making an appearance, which alters the facial features. The thymus, the endocrine gland associated with natural immunity before the lymph system can build up antibodies, begins to atrophy. The child's body is now "on its own" to remain pure. All this correlates with the diminishing of the "angelic" appearance of the younger years. Also, eyesight is now as good as a normal adult. (This is a point to note: in today's world, we have children learn to read from two to five years before their eyesight is developed to full capacity. This could well be a vital factor in reading difficulties and in the large number of children needing corrective lenses.) This is definitely a "talk" stage, as noted earlier. Speech expands rapidly, as well as the ability to express complex ideas.

Nutrition

The nutritional principles discussed in the section on early childhood still apply. Now, however, there are added factors for parents and educators to note. With the child out of the house and away from direct parental supervision more and more, some formal nutrition education needs to be given. School lunches, afterschool snacks, and other eating activities need guidance and forethought. With pressure from peers and TV, children can become exposed and susceptible to a wide range of unhealthy choices. Prevention works best, through education and the development of pride in healthy living. Adults can hold a relatively strict line, and limiting what comes home from the supermarket is one way to do it.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

The child is leaving behind the mostly subconscious world of imitation and impulse, and is entering the more conscious realm of motivation and self-authority. Purity of heart does not comes easily or automatically any longer; it must be maintained by the expression of assurance, courage, and willingness to try new and harder things. Also related to this is the sudden increase in the desire to relate to others socially and feel a sense of belonging. You can see evidence of this in the number of youngsters who join clubs and teams and have "best friends" at this age.

Erikson described this stage as a time to develop the sense of industry. This would mean proving one's value, ability, consistency, and trustworthiness. Again, this relates to maintaining purity, for the reverse of industry is inferiority or low self-esteem, which is the root of many "impure" behaviors at this age, including disrespect, laziness, bullying, and vandalism.

Sense Development

- Older children are compelled to develop and expand their feeling realm, and senses now begin to refine and take on metaphorical meaning.
The Design of Life

- Taste can become wider and more discriminating; it also begins to be transformed from gathering flavors to cultivating interests and a sense of fineness, as in specialized hobbies.

- Warmth is transformed from a “getting” sensation to a giving one, as in caring for a pet or looking out for a friend.

Vision, as mentioned earlier, becomes acute; it also begins to transform from passive reception to active imaging, as in envisioning plans or imagining how another person feels.

This metaphorical transformation of the senses parallels what some psychologists call emotional intelligence, or EQ. During middle childhood, while emotions are not yet complex or nuanced, children can nevertheless begin to develop their ability to work with emotions intelligently. This can include:

- Using impulse control to slow down their emotional reactions and desires.
- Sensing and describing their own emotions.
- Sensing the emotions of others.
- Acting and speaking with appropriate emotional response.

Character Development

When the child reaches this stage, there is a need to begin more active and concentrated character training. Up to now the child has either acted on impulse or has imitated the actions and attitudes of the adults around. With the advent of this new stage, the child begins to demonstrate a more individuated personality which is less reflective of family influences. Simple compliance is no longer the goal of discipline. Now the goal is to bring out a natural sense of authority or “can-do” that blends with the rhythms and needs of the family, classroom, team, or friendship group.

Earlier, the harmfulness of praise and reward was discussed. In this later stage of childhood, this is still true. But now a new strategy can now be employed to fit the urge toward self-esteem: recognizing responsible behavior with privileges. Consider the vast difference between giving temporary praise or rewards for “good behavior” compared to giving escalating privileges for proving trustworthiness. That would mean giving children increased choice and independence as they demonstrate responsible behavior. Matching earned trust with privileges fits the natural urges for character development at this stage.

Character development can, then, include any number of practical activities that utilize the child’s emerging capacity for observation, memory, and follow-through. More choices can be allowed, and the consequences can be both previewed and reviewed. Chores can be an expected part of daily routine (actually just a step up from those repetitive actions developed in early childhood). Plans can be made for a personal activity, or contributed to a family activity. Team sports or clubs can become part of the child’s life. All these things help build a sense of authority and the ability to make accurate discernments and follow through appropriately and consistently.

To round out the sense of self-esteem and self-authority at this stage, attention needs to be given to the development of emotional intelligence. Daily life should give ample opportunity for this, as nearly every event contains emotional undertones which can be observed, described, and responded to. With guidance, this can be done with increasing accuracy and finesse.

Even with the best of situations, the middle-age child will still experience periods of crisis. So much is changing, neurologically, hormonally, socially, and cognitively, that there will inevitably be moments when the child’s internal world feels overwhelming. This may take the form of regression, isolation, rebellion, or any number of other reactions. Proper encompassment of this storm might take various forms: soothing to meet a child’s confusion and upset, sternness to
meet rebellion, or perhaps non-interference to give the child room to do some inner processing.

Educational Approach

Middle childhood and adolescence include a span of years in which learning is primarily external. Primarily, the emphasis of focus for the child is the external world: “How does it work? Why does it behave that way? What can I do with it?” It need not always be physical, although there is a need for a balance of motor/tactile development with mental/logical development. This is the time for observation and exploration of the environment, through action, numbers, words, movement, and the arts.

As the older child explores the outer world, there is a need to be able to articulate what is learned. Practical skills are needed, but they need to be introduced and practiced with a recognition of their practical purpose. Reading, writing, grammar, and spelling are practical tools, and as such there is a question as to why they must be imposed as isolated subjects. Children will develop the need for these tools, and perhaps that is the best time to teach them. Also, why not train children in other language skills, such as speaking to an audience, recitation from memory, and storytelling? These can help develop a sense of using appropriate words and inflection, as well as building self-esteem, poise, and a sense of authority.

Children in this stage will benefit from exploring design in the world, through natural patterns (in nature, numbers, maps, and geometry), and through practical sciences (gardening, animal husbandry, anatomy). Even the art, music, and movement of the earlier years can be refined and incorporated into the study of design. And they can be integrated into the “regular” curriculum to give variety and relevance to any topic.

Above all, children love to do all these things in the context of interaction with peers and adults. This is essential for the development of both character and intellect. With this in mind, teachers and other mentors might well include time for children to review their emotional responses during or after interactive lessons and activities.

SOCIALIZATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESSES

Parenting Patterns

During these years, parents can participate with the child in maintaining a pure heart and high self-esteem. This gives parents several tasks. First, since the child is moving out of the “naturally adorable” stage, parents need to purge themselves of the notion that the child will or should always be “angelic” in appearance or behavior. Second, they need to be aware of the child’s needs to express resilience and authority, which means allowing more trust and responsibility. Third, they can begin to share the role of guardian angel with the child, helping him or her make wise choices and reviewing consequences of those choices. This involves what is called the interpretive role of parents: watching TV programs together, discussing the news and which current movies are acceptable—in other words, allowing more choice and participation, helping the child gain a clear-hearted perspective or interpretation of the world. This will influence whether the child will approach the world with an overall positive or negative outlook.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, parents can acknowledge the growing abilities of the child. This gives assurance that all is well, and the child can feel loved even during times of social turmoil and self-awakening. In this way, parents can instill a sense of authority in the child, an authority that is shared, so there is no need for coercion or bribery. (Consider the misguided practice of rewarding a child for good grades.) This is the next natural stage of discipline after teaching by example: inspiring a sense of intrinsic motivation and ability.
Responsibility

By the age of eight, the child has begun to exhibit a character that is not so dependent on parental and home atmosphere. Now other adults can have a powerful influence, and that immediately brings them into a sharing of responsibility. Teachers are the most obvious adults in this regard. Also, members of the extended family may take on greater roles if they are willing and able and geographically close. Even club sponsors and team coaches can have a strong influence at this time. However, the bulk of the responsibility is shared between the home and the school, and communication between the two is essential. Often this only happens when the child is performing poorly or behaving inappropriately, with occasional mention of fine achievement. The proper form of communication at this stage would be more consistent, relaxed, and anecdotal. In other words, parents and teachers can establish a bond of partnership and friendship that holds the child safe and communicates about all areas of development on a regular basis.

Society and Community Involvement

The school is the primary social agency for the child. Out of this setting come friendships, clubs, sports, etc. Parents sometimes recognize this and in turn give their support to the school as a neighborhood social center. Through parent-teacher associations, volunteer programs, sports, and other activities, parents can make the school a vital part of the family’s support system.

Grandparents can also play an important role at this time. Whether they are nearby or at a great distance, they can provide critical services to both parent and child (beyond occasional childcare). Being removed from the direct responsibility to raise the child, they tend to give more non-judgmental attention. Although this may lead to spoiling, it often just gives everyone a break from the routine and helps the child see life from a different perspective. In this way, grandparents act as godparents—adults who sense a strong bond with the child and offer a guidance that is almost subliminal. Of course, others may take on this role, but when grandparents do so, there is a natural ease within the entire family structure.
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Growth Patterns

Puberty marks the beginning of this stage. Although we tend to think of this stage in terms of sex hormones and their work on the body and its urges, it is actually a "think" cycle, according to Waskom. With the onset of neural growth in the prefrontal lobes of the brain, thought becomes as crucial a signpost of adolescence as physical changes. Teenagers are constantly thinking, about what they feel, what others think, what they want to do or not do, etc. Also, by this time the thymus has completely atrophied to the size it will remain for the rest of life, which indicates that the immune system is "on its own." The adult teeth are all in place, with some back molars coming a little later in the cycle. This gives a decidedly more adult appearance.

Nutrition

Teenagers are notorious for eating poorly, regardless of whether they eat a lot or almost nothing. Parents can combat this by instilling healthy habits in the early years, although adolescents may choose to ignore such practices (for a while, at least). However, since the same foods that contribute to health also contribute to clear skin and healthy hair, it is possible to appeal to a teenager's vanity as a way to keep up good nutrition.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

Adolescents are dealing with a new-found ability to think abstractly, which affects intellect as well as self-image and self-consciousness. The compulsion to think can be effectively channeled in work or service: it gives teens something constructive to think about. It also gives them a new arena to explore their sense of identity, which Erikson describes as the task of adolescence.

Teenagers need space apart to discover their relatedness to the world, outside of family influence. But too much space and reflection can lead to introversion and self-absorption. This can magnify what is unimportant or confused, and the resulting lack of perspective can lead to trivialized or morbid thoughts and behavior. So getting "outside of themselves" in active work or service (or creativity) benefits young people as they explore their own thinking and their ideas about how they fit in the world.

Young people at this stage can exhibit a great amount of idealism, based in their ability to think abstractly about social issues. Entering a period of almost constant self-realizations, they begin to feel stirrings of power and destiny—of making a difference in the world. These feelings are translated into various desires, such as making money, creating art, or helping others. Typically they congregate with their peers, but they also pour this desire to give into team sports, service clubs, and volunteer programs. When they do not find an outlet for their idealism, they can become cynical, which will influence their thinking and behavior in all areas of their life.
Sense Development

- Teenagers are compelled to develop their sense of clear, precise thought. For this, certain abilities need to develop:
  - the sense of appropriate speech, which relates to building vocabulary and a discernment for fine shadings of meaning, as well as a recognition of a proper tone in speech and writing;
  - active listening and hearing, which relates to the ability to follow instructions and also the development of empathy, "hearing" both the words of others and the undertones or body language behind them;
  - the sense of thought generation and flow, which relates to keeping a train of thought and avoiding tangents, prejudgments, stereotyping, and other errors of thinking;
  - the sense of ego, which relates to the discovery of the uniqueness of one's identity, as well honoring the individuality of others.

Armed with these senses, the adolescent can make fine distinctions when processing both external and internal information. This will give them the skills for true thinking, which should enable them to discern purpose and opportunity, and to discover the right relationship with each person they know or meet. In other words, they can use discerning thought in order to be in the right place at the right time with the right people, and for the right reason. This establishes the proper learning mode for the rest of the life cycle.

Character Development

Before this stage, emotions were relatively primitive: the child was happy, sad, angry, silly, etc. Now the emotions develop with vast shadings and subtleties. And now it is not unusual for emotions to get mixed—which requires discernment to sort out. When mixed emotions do not get identified and sorted, they become mixed-up emotions, causing confusion in words and actions. Previous training in emotional intelligence would help prevent or resolve this, as would continual emotional "checking in" with parents or mentors.

As the emotions take on these new colorings, there is a need to harness mental energy so that the emotions do not become the dominant factor. Teenagers instinctively know this and pour their passion into activities that are mentally stimulating (at least to them). Sports, academics, technology, cars, beauty and fashion, jobs, gossip, and any one of innumerable other topics may occupy their thoughts and energies. Still, the emotions, as yet unbridled, can creep in at times and turn exuberance into chaos.

In early adolescence, there is a great desire to break away from family identification and move toward peer identification and self-absorption. These tendencies are healthy, although they can take on rebellious or morbid aspects if parents have not tended to certain matters: nutrition, home atmosphere, respect, and the encouragement of self-authority and pride during childhood.

One way in which the young-to-middle teenager will move out of family identification is to feel and express conflict with a parent. Waskom speculated that it would be the opposite-sex parent. Why? Because this is the parent that the child has likely wanted to please the most. So the teenager suddenly needs to break this inner sense of obligation to that parent, who represents the bonding-point to the rest of the family. It is not uncommon for a young teenager to project these feelings onto the parent and make statements such as, “You don’t even like me, do you?” What should a sensitive parent do? First, try not to fight back or make the young person feel guilty. Second, encourage a closer connection with the other parent. Third, be alert for ways to keep a connection that do not fall into old habits of relating. Fourth, accept the inevitable.

In later adolescence, the young person might shift and begin to feel and express conflict with the other parent – which
THE TREATISE

Waskom speculated would be the same-sex parent. This again is natural, but for a different reason than before. This parent represents the role model for adult behavior, and now the child needs to break the inner sense of having to live up to someone else’s standards. This is part of the natural progression into adulthood: the desire to discover “my” unique way to meet the world. The sensitive parent will understand this and let the young person make mistakes and “go the long way around” situations without ridicule or judgment. So unless the matter is critical, parents may have to stand back and watch money being overspent, or employment or educational opportunities suffer. However, there cannot be any sense of abandoning the child, who is only exploring, perhaps clumsily, the fringes of identity and adulthood. Just the fact that this young person has such a strong sense of self-responsibility at this point is indication that something right is happening in the overall process.

It must be noted here that one of the major reasons for adolescent trauma is the lack of clear-headed, non-judgmental adults in their world. Many people in adult bodies are still carrying around childish and adolescent emotional patterns. They still want to have their own way, and they still throw tantrums (perhaps more sophisticated) when they do not get their way. Children tend to accept this without necessarily noticing at a conscious level. But adolescents know it all too well. They are quite often self-taught experts on human motives and behavior, and they can spot a “phony” in an instant. Adults who have never really grown up and learned to handle their emotions will alienate teenagers. But teens will gravitate to adults they perceive as having integrity and comfort in their own skin. And that should be no surprise: young people need to know that it is fun to grow up and take responsibility, that enjoyment of the adult world is natural. That is exactly what they are looking and listening for in adults, because they need reassurance that it is “worth it” to grow up.

Educational Approach

More practical skills are needed at this stage, and they can match quite well with the individual’s growing intellectual interests. Math can be as abstract as algebra and trigonometry and as practical as bookkeeping. English can incorporate speech, literature, and composition. Health and nutrition, as mentioned earlier, can be very practical in appealing to teenagers’ desire for good looks and stamina. History and geography can be relevant when they focus on human behavior and trends across time and space. Art and industrial arts are also fine tools for learning at this stage.

Vocational training at the high school level has begun to move beyond the “shop class” of previous generations. Now even college-bound students can take advantage of hands-on training in everything from food service to auto mechanics to business office simulation. Home economics classes have also begun to re-format, providing training far beyond simple cooking and sewing to include family budgeting, marriage preparation, and child care training. This kind of instruction is both practical and character building, since it provides skills that are marketable and an opportunity to discover the value of work and forethought.

It is interesting to note that Lawrence Kohlberg, who had researched and theorized about moral development, set up peer-group mediation groups in a high school. The idea behind this was to help teens negotiate emotional reactions to each other, especially in regard to ethnic differences. This exemplifies an attempt to channel cognitive energy into development of emotional intelligence at the adolescent stage, and to make it part of the secondary curriculum.

SOCIALIZATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESSES

Parenting Patterns

When the child comes into adolescence, parents can offer honesty. Previously, the child viewed adult life as remote and even mysterious. Now there is a keen interest, even scrutiny, in “grown-up” function. Parents would do well to reveal (as appropriate) the intricacies, challenges, and rewards of living in the adult world.
Parents can offer enlightened reason and guidance, which is the next step on the road to self-discipline. Here, the parent begins to work with a burgeoning mental ability, letting it develop along lines of interest while guiding (and expecting) rationality and logic. This also means keeping tabs on emotional states which could upset the balance of this new-found intelligence. In a world that seems to encourage criticism and blame, parents can take a firm stance in maintaining a tone of respect in the home. Regardless of the feelings of conflict and anguish, adults who are emotionally mature can establish a “bottom line” with the teenager that enforces mutual respect and rational handling of choices and crises.

**Responsibility**

As the child moves further into this stage, the parents should be able to slowly back out of their role of direct and full responsibility. This may not always be possible as the world is now. Teenagers need to break ties with the nuclear family, but there is often no one to turn to for guidance except parents. With that choice, many teens choose to bring their thoughts and hearts to their peers. This can be comforting but potentially disastrous, for informal peer counseling might never bring a teenager to an accurate sense of purpose, since purpose is tied to seeing the “next step” beyond the stage one is presently in.

Up to now, choices have been limited by parents. Now the adolescent is confronted by many choices, and will be tempted to make decisions and choices without parental knowledge or approval. This is both natural and treacherous territory. Some teenagers can and do bring their world to their parents, who alter their former parental roles to become counselors and guides. Other teens find someone, often in their 20s or well into later adulthood, to fill this role. This may be a friend, relative, coach, or teacher. Whoever it is, this is the person who has been given some or much responsibility, and it would be wise for parents to acknowledge and accept this person for their child’s sake. True, they will continue to be primarily responsible, but responsibility for the heart and for the process of guiding mental and emotional energies, may now rests to a large extent in the relationship between this person and the adolescent. Together, they will begin to unlock the potential that longs to be revealed.

**Society and Community Involvement**

During this stage, many people and institutions vie for the young person’s attention, and the support network can become very broad or very narrow. Peers offer a certain kind of support, which is natural but somewhat limited, since it lacks the larger perspective which an adult can provide. Teachers and other adults associated with the school can be approachable, and extracurricular activities can offer a wealth of support, mentally and emotionally. Also, many communities run recreation and drop-in centers for young people looking for companionship or athletic challenge.
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Growth Patterns

Now there is full development of the physical form. Body proportions are now fully mature. Muscular strength and sexual potency are peaking. This is a “walk” stage, in which the individual begins to explore the adult world after completing physical and neurological development.

Nutrition

Hopefully, the young adult has had a great deal of training in proper nutrition over the years. Now it is time to put it into practice, with no one looking over the shoulder to enforce good habits. Unfortunately, poor habits at this time may only cause occasional repercussions, since there may be a large reserve of health left over from earlier years. However, those little problems can be the warning sign of major problems later in life, for if the body is made to suffer through fast foods and hurried eating long enough, it will start clogging up or breaking down. The best cure is prevention, and that means avoiding convenience and indulgence in favor of quality and good sense.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

Moving into adulthood, the spirit of single-mindedness comes to focus. There are so many options for the young person, so many choices of seemingly equal benefit. Actually, many of those so-called options are probably distractions, because a sense of purpose would dictate much more precise action than just choosing from a social or occupational “menu.” Whereas adolescence was a time to gain mastery of the intellect, this is the stage for learning to control the emotions—to listen fully, outwardly and inwardly, and offer an appropriate emotional response to people and situations. Through this learning, purpose can be more accurately perceived, and subsequent choices of job, relationship, etc. can be appropriate.

Erikson sees this stage as a time to learn how to be intimate rather than isolated. He had formulated a three-prong notion of adulthood: outward, forward, and upward (Hoare 2001). This stage seems to emphasize the outward aspect, in the sense of looking outward into the world to find intimate connections. Traditionally, intimacy is seen in terms of relationships leading to marriage. But this urge goes into every area of life. The young adult feels the need to learn how to be intimate and facile with all the details of living, including money and job performance as well as social relationships. This kind of intimacy can only be known as one comes to know oneself, and that must include mastering the emotions. No one can know intimacy if emotions are erratic or out of control or denied. At least a modicum of consistent emotional intelligence is necessary for functioning appropriately in the adult world.

Sense Development

If young adults are driven to find intimacy, then they need the equipment to sense the right level of intimacy with each person and situation they encounter. They have the basic cognitive equipment, which has been developing since
adolescence. But that alone will not help them know how to develop right relationships with others. Now they need to develop their sense of fitness in regard to emotional response. The dramatic and ever-shifting emotional reactions of youth have to be reined in, so that it can be possible to discern what is appropriate to each situation. After all, emotional drama will not help when learning to deal with others in the workplace, nor will it help in social situations.

**Character Development**

This is the stage in which character development is expressed through life skills. This includes occupational skills, surviving-on-your-own skills, and social skills. Fine character in this stage would reflect a balance of adventurousness and practicality, of respecting convention while exploring personal lifestyle. It is a time for standing on one's own two feet in the creative cycle—primarily by working toward emotional maturity. At this stage, emotions can come under control, to be used by the individual instead of the other way around.

In practical terms, a young adult who is “on track” would be able to handle the initial responsibilities of the adult world while living within one’s means. This would be exemplified by steady employment, financial stability, and a healthy mix of sincerity and tact in social settings. There would not be any financial or emotional overreaching, nor any giving in to feelings that circumstances are overwhelming, unfair, or impossible to handle. The natural drive and initiative of this stage would be translated into allowing, not rushing, natural cycles. This would be proved in daily living, and there would be an overall excitement at the possibilities of what it would bring next.

**Educational Approach**

The majority of adult learning is concerned with internal processing. Of course, there are practical skills to be learned, but the primary focus is on one’s own personal processes. This is not to imply egotism or self-absorption. The individual is concerned to stay attuned with the creative cycle. What others think and feel is taken into account, but ultimately one must learn to move with assurance as integrity dictates, then accept and work with the consequences as they come.

There are three types of learning to be mastered in this stage: occupational skill-building, household management, and emotional management. The first comes in professional coursework or on-the-job training. Training in household management could have come during high school, but often that is not an option. Budgeting, scheduling, and other necessary skills can be learned by information on the Web or from older adults.

The third type of learning—emotional management—is not easy to find in formal training or online. Most young adults receive their emotional education by happenstance and trial-and-error. They get knocked around and knocked down emotionally until they learn what works. This is tragic, because it can make mastery of this stage take longer than necessary, and it can add emotional “baggage” to the individual who has been rebuffed over and over. Ideally, there would be access to formal training in emotional education. Although such training is difficult to find in the world today, it does exist through various group seminars and retreats. Unfortunately, it does not appear in college course offerings, although some elements of it exist in certain non-credit continuing education listings.

How does one determine the validity and quality of training in emotional education? The criteria would be positive answers to such questions as these:

- Does this course help me come to grips with my need to stabilize emotions?
- Does it help me learn to process or re-evaluate my attitudes?
- Does it help me learn to stand back from my feelings and circumstances and see from a larger perspective?
- Does it help me learn how to participate with others, take reasonable risks, and communicate with others?
THE TREATISE

- Does it allow me to make my own decisions, to come face-to-face with myself, rather than force some kind of technique or structure on my thinking and feeling?
- Does it help me become more effective in discerning what is appropriate and fitting in speech and action?

Time and stress management courses may help a young adult stay calm in pressure situations. Public speaking courses may help develop confidence and relaxation in social situations. Even mountain climbing and white-water rafting have been used to help adults come to grips with such qualities as teamwork, self-esteem, and personal initiative. Young adults long for a rich quality of experience in their jobs, their social relationships, and all through their lives. These are some of the ways they can come to know it.

It is interesting to note that many corporations are discovering that occupational skills and emotional management skills go hand-in-hand. They employ outdoor adventurists or group process trainers to take workers through activities that demand emotional control, focus, and teamwork. When properly supervised and “debriefed,” these trainings can enhance company loyalty, collaboration, and overall productivity—by boosting the social and emotional processing skills of individuals.

SOCIALIZATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESSES

Parenting Patterns

This may sound strange, but there is a birth taking place: an adult is about to come into the world. For this, parents can offer counsel or advice, but now in the spirit and form of fellowship. (Waskom and his wife gave their children the option to call their parents by their first names at age 21.) This means leaving the parenting role as it has been known and creating a new relationship. There is wisdom in doing this as far as the parent is concerned, because it signals a transition in a way that is psychologically healthy for both generations.

For the young person who lives with parents, whether attending college or working or unemployed, the need for a new relationship is critical. Although there may be financial dependency, the former child needs to assert some initiative toward cooperative adult functions in the household. All members need to give this a great deal of thought and come to solid agreements, so that there are no hidden negative feelings about the arrangement.

For the young person who attends college away from home and does not have significant employment, adolescence is extended in many respects. There is opportunity to try out some of the responsibilities of adulthood, such as keeping a schedule and maintaining a room or shared household. But there is a moratorium in effect, and true independent adulthood is still in the future.

And if the young adult is now a parent, then the foundation stage discussed above would apply.

Responsibility

Moving into the adult years, the individual becomes self-responsible. This is not a time to look back (try to be parented), nor is it a time to try to overreach by trying to be responsible for much more than oneself and one’s immediate relationships and obligations.

There is an urge in the young person to stand on two feet and prove the creative cycle in daily living. That is enough in itself. Ask almost anyone who has tried to start a family or run a large business while still in their early 20s, and you
Society and Community Involvement

The young adult has left not only home but possibly neighborhood and city as well. An entirely new support network might need to be created. New friendships form, often centered around one’s college or work environment, although other alternatives do present themselves. Aside from these new friends, the young adult comes to experience a new kind of relationship with colleagues and superiors. These are the ones who will influence the sense of work ethic and the possibility of future achievement. Colleagues can reinforce in each other the desire and ability to let the creative cycle work through to completion. Superiors can inspire the vision of how consistency and integrity will lead to expansion of ability and responsibility.

Because of the importance of the workplace, the young adult would be wise to observe carefully and learn its unspoken and informal “rules.” This is not an encouragement to “learn the system” in order to take advantage of it for self-gain, nor is this a call to blind conformity. Rather, this is the obvious setting to learn the ways of the world and to learn to read character in others. The knowledge that comes from this can help the young adult make wise choices of words and actions in both professional and personal life.
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Growth Patterns

This stage has its physical markings, but they come about slowly, almost sneakily. Body hair may increase; scalp hair may decrease. But more importantly, there are internal changes that can have critical effects. As the body becomes more “efficient” (not needing to produce extra hormones, cells, and energy for growth), there is a natural concurrent lowering of appetite. If this is not respected, the body will be given more food than it needs, and overweight and sluggishness will ensue. Similarly, with the increased efficiency, the individual has (potentially) more stamina than ever, and this can be maintained all through this stage. This is a “talk” period of life, active and achieving, but there needs to be care that the talk is matched with enough muscle movement and emotional equilibrium to stay healthy.

Nutrition

What applies to young people also applies to adults. They can abuse their sense of self-responsibility and load up on whatever they please, or they can let the creative cycle work here as well, guiding them to a sense of fitness of quantity and quality. As mentioned above, a heightened sensitivity is needed, for the metabolism is changing—actually becoming more efficient—and food intake should be adjusted accordingly.

If wise eating habits were not followed earlier in life, the body may start giving its owner messages of disease. Heartburn, ulcers, colitis, high blood pressure—all these and more are at least partially caused by poor diet and poor digestion. Because of this, some adults turn to diets, intestinal cleansings, and fasts to restore balance to their systems. Still, nothing beats prevention, which includes nourishing food, properly prepared and eaten with a grateful spirit.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

As one moves into their 30s, a more consistent lifestyle and personality has formed. There is less searching and more a sense of achieving. This is a perfect setting for the urge toward what Erikson called generativity. Now the emphasis is on forward motion in life. In this mode, the individual is ready to create, to “make a mark,” or to provide leadership and service to others—at home, at work, in the community. Learning is no longer the key motivation. Rather, applying and imparting previous learning becomes paramount. What does this adult have to apply and impart? Besides what has been learned through training and experience in work and family life, an adult who is “on track” will exemplify how to work with creative cycles and see things to completion.

The midlife crisis is the perfect example of what happens when an adult abandons the creative cycle, dissatisfied with how life events seem to be working out. This leads to overly-risky or foolish decisions, based on impatience, or to the stagnation that Erikson noted in adults who were “failing” this stage of development. (Consider the possibility of this happening at one of these age nodes: 34+8 or 34+13.) A truly mature person at this stage has the willingness to persevere, to iron out rough spots, and to be flexible rather than frustrated and disappointed. Fulfillment comes with
accepting and working with circumstances just as they are, or else creating new circumstances with full acceptance of the consequences to self and others.

During this stage, two critical life events can occur, and for many, they occur nearly simultaneously. On the one hand, children are moving through adolescence or coming toward the end of it. On the other hand, elderly parents are moving into advanced age. These events both need a great deal of attention and cannot easily be delegated to others. So while adults are coming into their prime, in terms of outward leadership and stewardship, their inward attention to family might also require periodic focus of their energy. An adult who has previously stewarded many cycles to completion will find the agility to handle these matters with efficiency and sensitivity.

**Sense Development**

Having trained the fine sensing mechanisms, the mature adult is in position to actively “make it” in the world. This individual senses what is fitting, then acts upon that sense. Emotional intelligence should be at its height, where integrity is expressed, rather than just personal preferences. The main sense being developed now is finesse—not an artificial sophistication, but a concern to make finer and finer distinctions and to create with greater accuracy and effectiveness.

With years of experience comes the ability to sense larger and longer creative cycles. This is extremely helpful when watching one’s child grow up or reviewing one’s career. All the stages and phases and transitions can be seen as parts of a much larger drama, and this kind of perspective can give the mature adult the beginnings of wisdom, as well as a more relaxed approach to any further achieving that seems to be needed.

**Character Development**

The character of a mature adult is marked by assurance and potency. The individual at this stage, fully integrated with the creative cycle, would exhibit a comfort with the environment, regardless of who or what inhabits it. Family life would be stable yet dynamic. Occupational life would be fulfilling and expansive. There would be comfort with people of all ages and all positions, with no feeling of arrogance around the less mature and no sense of awkwardness around the more substantial. There would be only proper respect for all.

Being at ease in the process, where there is no sense of need or greed, the mature adult would have space in consciousness to discern what is fitting for the sake of the entire outworking, not just to benefit oneself. Once the individual senses what is fitting, action is initiated. However, there would naturally be a sense of coordination with others, for a mature adult would not be arbitrary or insensitive. Thus, it is reasonable to expect this adult to be an effective communicator. When initiating a new creative cycle, spouses, colleagues, superiors, and friends would all be consulted, as appropriate.

People often speak about how flexible little children are, how they seem to bounce both literally and figuratively. Then they will speak about how rigid adults are. Yet if you observe young children, and even teenagers, you will see that they are the rigid ones. Young people have limited perspective and thought processes, so they set up rigid expectations. When those expectations are not met, emotional trauma ensues. Children’s bones are not yet hardened, and it may be that they need the extra elasticity to buffer them from their own headstrong impacts against life’s realities. On the other hand, truly mature adults know how to change plans, how to be diplomatic, and how to be appropriate in the social context. They are the ones who are really flexible, provided they have learned to be in harmony with the creative cycle. It is this ability to be flexible yet still effective, that marks the adult who is gaining wisdom and stature.

In our present society, few adults come through previous life stages fully integrated in character formation. Neuroses and personality quirks are prevalent, and many are considered acceptable – “battle scars” in the growing up and coping process. But many adults are not willing to live with such scars and gaps in personality. Note the many “self-improvement” books and courses on the market. Middle-aged adults often seek to take care of what has been called “unfinished business.” This can be the best time of life to do this. For instance, in previous stages, there was not
enough perspective or insight about what one's parents were dealing with during childrearing. So now there can be a more accurate assessment of what damage has been caused by interrupted cycles in the past – but without a sense of blame or resentment.

Deep change is possible, because now there is enough depth of perception to sense how much one has been affected by old patterns. And there is enough breadth of perception to take responsibility for changing oneself, rather than denying a need to change or trying to make others change. This depth and breadth of perception can be called meta-consciousness, which is being conscious of being conscious – i.e., the ability to see oneself objectively and to have the willingness to deal with one’s thought and feeling processes honestly. (It can also be called true maturity.) With this ability, middle-aged adults can make conscious choices about their beliefs, attitudes, and actions, based on clear-headed perceptions. They do not have to hold on to perceptions and attitudes ingrained from the past. They can choose to work honestly with their present circumstance, or they can choose to make deliberate changes if their inner or outer circumstance is intolerable.

While all this is commendable and sometimes even essential for full character development, middle-aged adults need to beware of becoming self-improvement “junkies.” There is a trap in getting so enamored with healing personal wounds that one becomes negligent of the needs of others and the requirements of stewarding creative cycles at home and work.

On the topic of “unfinished business” and correcting self-defeating perceptions and feelings, Waskom made a speculation that might be difficult to verify, but worth consideration. He stated that it would not be unusual for an adult to experience some kind of crisis upon reaching the age of the same-sex parent was when he/she was conceived. For most, that would occur in the 30–40 age range, about the same time period as a brewing middle-age crisis. Whether there is a correlation or a cause-and-effect relationship is up to each individual to judge.

Educational Approach

Educationally, mature adults need skills for administrating larger creative cycles. Such individuals find themselves with increasing responsibilities in all areas of their lives, and they are often called upon to oversee, supervise, or create things and events. Some additional formal instruction may be needed, especially if they are outside one’s specialized training or experience. However, much of the learning at this stage can be self-taught, since a mature adult is experienced enough to grasp the way the world works, even in unfamiliar situations. And if new learning is required, it would be absorbed fairly easily, because there would be no emotional interference. So new situations might be challenging, but they would not be overwhelming.

SOCIALIZATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESSES

Parenting Patterns

Ideally, when offspring reach full adulthood, parents can experience a sense of completion of the parenting cycle, with affection and pride for the “finished product.” They feel fellowship with this grown friend who is now fully functioning with purpose and honor. Their bond is more than familial: it is partnership grounded in a shared sense of responsibility for mature action, regardless of differences in occupations or interests.

Responsibility

Moving out of the self-absorbed 20s, the individual comes to recognize an ability and willingness to be responsible for
more than just personal activity. Managing a family, a business, or any other endeavor is much easier now. At a stage beyond self-responsibility, the individual senses the need to be of service to others. Thus begins a long career of offering one’s talents and energies into the social whole. Fulfillment comes not so much in position or money as in knowing that each job is done with integrity, creativity, and with a sense of follow-through.

Society and Community Involvement

The support network and the mature middle adult would be mutually nourishing during this stage. Maturity has brought the ability to be of service, so those who offer support would also receive support by this individual. Family, friends, community, and profession would all be included in the world this adult encompasses. Sometimes it might seem like a lot to juggle, but priorities would be maintained and everyone would receive the attention and care that is needed.
THE TREATISE

ELDER STAGE

[Note: It is important to distinguish terms here. In our framework, elder years begin at 55. This is not the same as “old age” which begins later. It might be helpful to revisit the notion of nodes in this regard. Consider the ages of 55+8, 55+13, and 55+21. These nodes might give us clues as to when elders naturally reach points of change in physical attributes, emotional outlook, and life priorities.]

PHYSICAL FACTORS

Health Patterns

This stage is noted for its decrease in physical strength and stamina. However, we probably have little idea of what is possible if nutrition, exercise, and emotional stability have been the rule up to this point. Elders are in a “think” stage, and they do not need to use their bodies inordinately. However, they may be much more robust (without great exertion) than we presently think they can be. It all depends on what has gone before and the preparation and dignity with which they approach this time.

Nutrition

This stage reveals the culmination of all previous habits in diet. Along with attitude, diet can contribute to elder years full of vigor. Of course, some physiological processes must be given careful consideration during this stage. For instance, osteoporosis is a familiar condition, caused by the leaching of calcium from the bones, making them more porous and brittle. So dietary supplementation may be called for. Menopause may also require some dietary shifts to account for chemical changes. Other examples could be given, but all conditions can be met with conscientious diet and a healthy disposition – after consulting with health professionals.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Developmental Urges and Tasks

Erikson speaks of this stage containing the compulsion to integrate experience and personality. He saw this as the elder’s best hope against despair and loneliness. However, we probably have all seen at least one elder who seems to be living in harmony with the creative cycle, and who does not seem to be battling against despair. This individual seems to accept the life cycle coming to closure, and lives with grace and humor, regardless of feelings of dejection that invariably arise.

Looking at Erikson’s three-prong notion of adulthood, this final stage de-emphasizes movement outward and forward and emphasizes movement upward. This can be interpreted in many ways – spiritually, emotionally, socially, or even cognitively. The urges of life come full circle, and this stage, like the first, can contain sensations of wonder and discovery. However, this wonder can be full-blown, unlike in childhood, because there is a greater depth of perception and understanding behind every discovery.

In an interview, Joan Erikson (2010) expressed her husband’s regret regarding his assertions about elderly wisdom.
Many people have thought it would mean that elders would be full of sage advice or wise understanding about how to make one’s way in the world. But the wisdom of an elder is more about self than the world. It is a wisdom of understanding how years of experience have brought one to a point. And it is a wisdom summed up in the phrase, “This too shall pass”—an understanding that one has contributed to the world, and that the legacy of that contribution is not knowable. If those years of experience include consistent action in harmony with natural rhythms and cycles, then the resulting wisdom might well include an understanding that life is culminating as well as possible, and the fact that it is all passing away is accepted with contentment.

**Sense Development**

At the beginning of this stage, an adult is at the peak of mastery with the outer world. The mental equipment is sharp, and the emotional equipment is hardy yet sensitive. There is a background of many completed cycles in regard to family and work. Now the older adult begins to move from finesse with the outer world to finesse with simpler, more personal matters. The concern now would be in living as creatively and smoothly as possible within the context of diminishing ability.

The elder can have a very different sense of time, of what each moment contains. Time can seem elongated, now that the urgency of accomplishment is over. This lack of hurry contributes to an aura of wisdom. It also can make an older adult an excellent companion for young people, who have yet to know the contraction of time in the adult world. Many preschools and elementary schools have adopt-a-grandparent programs, and many teenage volunteers have found great fun and reward in working with elders in hospitals and care facilities. Elders can have time to share with everyone.

Elders can have a heightened sense of life, and at the same time a sense of mortality. Although this might cause some “dark nights of the soul,” it can gradually come to rest in acceptance (much like the final stage of grieving – and it is a form of grieving, in a way). From that point onward, time and relationships can take on new meanings and shadings. On the one hand, the elder can seem to embrace everything and everyone with renewed intensity. On the other hand, the elder can relinquish activities and relationships rather abruptly, because time is precious, not to be spent any longer with things or people the elder does not harmonize with.

**Character Development**

With years of experience in the creative cycle, and the stability of character that it naturally elicits, the elder can exhibit clarity and compassion. A sense of simple and powerful being can be present. This is the source of dignity in the elder – assured and accepting. Death of loved ones occur, and fears of many sorts may arise, but this person will continue to move through this cycle with dignity.

Aside from any clinical or inherent causes of senility, there are some considerations that can be made regarding elders who exhibit less-than-ideal behaviors and attitudes. A case can be made that over time, sedentary lifestyle choices cause oxygen starvation in the brain—which would tend to dull the intellectual and social functioning. Another case can be made for a more psychological explanation: poor character expression in old age occurs because the individual never matured. This person had developed a “grown-up act” or veneer that is now crumbling because there is no longer the mental, physical, and emotional strength to keep it up. In other words, the creative cycle has been ignored in the past, and the result is a petulant child or argumentative adolescent in a much older body.

The elder years are meant to be the “fire” cycle of the life process, the harvest of a long and generous sowing. This would be reflected in the heart, not so much in outer activity (although there may still be a considerable amount of that, too). To witness this in an older person can evoke feelings that the entire life cycle can be truly fulfilling and worthwhile. In this light, even death may be met with dignity, and the process of dying can be a time of thankfulness for the completion of a life cycle. For those who remain, bereavement is appropriate when it is balanced with appreciation for the person’s life and for the design that unfolded through that life.
Educational Approach

As in the stage before, learning is self-induced. Since there is a gradual lessening of emphasis on managing/administering material processes and events, the elder begins to translate the sense of governance and stewardship in more subtle ways, having to do with personal rhythms and interests. This can be a time of “learning” what full humanness means, consciously and subconsciously. It can be a time of “learning” how to integrate experience, thought, and feeling so that one is an example of fulfillment, right up to the end of the life cycle.

In practical terms, many elders find themselves very active in the learning process. Some seek degrees once childrearing and professional commitments are over. Elderhostels are convened on college campuses every summer, offering relaxed and congenial learning settings for this age group. In these, elders can learn for pleasure and pursue new or lifelong interests with experts in the field. This can be excellent brain work that keeps the intellect sharp. And it can open opportunities for new friendships at a time when isolation is a danger.

Socialization and Guidance Processes

Responsibility

As achievement gives way to simple being, the elder graciously gives up the feeling of being responsible for running the world in a material sense. Now responsibility can be expressed in being a friend and an inspiration to others through simple acts and words.

As this stage progresses, the responsibility for physical care may rightly pass on to others. Elders sometimes have to move out of familiar surroundings and into assistive living arrangements. Or they might move in with younger generations of family. This can cause strain in a number of ways. However, it would seem that if an elder has been living with integrity all along, then family would recognize that they are in some ways the product of that integrity. That recognition could make the transition smoother for everyone.

Society and Community Involvement

Housing for the elderly is a concern in many communities as well as many families. A rich variety of options is becoming available, from communal group homes to luxury retirement communities to assistive living quarters with any number of technologies and innovations for mobility and comfort. In all these options, there is a recognition that it is important to have elders around, not shut out of society in institutions. Elders have invaluable gifts which can only be known when the heart of society shows its concern by providing housing with dignity.
PART TWO: IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS
MORAL DEVELOPMENT

This is adapted from a paper titled "Moral Development: The Experiential Perspective" published in Journal of Moral Education, 1992. It contains some discussion similar to what has already been presented. However, this focuses exclusively on character development in childhood and adolescence, and it does so with a comparison to other common perspectives on the subject.

In our modern world, there are two perspectives on how moral education should take place with young people. The Conventional perspective is essentially behavioral, asserting that morality involves discernible rights and wrongs and that moral action involves the ability to discern or remember those rights and wrongs. The Developmental perspective is essentially cognitive, asserting that morality runs parallel with cognitive development and that moral action involves the ability to set and solve moral problems.

Do either of these perspectives coordinate well with natural design and development? The answer is that both offer some useful strategies, but neither aligns with all that is natural. So consider a Perceptual–Experiential perspective. This perspective asserts that morality involves the development of perceptual (sensing) mechanisms through stages and transformations, and that moral action involves the ability to create an accurate perception and an equally appropriate response to each situation. Figure 1 provides a further comparison of the three perspectives regarding their stances on moral aptitude, training, and remediation.

Figure 1. Comparison of the two current approaches to moral education with the Experiential approach

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<tr>
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<th>Conventional</th>
<th>Developmental</th>
<th>Experiential</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source and nature of</td>
<td><em>Tabula rasa</em> (no moral predispositions)</td>
<td>Psycho-neural aptitudes that appear in stages of cognitive growth</td>
<td>Psycho-sensory predispositions tied to universal urge to develop and transform the senses</td>
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<td>moral aptitude</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rationale and form</td>
<td>Character training, using modeling, explaining, reward and punishment</td>
<td>Facilitation in cognitive problem-solving (framing, perspective-taking, etc.)</td>
<td>Modeling, setting expectations, guidance in sense-heightening challenges and projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of moral education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sources of character</td>
<td>Character flaws as a result of improper training or poor modeling of strong character</td>
<td>Character flaws as a result of poor or lack of exposure to problem-solving techniques</td>
<td>Character flaws as a result of imposition of expectations or values that are contrary to natural sensings and rhythms</td>
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<td>flaws</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methods for correction</td>
<td>Correct flaws through reward/punishment, re-training, re-programming (using behaviorist and imitative social learning models)</td>
<td>Correct flaws through dialog over real and hypothetical issues that require moral judgment</td>
<td>Correct flaws through opportunities to resolve sensory distortions and discrepancies, thus leading to more accurate perception and self-trust</td>
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Conventionalists tend toward a view that humans are born with no moral aptitude or predisposition – assuming that a moral *tabula rasa* exists that must be filled with character training. That training would include modeling, exhortation, explanation, reinforcement of proper behavior, punishment of improper behavior, and practicing social responsibilities (such as doing chores). The ideal setting for moral education would resemble a "social laboratory." Morally mature teachers would use effective management that reinforced ethical behavior through consequences and through student involvement in classroom responsibilities. The curriculum would further reinforce moral understanding by introducing examples of moral correctness from literature and history. Students who were not responsive (character-flawed) would receive a more individualized and intensive program of reinforcements and/or punishments to counteract an assumed background of faulty training or modeling.
Developmentalists tend toward a view that humans are born with moral predispositions that parallel their cognitive development, as outlined by Jean Piaget. Training in moral development would coincide with the honing of cognitive skills at each stage. That training would include analyzing hypothetical or actual moral dilemmas. Current theory allows for two types of solutions to moral dilemmas, based on either a morality of justice (ethics) or a morality of caring (social cohesion). Students might also receive training in problem-setting; for instance, analyzing the difference between viewing a moral problem in terms of what is fair versus what meets social convention. The ideal setting for moral education would be a “just community” with peer groups problem-solving on real and imagined issues. Teachers would act as facilitators in these discussion groups, and they would also incorporate cooperative learning in academic lessons, so that students would receive an education that consistently stressed cooperation and cognitive processing. Students who were not responsive would be viewed as lacking in cognitive processing skills and would be given extra opportunity to engage in dialogue with others to learn their perspectives and skills.

Training programs have been devised which incorporate both conventional and developmental components. In one such program, adults set expectations for children regarding behavior and discipline, but children also learn cooperatively and discuss issues of cooperation in regular classroom meetings.

The perceptual–experiential perspective, based initially on the developmental work of the late John Waskom, views humans as born with moral predispositions that parallel their natural psycho-sensory development toward clarity and meaningfulness (where “psycho-sensory” involves the interplay of basic physical senses, subtle bio-sensory mechanisms, and psychological sensibilities, as described in the following section). Training in moral development would coincide with the honing of psycho-sensory skills through direct experiences and challenges, since it is only through these that senses and sensibilities can develop. Thus, an ideal setting for moral education would resemble a “mini-society” in which students experience realistic challenges as they interact with nature, husbandry, peers, and community. Teachers would model perceptual clarity and psychological health but would use their psycho-sensory refinement to help young people through their own challenges, rather than to teach morality. Students who were not responsive would be seen as character-flawed, most likely due to previous imposition of expectations or values that were contrary to their natural psycho-sensory rhythms. Remediation would take the form of opportunities to resolve their sensory distortions and discrepancies through carefully guided challenges and de-briefings which would help the young person to establish perceptual acuity and thus regain self-trust and self-assurance.

Although the perceptual–experiential approach may include elements similar to those of the conventionalists and developmentalists, it involves a view of human development that differs significantly from their respective behavioral and cognitive perspectives. A further discussion of the experiential view of development, and its implications for moral education, follows.

**Psycho-Sensory Urges**

Psycho-sensory urges are the drives toward perfection of the “human equipment,” that is, toward perceptual acuity, psychological stability, and an overall sense of personal coherence and meaningfulness. These urges involve the development of the senses, which can be divided into two levels, the basic and the subtle.

At the basic or tangible level are the physical, muscular, and motor senses, such as the senses of sight, hearing, muscle tension, and balance. These develop through age-appropriate training and through natural maturational processes, if they are allowed to progress without the interference of age-inappropriate stresses. (An example of age-inappropriate stress is instructing children in reading skills before eyesight is fully acute.)

At the subtle level are biomagnetic senses that “read,” interpret, and adjust to electromagnetic impulses which emanate from living organisms (Zimmerman 1989). One such sense is the ability to monitor internal feedback, as when one suddenly craves certain foods without knowing that those foods will counteract a potential illness, or when one makes undetectable adjustments to change a mood or attitude. Another subtle sense is the ability to ascertain hidden aspects of the environment, as when one “senses” another’s honesty or insincerity or “senses” danger or excitement when entering a new setting. These senses most likely develop through non-interference; that is, they probably develop by
allowing a child to trust and act on hunches in the normal course of interacting with people and the environment. Refining those senses could be the accomplished by educators setting up experiences and challenges with peers and through interactions with plants and animals. Training these “biomagnetic” senses directly (through biofeedback, for instance) may be feasible, but such training is outside the domain of education as it is presently known.

Both basic and subtle senses mature, and they can also be refined to a great degree, depending on the needs of the individual and the demands of the culture. But beyond such refinement, the senses have the potential for metaphorical transformation and further refinement after transformation. For instance, sight is not fully developed at birth, and physiological processes continue for several years to complete the visual mechanism. During that time, usage of the visual sense helps bring it to acuity, and that combines with cultural and individual training to bring about perceptual refinement, as in the ability to read or to note subtle differences in hues or to discern slight movement in tall grass. At some point, associated with the cognitive ability of abstraction, the individual can come to realize that there is a metaphorical or symbolic experience of seeing that is at once similar to, yet greater than, physical sight. Now the sense of “seeing” can also take on the meaning of cognizance, of “vision” about abstract concepts and possibilities. This transformation can be further refined as the individual is trained to envision on increasingly abstract levels and to discern increments and shades of meaning on the road to expanded perception (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The process of metaphorical transformation of perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senses at birth—basic and subtle (but often incomplete or immature)</th>
<th>Sensory development through maturation and usage</th>
<th>Metaphorical transformation of senses as cognitive readiness for abstraction appears</th>
<th>Refinement of metaphoric senses through training, bringing about a growing wisdom for right feeling and action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sensory refinement through training that is appropriate to age and culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the same token, the sense of balance is quite imperfect at birth, and it improves with maturity and usage to aid in standing, walking, and running. Beyond such ordinary improvement, the sense of balance can be refined to include physical grace and poise, as applied in dance and athletics. Beyond that yet again, the sense of balance has the potential to transform metaphorically into psychological and aesthetic appreciation. In other words, as one comes to know fully, and appreciate, the sensation of physical balance and poise, one can realize that it is possible to know and apply that same sense in psychosocial contexts (i.e., expressing “balance” or tact in relation to people or circumstances) and in matters of aesthetic discernment (i.e., choosing art forms, attire, or even words that reflect appropriate balance and proportion).

As with vision, the newly transformed sense of balance begins at a primitive level and needs refinement through training for its potential to be realized.

Of course, there is no one-to-one correspondence of physical senses with psychological sensibilities, and it would be futile to try to map the direction each transformation takes. For instance, the sense of touch transforms into components of both empathy and discrimination, as does the sense of warmth. The idea here, then, is to introduce the reader to the avenue by which psychological sensibilities occur (namely through the senses), rather than try to establish or even suggest one-to-one correspondence.

How does the notion of psycho-sensory urges and transformations relate to moral or character education? As Waskom intimated, as senses are refined and transformed, character is established. This would be especially true if one looks at the sum of all transformed senses (discernment, balance, empathy, etc.) as the most important and most
The experiential, psycho-sensory viewpoint establishes a naturalistic basis for character development and moral education. This gives educators a rationale for training young people in citizenship and moral reasoning without having to resort to "moralizing" on the one hand or "mentalizing" on the other. Instead, educators would concentrate on heightening awareness and ability by providing opportunities for refinement and transformation of sense mechanisms. Such a psycho-sensory development curriculum would begin by listing those senses or qualities educators consider critical for academic success and psychological well-being. Such a list might look like Figure 3, with other senses added as deemed appropriate.

Figure 3. Some possible target senses for an experiential curriculum of moral education based on psycho-sensory development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Discernment</th>
<th>Courage</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Stamina</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
<td>Esteem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These senses could then be developed through a three-stage process of instructional planning and implementation:

1. pinpointing basic and subtle senses that best relate to each quality;
2. providing natural or realistic settings and activities (outdoors, community, hands-on or interactive teaching and learning, etc.) which require the self-controlled use and refinement of those senses; and
3. providing age-appropriate opportunities and strategies for consciously processing the experience (verbally or in writing) during and after the activity, so that sensory learning is cognitively reinforced.

Meta-Senses and Developmental Stages

In order to establish an age-appropriate curriculum of psycho-sensory development, it is necessary to map stages of development. In the experiential perspective, this means a sequence of meta-senses. Meta-senses relate somewhat to Erikson's well-known sequence of psycho-social urges or tasks. Like Erikson, the idea of a meta-sense acknowledges a powerful and innate backdrop or matrix upon which development is played out. However, Erikson's concept of psycho-social urges is based on a psychoanalytic notion of developing successful coping mechanisms at each stage of life, while the concept of meta-senses is based on the notion of psycho-sensory urges to perfect the human equipment. This difference is crucial, for whereas the psychological theorists of the early twentieth century relied on the medical (largely pathological) model of human adjustment or coping, the psycho-sensory approach affirms the more recent model of “wellness,” or the drive toward self-actualization.
Meta-senses, then, determine or at least highly influence the nature of developmental activity in each stage of the human lifespan, including sensory and moral development. Using a scheme developed by Waskom (1972) and refined by Rose (1991), a sequence of meta-senses for the ages of schooling, and their implications for moral education, is outlined below.

**Early Childhood: WILL**

*This meta-sense involves urges to gain control over the physical domain and express/know the sense of life in self and others. It includes Erikson’s tasks of trust, autonomy, and initiative and spans Piaget’s sensorimotor and pre-operational cognitive stages.*

The individual’s initial sense of morality is tied to the developing understanding and expression of Will. On the one hand, the young child is absorbed in discovering and expressing self-will, but on the other hand is confronted with the challenge of sensing, accommodating, and even imitating the will of others. This presents a need for sensory balance between self-mastery of body function and free expression on the one hand, and self-mastery of impulse control and delayed gratification on the other.

Basic perceptual and motor senses are developing at this time, and since they will later transform into formative character traits, these need to be guided carefully through activity. The development of will is accommodated through games, song, rhythm, manipulatives, and a balance of exploratory, imitative, and repetitive (routine) activities that allow the child to gain initial control over body and environment. By learning to control the self through guided activity, the child learns natural laws and limits. This probably works as well as (and certainly more healthily than) learning laws and limits through fear, reprimands, threats, or age-inappropriate explanations, all of which impose stresses on the child.

The sense of sentience is also critical at this stage. This is the ability to sense “aliveness” in oneself and others. The young child tends to attribute sentience to nearly everything (rocks, dolls, the moon), yet does not always behave as if it mattered, as when he/she pulls the dog’s tail or hurts a playmate. So it would seem imperative that this sense be given careful guidance, as morality hinges on the ability to sense aliveness and demonstrate understanding of it in feelings and acts of reciprocity (justice) and empathy (caring). Guidance could include exposure to gardening and husbandry, where a child can witness directly the interdependence and cross-nurturance of living forms in mutually beneficial ways. At this stage of limited memory and cognition, such observational and participatory activities would be preferable to reprimands or explanations to guide the child.

**Middle Childhood: FEELING**

*This meta-sense involves urges to feel confidence and competence, which entails the refinement of senses and initial transformations of them. It includes Erikson’s task of industry and spans Piaget’s cognitive stage of concrete operations.*

Physical, perceptual, and cognitive abilities are expanding in a context of broadening social awareness. Thus it is, at this stage, that sensory refinements can be specifically trained and their metaphorical transformations have the greatest potential for occurring.

Morality is now associated with feeling, including such senses as pride, courage, fair play, loyalty, accomplishment, and mutuality. Specific training or challenges in sensory refinement can now take place, starting with learning to make thorough and accurate observation of attributes and patterns—in nature, in numbers, in words, in movement and rhythm, and in people’s attitudes and behaviors. This could help build sensory competencies which would lead to feelings of confidence and competence in all areas of function. It would also help make the child less self-centered, and thus more “moral” or ethical in outlook and behavior. Such training for refinement of perception would need to
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include a wide range of senses (muscular, aesthetic, cognitive, perceptual, etc.) in order to accommodate the range of potential competencies in children. For this reason, a wide variety of learning objectives, settings, and styles would need to be utilized.

As sensory transformations are imminent, moral guidance would also need to include the nurturance of budding potentialities in abstract thinking. Many years will be needed to refine these transformations, so it would be enough for those in middle childhood simply to get a “feel” for how sensory transformations can influence life choices and moral sensibilities. For instance, having prime responsibility for a pet or small garden plot can help foster the transformation of feeling/receiving physical and emotional warmth into the ability to sense and offer warmth and care. Likewise, having a part in a play or academic project can help foster the transformation of egocentrism into a sense of interdependence. Although the child in this stage cannot fully appreciate or understand what is happening cognitively and morally in such settings, such experiences can serve as vivid and poignant exercises to introduce a larger world of moral concerns and behavior.

Adolescence: THINKING

This meta-sense involves the urge towards metacognition: to know how to use/control thought processes and to know oneself in terms of values (sexual, political, social, etc.). It includes Erikson’s task of identity and is marked by movement into Piaget’s cognitive stage of formal operations or abstract thought.

Whereas the young child’s moral choices are a function of will (“Should I gratify or restrain?”) and the middle child’s moral choices are a function of feeling (“What action will make me feel most happy/proud/assured?”), the adolescent confronts moral choices largely through thinking, and ultimately that thinking is about values. So the adolescent’s moral choosing would sound like, “What do I think about this issue, and what do others think about my thinking?” Since morality at this stage is tied in with the ability to think, the clarity of thinking will determine the clarity and logic of moral values, choices, and behaviors.

Training adolescents to think clearly (especially in the area of values) is a considerable challenge. Immature emotions, which are often the very subject of thought, can play a distracting role. Lack of real experience on which to base thought is another impediment. The “just community” school concept goes a long way toward giving young people a forum (with ground rules and a safe, neutral setting) for processing values-related issues. However, these schools do not seem to provide guidance for working through or avoiding emotional confusion, nor do they afford opportunities for novel and challenging experiences upon which thought and feeling can be expanded and values re-assessed. Without such components, adolescents may show some gains in moral stage progression, but in other ways they will be “spinning their wheels” into ruts of perceptual sameness and emotional “soap operas” that never resolve.

Adolescence would be an excellent time to introduce novel types of learning settings. Apprenticeships and mentorships would require the young person to think clearly, to acquire real (not imagined) expertise in an endeavor of interest, and to learn to avoid trivial emotional distractions. Outdoor experiential learning would also provide experiences for testing one’s ability to process thought clearly, on one’s own and within a group context. Of course, for these or even more traditional settings to be beneficial in the development of thinking and valuing, the adults in charge must be clear-headed and able to provide the mental and emotional support needed by young people in their care. They must be models in their own sense development and values, so that they can be completely available to facilitate the deepening understanding of young people, by sensitive interaction, not by lecturing or arguing.

Finally, the value of a “walkabout” fits well here (Gibbons 1974; Knapp 1989). This term is borrowed from the Australian aborigines, who send young boys into the Outback for months of self-testing. Upon their return, they are inducted into the tribe as adults. Our young people, of both sexes, would benefit from a similar experience at the culmination to their educational “childhood.” It might include wilderness adventures, inner city projects, foreign travel, scientific exploration, or a combination of activities requiring self-reliance, a synthesis of previous learning, and the creation of some original product or process. Besides the benefits of such experience in sharpening cognition and self-esteem, it
would give society a “marker” upon which to base a true “rite of passage,” something many psychologists say is missing, to the detriment of everyone’s mental health. Thus, a walkabout of some kind would offer adolescents a major stepping-stone for clarifying their sense of values and thus their moral outlook as they move into young adulthood.

Psycho-Sensory Remediation and Healing

When a child has received repeated sensory input that is antagonistic to natural sensings, rhythms, and sequences, a developmental flaw is likely to occur. That flaw will be initially a perceptual flaw, then an emotional and cognitive flaw, as it manifests itself in observably flawed behavior.

For example, a child who is neglected during infancy (due to inattention or the lack of a single, stable caregiver) will tend to perceive the world as an untrustworthy place. This perception, although accurate from the child’s standpoint, is too overgeneralized to be an actual fact. However, it is believed, and it constantly reinforces the message, “Watch out for yourself; no one is on your side.” This message becomes self-fulfilling, since the child will unconsciously avoid intimacy, which would disprove the initial perception, in the name of self-protection. This perceptual set becomes an emotional issue as the child comes to interact with other children, taking the form of withdrawal and defensiveness, or slyness and bullying. It also may influence the child’s cognitive mode, forcing the child into denials and rationalizations when confronted by peers or adults over misbehaviors. This is the typical psychology of the young psychopath (Magid and McKelvey 1988).

From a psycho-sensory viewpoint, this child has been flawed by a sensory imposition of uncaring which has distorted the meta-sense of will in early childhood. Due to the perceptual influence of that imposition, the will has been sidetracked into an unbalanced and paranoid mode, and behavior shifts toward expressing self-will and away from accommodating the will of others.

Another typical, but less recognized, developmental flaw is caused by adults who repeatedly impose their expectations on a child, who must then repress his or her own natural responses. This occurs when adults tell the child what feelings to have toward a third person (a relative or another child, for example). It also occurs when a child is forced into unnatural eating, sleeping, activity, or learning patterns. If the child has perceptions that are at variance with the imposed message, self-trust is diminished, and, over time, this might lead to serious problems. The individual may be unable to trust his or her own judgments, unwilling to take even minimal risks, unsure how to “read” even the most obvious body language in another person, or ambivalent to act on the most obvious internal messages regarding health or safety. In short, the individual is reduced to dependency on the perceptions of others and must seek refuge in that which is secure and well-demarcated. This flaw has no clinical name; it pervades society so widely that unless it causes near-paralysis of action, it is considered within the range of normal functioning.

Many other developmental flaws can be traced to perceptual or psycho-sensory distortions that manifest in emotional, cognitive, and behavioral distortions. This could include character flaws, but also many learning disabilities. It is difficult to establish cause-and-effect relationships between imposed values and perceptions on the one hand and learning disabilities on the other. However, if psychological stress can cause somatic dysfunction, it stands to reason that such stresses could also cause cognitive or learning disabilities through similar psychosomatic mechanisms. So it is not far-fetched to reason that any distortion imposed upon natural perceptions could be a potential stressor, contributing to some kind of developmental dysfunction, whether physical, emotional, or cognitive.

To remedy psycho-sensory distortions that have manifested themselves emotionally, and that impair moral sensibilities (e.g., psychopathy, distrust, hopelessness, rage), a new perceptual set must be introduced to the child, and it must be delivered in an emotionally powerful enough message to break through the faulty perceptual loop already established. A few therapists have developed programs to do this in extreme cases. Other than these, what else is available to counteract psycho-sensory impositions? One promising area is that of experiential education and some of its more therapeutic offshoots. For example, the Outward Bound program has worked with young people who had various character distortions. When confronted with the unemotional and unforgiving face of nature, young people respond
by dropping their selfish and defensive attitudes. Then they can begin to face circumstances with a fresh perspective of trust and interdependence.

Obviously, it is much easier to teach or facilitate than it is to remediate, and this applies to moral development no less than academic studies. However, as long as there are distorted adults, there will be distorted children, and it is heartening to know that there are highly experiential treatments available to bring balance back into the lives of those whose perceptions have veered away from wellness.

Implications and Conclusions

An experiential approach to moral education may look intriguing on paper, but the idea inevitably sparks a host of questions that others may want to answer through investigation and application. Researchers may want to explore specific links between the development of perception and moral outlook. They may also want to explore more closely how psycho-sensory interferences might lead to character flaws.

Practitioners may want to explore influences of experiential education on moral outlook, choice, and behavior. They may want to plan a detailed curriculum and consider methods for implementing and evaluating it. Curricula that address the remediation of character flaws would need to pay particular attention to the overall psycho-sensory environment and to the level of intensity participants can accommodate in their challenges.

In summary, in the experiential approach to moral education, the goal is to encourage each individual to gain perceptual acuity, which leads to emotional stability and a sense of meaningfulness. Such a person sees a situation accurately, is free from emotional distractions in relation to the situation, acts appropriately, and sees the entire episode as part of a meaningful gestalt in relation to self and others. To reach this point of maturity, the moral person must have developed psycho-sensory skills through experience—ideally, directed or facilitated experiences which challenge and provoke growth.

In this approach, guiding moral growth involves guiding sensory refinement of psycho-sensory mechanisms, which are present at birth, and their metaphorical transformations, which occur later in childhood and adolescence. A curriculum of moral education would could be approached by identifying age-appropriate senses along the developmental continuum, then creating a plan of naturalistic experiences and challenges which would spur the refinement of those senses. A final, culminating end-of-childhood challenge would be useful both for the individual and the society as a marker to designate the entrance to young adulthood.

Moral remediation would be highly naturalistic and experiential. Without involving undue amounts of moral exhortation or mental gymnastics, adults could set up challenges which would “jump start” young persons to discover and express more accurate and healthy perceptions and attitudes.

The experiential approach to moral development and education gives youth stage-appropriate tools for constructing their own moral reality within a social and environmental reality. This is crucial, for as many educators would agree, when an experience becomes one’s own reality, the learning sticks. This may be the greatest advantage of the experiential approach: rather than as issues to be explained by adults or discussed by peers, moral concerns are experienced—and verified—by one’s own sensory mechanisms. That can lead to a lifelong affirmative interaction between the individual and the field of experience—which is life itself.
WORKING WITH THE SUBCONSCIOUS

As psychology has taught us, much of what guides thought, feeling, and action resides in the unseen areas of consciousness. This applies to adults as well as children. Some might wish to use the term “unconscious” and others might wish to use the term “subconscious” for this hidden area of ourselves. The latter term will be used here, particularly because it elicits a sense of being “below” consciousness – below our normal level of awareness.

An iceberg is often used as an analogy for the subconscious. Recall that the greater mass of an iceberg is below the surface. This analogy is appropriate here, because the “mass” of this part of consciousness can weigh more heavily on our behavior than all our education and rationality.

How do we access the subconscious – talk to it, nurture it, heal it when necessary? This is an important matter, both for ourselves and for our children. All the previous discussions have pointed out or hinted at many reasons for needing to address the subconscious, especially during times of transition and crisis. Psychotherapy, music, art, poetry, and drama have been used to great advantage in this regard – none of which will not be discussed here. Ceremony has also been used, and this will be discussed in the following section. In this section, we will look at two forms of communicating with the subconscious that are less well known: storytelling and bedtime rituals. These are particularly pertinent for the purposes of this book.

Storytelling

When John Waskom and I hosted parent/educator seminars, we always included the topic of subconscious symbolism. Our favorite way to do this was through Grimm fairy tales.

Rather than write children’s fiction, the Grimm brothers compiled stories that had been part of Germanic oral tradition for many generations. What stories grew out of that culture and why? And why have similar stories evolved in other cultures? And why do children continue to ask for these stories over and over? Are they listening for something instructive or reassuring under the surface?

Besides being both entertaining and moralistic, some psychologists think folk stories contain hidden messages that need to be imparted to each generation. These messages are a part of the culture’s “collective unconscious.”

So we would present a story or two from the literature. At different times, we used “Iron John” or “Jack and the Beanstalk” to study male development and “The Three Tasks” or “Sleeping Beauty” to study female development. After reading the stories aloud, we encouraged participants to find symbolism for characters and events. Then we would ask them to assess the “life lessons” that such symbols might convey to children—lessons about what to expect at later stages of life or lessons about how to meet various types of challenges.

At other times we asked how story characters or objects might represent aspects of one’s own personality, and how story events might represent developmental tasks. In this regard we also referred to the works of Robert Johnson, particularly his books He (1974) and She (1976). Johnson gave readers tools, through analysis of mythology, to understand the workings of the subconscious at times of developmental crises. Such knowledge could give individuals a “roadmap” for self-healing or for guiding young persons through their developmental crises.

Bedtime rituals

One of the finest ways to work with the subconscious is to take advantage of the daily transition from wakefulness to sleep. This transition is not as mundane as it may seem, and it would do adults well to explore this for themselves.
A quiet time to relax, review, and let the day’s activities subside in thankfulness, rather than “crashing” into bed, can result in better sleep and a more alert awakening. It may also help increase one’s sensitivity to the rhythms of the creative cycle, as patterns of relatedness and connection come to mind in these moments of quiet. Much like viewing a movie, without emotional involvement, cycles and their transition points can begin to clarify and resolve. This can be especially useful at times of intensity, when it seems that decisions must be made or there is a need for perspective. Establishing a routine with this kind of peaceful ritual may be invaluable for health and character development.

Children give an indication of just how significant such an evening transition can be. Those who have a story, backrub, or quiet chat before bedtime often have a more relaxed attitude about going to sleep and a more sound sleep rhythm. It seems to help settle their hearts as they give control to someone who is strong and trustworthy while they drift out of wakefulness. Childhood fears and worries can dissolve, and rest can be deep and refreshing. Bedtime can be an important period of cleansing or purification for the subconscious. Story reading is one way to do this, as described above in regard to folk and fairy tales. Another avenue is music and song. Lullabies can have a powerful effect, especially when sung by a parent to a child. Touch also sends a powerful message of assurance and caring.

For older children, issues can be addressed more directly. Parents can listen to what is troubling or confusing and can help “absolve” feelings of guilt and hurt. Parents can also occasionally take this opportunity of the child’s open-heartedness to “wipe the slate clean” of past misconduct that might be weighing heavily. Parents can periodically offer cleansing to the subconscious with comments such as this:

“Do you remember all the things that you shouldn’t have done, and I found out about them? Well, you are forgiven. We’re starting a new clean page now. And do you remember all the things you shouldn’t have done, and I didn’t find out about them? You are forgiven for those, too. The page is new and clean for you.”

The subconscious can be burdensome and troublesome, and it can be lightened by a child’s guardian angel – the parent.
CEREMONY

This topic requires a special section, for it can bring together the elements of home and community in a most impact-
ful way. Ceremony is the marriage of conscious and subconscious, taking a worldly event and clothing it with symbolic
meaning. Human beings have demonstrated the need and love for ceremony in all cultures and in all eras. From the
Australian aborigine “walkabout” (which can involve months of self-survival) to the common high school graduation,
from christenings to weddings to funerals, we humans create ceremony to celebrate the turning points in our lives.

Ceremony requires certain elements: purpose, participants, symbols, action, and atmosphere. Each element is specific
to the culture and the occasion, yet some conclusions can be drawn.

Purpose: The purpose of ceremony is to recognize or commemorate a transition in someone’s life. Examples of sig-
nificant transitions are: conception, birth, entrance into school, the receiving/acceptance of godparents or guides,
entrance into adulthood, entrance into a profession, marriage, and death. Smaller transitions may also have fitting
ceremonies, such as departure for and return from a journey, elevation to a higher position in one’s profession, or
losing a first tooth.

Participants: The participants have an important part to play, so they should be chosen with care. Since each tran-
sition has its own “flavor,” it is not possible to outline what is fitting here. However, there would most likely be rep-
resentation from each of these three areas: family, community (such as friends, colleagues, or teachers), and spiritual
leadership (clergy, elder, spiritual guide). These areas cover the spectrum of an individual’s life experience, and thus
need to be represented so that there is a sense that the “whole” person has made the transition and that the fact is
recognized by others.

Symbols: Ceremonial symbols are the element which distinguishes this event from a casual party or get-together. A
symbol can be any object, sound, or movement that all participants agree represents something about the transition
being celebrated. Many symbols have traditional meanings, such as wedding bands or the graduation “Pomp and
Circumstance” music. However, symbols can be created or improvised, for anything can be “charged” with symbolic
meaning by the agreement of those concerned.

Action: Ceremonial action can often be ritualistic. The traditional wedding ceremony is a good example of this, with
specific words and a particular sequence of motions. One might think of this kind of action as a drama, and this would
be an accurate analogy. Traditional, ritualistic ceremonies have been thought of as re-enactments of “cosmic” dramas
by many cultures. This relates to the idea that we function with subconscious archetypes in the back of our minds, and
these guide our actions, particularly at times of symbolic significance.

The notion of proving oneself can also be important in some ceremonies. This is true in rites of passage, but it is also
true to some extent in the ceremonies of marriage, graduation, and birth. This proving is a powerful motivator, causing
people to endure much physical and mental exertion in order to receive the recognition of the community and justify
the “right” to move into the next stage.

Atmosphere: This is an essential aspect of ceremony. At some point in every ceremony, through symbolic words and
motions, and particularly through the presence of the one who represents spirit, there is a sense of the sacred. Whether
it is an elegant church wedding, the opening of the Olympic Games, or a grueling trial of strength, behind it all there
is a recognition that this is a sacred and holy event. Human beings yearn for this experience, although many moderns
are almost embarrassed by it for lack of familiarity with it. Still, this feeling is most desired, and planners and partici-
pants should do everything to bring it about. This is quite appropriate, for if design and purpose are ever going to be
honored, it will be in ceremony; and if ceremony is going to truly honor anything, it must contain reverence so that
the appropriate “tone” can come through the symbols and actions.

After sacredness has fulfilled its purpose, joyous celebration can follow. This is a “cooling down” or release of the
deeper energies into a more relaxed pattern. This is appropriate, as long as there is no dissipation of finer essences
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through over-indulgence or coarseness. When celebration is in keeping with the significance of the event, it becomes a welcome extension of the special time.

Innovation

Although our society has many occasions for ceremony, some transitions get by-passed. For example, entrance to puberty has been marked in many cultures by “rites of passage,” in which young people were inducted into the adult community. These rites included some or all of the elements of music, movement, chant, and challenge. Western society today does not recognize puberty as the beginning of adulthood, and young people most often do not have a symbolic honoring of that natural transition. It is as if it had no significance, or society could not figure out a significance for it. Thus, there is a subconscious message given to adolescents: “We don’t know what you mean or what you are here for.” School graduation is not a substitute, because it honors a different kind of transition. So the compulsion to prove oneself, to be recognized as a special part of the fabric of society, gets ignored, and at a symbolic level, the young person starves.

It could well be that some very beautiful and needed ceremonies have yet to be created. (Besides puberty, consider a ceremony for transition to middle childhood, or a formal ceremony for transition to young adulthood.) It may also be possible that traditional ceremonies may need replacing, not by new traditions but by creating ceremonial symbols and procedures that fit just the people involved in that moment. As more and more humans come into attunement with the creative cycle and have finer sensings for how to clothe design and purpose, there may be a resurgence in the creation of ceremony. Perhaps we are all responsible for being creators, in this field and many more.

Support Your Local Shaman: The Case for Secular Spiritual Guidance

Of course, not everyone is going to be able to create ceremony appropriate for an upcoming transition. Perhaps a new profession is needed. Consider the following scenarios.

A couple, previously non-religious but suddenly in awe of their newborn, wants something akin to a christening ceremony; not knowing where to turn, they drop the idea. Two parents realize their child is entering adolescence and want to honor the transition; they settle for giving a gift and a store-bought card. High school sweethearts are thinking about marriage; neither of the skeptical families can afford counseling and no one has church affiliation. The couple elopes, and two years later they divorce.

These are not uncommon scenarios. Our society is full of stories about people in transition, in turmoil, in decision-making situations. What these stories have in common is the fact that the characters live in a setting that leaves them in a spiritual limbo. They sense that some action or guidance would be appropriate, but they have nowhere to turn. The clergy is out of the question, for they have no ties to religion. Counseling is out of the question, either because it costs too much, has a stigma attached, or because what they are sensing is not really a psychological problem so much as a turning point to be considered. What these people seek is a guide, a person of wisdom—a person of spirit.

The needed wisdom and creativity for guiding others might not reside in family, and most likely not in friends who are in the same life stage as the questioner. Counselors and therapists possess expertise, but there is no guarantee that they possess the ability to offer spiritual guidance.

So a new profession is in order—a profession of people who possess qualities for advising and guiding others through life transitions. What would this profession look like? Who would qualify? What might be included in their services, and what would not?
IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

What it might include:

• Guided exercises in mindfulness and energy balancing.
• Active listening to guide clarification of perceptions and purpose.
• Creation and facilitation of ceremony/ritual.
• Acting as witness (for spiritual component in traditional secular rites).
• Advocacy and guidance for parents and preparents.
• Guidance and facilitation of challenge exercises for young persons.
• Guidance and challenge facilitation for adolescents.

What it should not include:

• Psychotherapy or problem-oriented counseling.
• Religious or mystical orientation.
• Advocacy of a particular philosophy or world view.
• For-profit or institutional motives or affiliation.

Questions and concerns:

• What would be an appropriate name for this kind of guide?
• Where would such people come from? Would disenchanted traditional and/or New Age clergy be interested?
• Would there be training or apprenticeship to prepare the next generation of guides?
• How would anyone know the difference between a shaman/guide and a charlatan?
• Would there be a need for bonding, certification, or licensing?
• How would people pay for services? Would it be by fee or by donation? Could a guide set him/herself up on retainer to families?
• Would there be any need for legalization or incorporation?
• How would a guide legally act as a witness to an event, if not performing the event?
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CONCLUSION

There is a wealth of untapped power in the deeper recesses of human consciousness, which can only be revealed through the language of the heart, or what psychologists call the subconscious. There is no better way to speak that language than through the magic and symbols, the art and science, of ceremony. This may have greater implications than we can currently imagine. For no matter how much we may prize clear thinking and noble achievement, a resilient and understanding heart may be the most powerful instrument in our lives. Having someone available who can make ceremony potent and meaningful could be immeasurably valuable.
SEX EDUCATION

This is a tender area, not so much because it is controversial as because it relates to such a powerful and creative aspect of human life. It is rarely handled with the finesse it requires, since few understand the power and creativity that is possible—or the destructiveness of its misuse. Sex is more than an act or a feeling, and its handling needs to be more than an attitude. Sex involves an entire principle of living, and in it is a key to fulfillment and personal effectiveness in all areas of life. Let's take a look at that principle.

To begin with, think of sex, in the symbolic sense, as pervading all areas of human function: people have “love affairs” with their jobs, their cars, their homes, their spouses, their children, their neighborhoods, their pets, even their clothes. This is not meant to be facetious; in a symbolic sense, this is simply fact. This grand love affair takes on many shadings of appropriateness, as it should, yet it is all a part of one’s compulsion to accommodate the life energy and its cycles.

Obviously, we don’t have the same feelings or relationships with a car as we do with a spouse. Some people and things are close to us in feeling, others further away. It becomes important to have an accurate sense of where each person and thing belongs, according to the mutuality of the relationship. This is illustrated in the “Rings of Intimacy” below.

Have you ever wished a certain person or object was closer to you, even right by your side? Have you ever wished someone or something further away? We may not realize it, but such feelings affect our relationship with everyone and everything in our “orbit.”

It has been said that the amount of care a man has when shaving in the morning is a reflection of his attitude toward sex. So is the way he treats his mother and his dog. After all, each person is an entire ecology, the center of many rings of intimacy, and how we behave or feel about something on one ring affects every other thing on every other ring—a ripple effect in the illustration above. Thus, the topic of sex relates to much more than birds and bees. It deals with one’s relationship to all things, although it does come down to human interaction.

So we postulate that having an appropriate relationship with each person and thing is a crucial element in the area of sex. What is an appropriate relationship? There is no fixed answer, but it would be appropriate according to the creative cycle—no controlling or being controlled, just letting each relationship find its own balance and movement.

Seeing how vast the field is, sex education would rightly begin at the beginning. As parents exemplify proper respect and care for each other, the child absorbs that (both in the womb and later). Beyond that, who is responsible for training the child in this area? The answer is: the same ones who are responsible for character training at each stage. Consider the person responsible for guidance in the foundation stage. This individual would naturally have preparents look closely at topics of relationship and communication so they could discover their common ground and the areas where they still need to find agreement. Later the parents would be on hand for the child, to exemplify right relationship
and to help the child understand the fundamentals of attraction and relationships. This is not particularly meant to be instruction in sexual function, but what might be called training in intimacy.

Intimacy training would involve learning to sense the rhythms of the creative cycle as a relationship forms with another person. Communication would be a large part of this: learning to speak from the heart, to listen to and with the heart, to read silences and body language. It would also involve learning appropriate touch, both in giving and receiving. Behind it all, training in intimacy would mean learning to be stable enough in oneself that another person can be fully recognized and included at the right emotional proximity. Such training could be life-changing, even world-changing, for intimacy is one of the most delicate acts of harmonizing with creative rhythms, requiring of us all a deep sense of inner attunement.

...But what about sexual function? How is that to be introduced to young people? What can be expected, or what should parents be prepared for, regarding adolescents? This is both a societal matter and a family matter.

Much of our society tends to hang on to a very moralistic perspective regarding sex and young people, a perspective that often does not play out realistically, nor is it natural. Another portion of society tends to ignore the topic, which leaves young people to flounder in a sea of uncertainty and unanswered questions.

It is difficult to imagine an alternative that is both realistic and still protective of the hearts and bodies of young people. Yet that is what mature parents must do: find a strategy that recognizes natural compulsions while also recognizing the need to protect young people from stepping into territory that would overwhelm them. What might such a strategy look like?

First, in younger years, there would probably be opportunities for casual observation of animal sexual behaviors, as well as animal births. In later years, there would likely be open discussions to satisfy curiosity about human sex, coupled with discussions on right relationships. (Exposure to modern media should give plenty of opportunity for older children to come up with questions!)

In adolescent years, especially with older teens, parents would need to be quite realistic about emerging sexual urges, and open to discussing the topic. It would need to be put across to these teens that the urges are natural and welcome, and at the same time, there would need to be careful discussion about safely releasing those urges. What would be both natural and safe? Masturbation comes to mind as a primary release. Beyond that, some experts have advocated giving older teens a safe physical space to explore sexual behaviors short of intercourse. Other experts have advocated the use of birth control so that older teens can have safe sex.

What would be both natural and safe, in the world we inhabit now? Parents and teens in each family would need to trust each other and communicate openly to find an answer that works for everyone. And the conversation would need to stay open as time progresses.

At its root, that conversation on sex and intimacy contains differing perspectives that need to be bridged. Mature parents know (in hindsight) that there is a stage after adolescence, one that is full of promise, as long as the present stage is not thwarted by guilt, shame, rebellion, promiscuity, or unwanted pregnancy. The teen, on the other hand, does not really know that, and cannot see the future. Yet the teen’s perspective has validity in its own way, even if it lacks foresight. So the conversation hinges on the maturity of the parents and their ability to listen and speak with respect. It may not be an easy thing to do, but the risk of doing it badly or not doing it at all should make it clear how important the conversation is to the life and future of an emerging adult.
CLASSROOM AS ORGANISM: MANAGEMENT FOR GROWTH

As an elementary-level teacher for several years, there were certain phenomena that continually intrigued me. For one, I noticed that students who were really “in sync” with me tended to learn faster and easier than those who had a neutral or resistant stance toward me. I also observed that students who had relaxed, self-disciplined attitudes tended to be able to focus and concentrate more effectively. (I observed the converse as well; those who could focus and concentrate tended to have more relaxed, self-disciplined attitudes.) Finally, I noted that if a certain percentage of my students became insensitive to my control in any situation, invariably someone became sick or injured within a few minutes—and often the “victim” was a student who had remained within the influence of my control.

These observations might have remained simply random mental footnotes, but their pervasiveness made me aware of recurring patterns. I came to realize that my classroom was more than the sum of its students and myself: This “thing” called a classroom could actually be conceived as an organism. This organism, like any other creature, had personality, body parts, developmental stages and challenges, and even goals. This classroom entity was alive, and I could influence its growth.

Redl and Wattenberg (1959) reached similar conclusions several decades ago. However, their observations were made with an eye toward classroom management that sought compliance with teacher expectations. In other words, they sought ways to get the classroom organism to fulfill instructional tasks. But what about developmental tasks? Rather than group dynamics being seen as a means of enlisting compliance, how could those same dynamics be seen as an expression of growth processes? Most importantly, how could the teacher use observations on group dynamics to get not mere compliance, but to help the growth process unfold effectively? This would require a new look at the classroom organism and its components, a look that presupposed that young people have an innate urge toward maturity rather than a predisposition toward anarchy or stagnation. And, as I came to realize, this look would hold as true in the university as it did in the elementary school.

Personality

Classroom personality is relatively easy to recognize; teachers come to know it intuitively and build it into their planning and instruction. For myself, I got the point at both ends of my career: one third-grade class could never get enough of Pippi Longstocking; but the next year when I pulled out a Pippi Longstocking book, there was no enthusiasm for it at all. Much later, a university class rebelled at devoting time to “show and tell” (problem-solving about events of their teaching day); the next semester’s class complained I didn’t devote enough time to personal sharing. The reason for such quirks is obvious: each new classroom organism has a very different personality. So it was (and is) my challenge to ascertain the nature of this personality and capitalize on it for the benefit of all.

Body Parts: Head and Heart

Identifying body parts was a bigger challenge. It did not take long to realize that I was the head of this entity, but what did that really mean? Obviously, being the head meant providing direction and coordination. After all, that is what my head did for my body. But it seemed that I was doing more than that. After more thought I realized that as the head, which contained the overall vision, I provided the body with a matrix of the possible. This meant that beyond simple
direction and coordination, I sent a silent message to the rest of the body telling it what was possible and acceptable in terms of development and function. This meant modeling, yes, but so much more. It meant actually setting a matrix or skeleton around which psycho-social development could “flesh out.” Therefore my own ability to be focused, coordinated, and self-disciplined (i.e., mature) became absolutely critical to the health of my classroom. So as the vernacular has it, I had to “get my head together,” then get busy training the body to coordinate through me. Those last two words were crucial, because just having students getting along could lead to chaos; but by coordinating through the head, harmony could reign. The training took many forms: teaching students to relax and focus, exercising their ability to follow directions, using short-term cooperative learning projects, and acknowledging responsible behavior (trust-worthiness) through privileges. As various students responded to the call of self-discipline, the organism as a whole became more resilient, more “toned.” We moved out of infancy/dependency into the further stages of development.

Searching for the heart of this organism was another matter. I myself was heartful, and some students were exceptionally compassionate toward their fellows, but this did not seem to fill the need for a heart that could contain a whole classroom. It became obvious that there was no single heart that could contain something this large: the heart of this organism was a collective heart and needed to be respected as such. This meant that all feelings, all moods, were contained in this heart. Every nuance of emotion did indeed seem to affect every other in a swirling mass of “heart substance.” Therefore every feeling was valid and a part of the overall heartbeat of the classroom at any given moment.

As the largest single component of that heart substance, my own heart had to remain balanced and serene, even during the most stressful moments. Beyond that, I realized that as the head and most conscious part of the heart, I could not really control or manipulate the heart substance where it would not go. For example, one day the students and I spent a hilarious session playing “Make Me Laugh.” They wanted a repeat performance, which I set for later in the day. But later in the day had a different texture of heart substance, a different mood. The game was not very funny, and by mutual consent it did not last very long. No blame was attached, and I as head suggested a new, less humorous activity which everyone enjoyed much more. Heart substance cannot be contrived; it can only be noted and respected.

Body Parts: Miscellaneous

If the function of the head resided in me and function of the heart resided in the class as a whole, what body parts did individual students represent? For the answer to that, I had to look at my students one-by-one. Now although we teachers say we eliminate bias, I had to admit that when I viewed supposedly unique individuals, I could see definite stereotypes: Clown, Gossip, Jock, Complainer, Brain, Scapegoat. Were these the organs of the classroom body? This did not seem reasonable, for every stereotype is a personality distortion, and no healthy body could possibly be composed of such distortions.

The answer to the puzzle did indeed lie in the stereotypes. I realized that if stereotypes were distortions, they had to be distortions of something. If I could discover the “somethings” behind the stereotypes, I would surely find the organs of the body. I made a chart of these stereotypes, leaving room next to each for the name of an admirable trait or essence shrouded by its own distortion. In other words, I began with the premise that a stereotype was simply a poorly-portrayed essence of character. It was my task to find the essence that was being distorted by character-flawed behavior. This illustrates some of my thinking:
With determination, I found at least one admirable essence of character for every stereotype I had encountered, including all the above as well as for the Nerd, Scapegoat, Bully, and Class Couple. Sometimes the essence was hidden inside the stereotype; sometimes the essence was hidden in the class response to the stereotype. For instance, the Couple’s essence of harmony and sweetness (often poorly portrayed in distracting note-passing and other off-task behavior) was met by the essence evoked by the class in response to them: protection. Likewise, the Scapegoat’s essence of acceptance and vulnerability (poorly portrayed in self-effacement) could also evoke in the class the essences of compassion and forgiveness.

It became apparent that as the head of the class my task was not to suppress stereotyped behaviors, but to find ways to bring out the essences behind them. These character essences were the organs of the classroom body, and healthy development was dependent on the expression of these essences rather than the continuance of their distortions. Until an essence could emerge in undistorted expression, the individual would express weak or unbalanced character, the organism would experience deficiency or illness in that body function, and the entire system would be affected adversely. (For example, when I stub my toe, my whole body has to suffer due to the distraction and the limp that it causes.)

Bringing out the essence behind the distortion was always challenging, but never depressing as when attempting to suppress unwanted behaviors. Counseling, peer tutoring (academic, athletic, etc.), and various group efforts were used to accomplish this. But once again, it seemed mandatory that all coordination come through the head. No distortion ever passed away to reveal its essence without first coming to crisis or issue with me.

**Development**

Having changed my perception to see my class as an organism with personality and essential organs of expression, I had a framework for solving the puzzles mentioned at the beginning of this article. For example, it became apparent why learning was less arduous when students were “in sync” with me; in fact, I could now define “in sync” with greater precision. As distortions and resistances melted away, the organism was more coordinated with the head, giving
that unmistakable sense of ease. The ease would naturally translate in every area of function: thinking and learning, creativity, even social relations. The organism was functioning optimally (at least at its present stage) and all the parts worked harmoniously, even strengthening each other. (My singing voice is much stronger and musical when I sing with a well-rehearsed choir than when I sing solo.)

This perspective also helped explain the relation between the ability to focus/concentrate and the expression of relaxed self-discipline. Students who were in harmony or coordination with the head had an instinctive sense of protection and a heightened sense of responsibility, for they were connected to the head, which meant being connected to the organism’s vision and sense of greatness and purpose. Students would not have to be conscious of this to reap its benefits. As long as they continued to express their undistorted essences in coordination with me and others, they naturally wished to maintain and even defend the organism’s emerging well-being.

Finally, I could begin to understand why students out of coordination could produce a situation in which illness or injury would occur. The best analogy here might be the development of a tumor growing outside the control of the head or any other regulatory system. But why did the victim tend to be someone who had not strayed from control or coordination? Perhaps it had to do with essence: the student most apt to be affected might be the one whose essence would be most “under attack” in the situation. In other words, the student whose character would be most offended or hurt by the particular systemic outburst would be the one most likely to feel the brunt of it. (This is analogous to cancer’s “choice” of organs to attack.)

As I watched these various episodes involving coordination, or the lack of it, I noticed changes over time, both in individuals and in the organism as a whole. I came to realize that this entity actually moved through developmental stages. Perhaps the stages could be plotted and described in terms of Piaget’s (1954; 1963) cognitive theory. Perhaps they could be plotted and described in terms of Erikson’s (1968) psycho-social theory. Both would surely reveal interesting and accurate considerations, for the classroom organism did seem to grow both in perception and interaction. There was definitely an infancy stage, with body parts flailing about, testing to find what was trustworthy. There was an early childhood stage, full of egocentrism and tentative initiative. And there were further stages, in which coordination became adept, perception and interaction were heightened to a mature point, and the year ended with a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Like any organism, the classroom did not mature all on its own, nor was maturation assured by the elimination of individual distortions. Guiding the organism through developmental stages required a great deal of sensitivity and ingenuity, but before that could happen, one further perception had to penetrate the head.

**Challenges**

One year my third-graders had a scapegoat who was mildly irritating and meddlesome. When he announced that he was moving, everyone cheered. Later I sent him on an errand and said (with absolutely no forethought), “If this class doesn’t make peace with him now, what comes after him will be ten times worse.”

They would not make peace with him. Two weeks after he left, a girl entered our class, and she was indeed 10 times worse: manipulating, gossiping, endlessly irritating. One day I sent her on an errand and said to the class, “Remember what I said about making your peace?” They did remember, and they were aghast, almost as if I had conjured up the new student. In a sense, they had conjured her up, for they had failed in a developmental challenge. They got to see that when an opportunity for growth is wasted, the next opportunity can be more difficult. (Ask an addict if quitting gets easier or harder as time goes on.)

In the life cycle of the classroom organism, there are many opportunities for meeting growth challenges. Some have to do with social interaction; some deal with work habits; many are related to moral/ethical development. The head of the organism can be sensitive to the optimum moment for a challenge to come to issue. Most teachers can recall incidents in which a challenge was forced and met: a missing personal article, cheating, a lost recess due to unfinished work. When it involves one or two students, a small growth opportunity exists. But when it involves a whole class, the opportunity can be extraordinary, if the head has a heart as well.
IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Purpose

Organisms move through time toward their own fulfillment, and the classroom seems to be no exception. Because each classroom has a unique personality, yet develops through common stages, its ultimate purposes or goals contain elements both of uniqueness and of commonality. One element of commonality is the urge toward ending the year intact: everyone passes, everyone remains alive; no organism wants to lose a member. Another common element is the urge toward feeling good about the life cycle as it draws toward completion (perhaps similar to Erikson's stage eight, marked by the urge toward integration); no organism wants to feel that its life was wasted or in vain.

Alongside the common elements of fulfillment, each classroom seems to possess unconscious urges toward unique goals as well. These would be based on its personality and its experience. A classroom with a “split” personality (with clashes between the sexes or social classes) might include elements of conflict resolution or equity in its goals. Likewise, a classroom that has undergone an experience of stress or special circumstance (such as a death or kidnapping) may include in its purpose elements of compassion or forgiveness.

One of the finest ways I ever found to help the classroom organism fulfill its purpose (and spur its overall development as well) was through large class projects. In these situations, talents and essences of class members could be utilized for the benefit of the individual and the group. Also, class members were called upon to put aside distortions, preferences, and judgments in order to see the project through. The stress of a deadline further enhanced the growth potential of the endeavor.

Two types of projects come to mind. The first was a dramatic presentation, sometimes seasonally related, which was often performed two or three times before other classes and parents. Putting on a play or musical involved many talents, both on and off stage, so there was work for everyone. Since drama coaching had to be kept to a minimum, the “best” performers (as demonstrated in auditions) were those with a natural bent toward the character being portrayed. Thus, acting was closely related to the natural character essence of the child. (This might be considered merely typecasting, but in a psychological sense this has more subtle and useful implications.) A silent melodrama proved this quite effectively one year, since essence (to the point of caricature) was all that could be portrayed. It was a great success, much of which was owed to the willingness of class members to portray and exaggerate their own unique personalities.

The second group project which tended to bring out the best in every class member was the spring vegetable garden. Again, many talents were enlisted, from the child who could turn soil to the child who could carefully plant tiny lettuce seeds. Besides the drive toward completion, there was also present the element of caring and stewardship. The huge salad party at the end (with enough food to share with others outside the class) was not only festive but immensely satisfying. It always came during the last week of school, thus symbolizing a bounteous culmination to the entire life cycle of the classroom.

Conclusions

Seeing the classroom as an organism has immense advantages to the teacher. It allows for an increased sense of perspective on management issues by providing a framework for action. This action will always be ultimately positive since it is based on seeing, then drawing forth, what is inherently right in the character of each child rather than constantly suppressing what appears to be wrong. It does not presume how a child should develop, but rather seeks to refine a character essence already in expression.

The classroom-as-organism perspective has other advantages. Because it entails a holistic outlook, the teacher is potentially catapulted into a heightened awareness of human interaction at both obvious and subtle levels. This can mean an on-going growth experience for the teacher, a type of burn-out prevention at the very least. It can be instructive to the class members as well, since the teacher, as mentioned earlier, constantly demonstrates what is possible in mature human function. Students would most likely learn the lessons of sensitivity to essences and a wider perspective of human interaction by simply being in the presence of an adult who was demonstrating such abilities. Such subliminal training could mean a future generation of highly effective adult communicators, workers, and nurturers. At the very least, this
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kind of teacher would give students ample opportunity in character formation, filling at least four of the “Five E’s” described by Kevin Ryan (1986): Example of fine character, Exhortation to excellence, Environment of caring and high expectations, and Experience in interdependent action. For those with a more developmental bent toward moral and character education, this model provides an invaluable context in which teacher and students can analyze and discuss roles, dynamics, expectations, pressures, and behavior choices (Nucci 1989).

This perspective on the classroom does not make the teacher’s job any easier. It presents enormous challenges, some of which may have no solution with any particular classroom. But along with the challenges, it gives vision, so that the classroom teacher can find renewed energy and creativity in approaching management issues. It is a perspective that sees the finest, the highest potential, and gives clues for action that can make that potential a reality for all. For these reasons, it is a message of encouragement and empowerment, bringing nobility to both the teacher and the student.
WHAT ABOUT TECHNOLOGY?

In all this discussion of what is natural in the development of the human and what is appropriate in the unfolding design of human life, where does technology fit in—especially the digital technology that permeates our culture and entire waking lives? And more to the point, where does technology fit in when we consider the development of young people?

On the parenting side, technology can be a blessing, helping parents find answers to questions, and support for issues they face. Technology helps parents monitor the sleep patterns of their infant, investigate new learning activities for young children, coordinate schedules for older children, and stay in touch with teenagers who are ranging away from home.

But what about technology in the hands of young people? What is appropriate? What coincides with what is natural?

Rudolph Steiner and Maria Montessori did not have to think about these things when they created educational philosophies that were meant to be as “natural” as possible. But the schools that have their names attached have had to think about these things. They have had to develop practices and policies, some based in science, some based in the philosophy of their pre-tech founders. Thus, Montessori schools are exploring the use of technology within the constraints that it should not replace hands-on materials, and it should always represent the real-world accurately. Steiner-inspired Waldorf schools are avoiding technology, based on his philosophy that child development and education should replicate the historical evolution of culture.

(Erik Erikson did not have to think about technology very much. Neither did John Waskom. Television was the only technology he had to consider when his children were growing up, and he made sure they were interacting with animals, plants, building materials, or any number of other hands-on pursuits, as much as possible.)

Looking at natural design and the unfolding of the sensory mechanisms in children, the question comes down to this: Will technology in the hands of young people help or hinder their natural development? The answer, as with many things, is “It all depends...”

For the youngest children, what are the possible benefits of digital technology? When the child is viewing passively, there is little benefit, other than absorbing information that is not immediate or real, not actually experienced. When the young child is called upon to interact with technology, there can be benefits in learning about cause and effect, the need to be patient, the need to follow instructions and rules, the need to use objects correctly and safely. Also, the child can practice skills in eye-hand coordination, pattern recognition, and basic concepts of numeracy.

There is concern for the development of eyesight in young children. There is concern that the “refresh rate” of digital screens is harmful to eye development. Is it harmful enough so that parents need to keep young children away from all digital images? Or is there a safe amount of “screen time” that can be allowed per day?

The same questions must be asked in regard to the concern that young children cannot process fast-changing images that come with television, movies, and many video games. Is it possible that exposure to fast-moving imagery will disrupt brain development? Is this a source of the increase in attention deficit disorder and other learning disabilities in our culture? Or can young children accommodate a certain amount of this and perhaps even benefit from having to process fast-changing digital images? Will the brains of children with some safe exposure to these things wire themselves in patterns that could be useful to sensory development?

For older children, the benefits can be enormous. With proper guidance, digital technology can give them tools for developing many skills. On the academic side, they can learn and practice a multitude of skills and research a multitude of topics. On the character-development side, they can learn patience and persistence and a sense of doing something well and to completion, on the road to a general sense of self-competence and self-confidence.
Of course, the key is guidance. It can be easy for a child to get lost or overwhelmed by all the choices and directions offered by technology, and it can be just as easy for them to get distracted and addicted to activities that have no learning value. So there might need to be filters and time limits, as well as occasional direct adult supervision.

The same holds true with adolescents. If this stage is crucial for developing abstract reasoning, then the use of technology should be geared toward that as much as possible. It would be easy for teenagers to get swept up in mindless, repetitive gaming or in perpetual social interaction, which would make technology more of a hindrance to natural adolescent development. But there are also venues for them to engage in real-world and simulated problem-solving that call for active pre-frontal brain activity. In other words, teens can use technology to explore issues, trends, opinions, and motives in the world, so that they are not "pawns" in social movements, in advertising schemes, or in planning for their future. Besides the intellectual benefits this offers, this can also help with their urge toward self-identity, as they ponder and interact with many perspectives in the world around them.

Teilhard de Chardin theorized that humankind, as brain complexity increased, at some point left physical evolution in the biosphere and entered into the noosphere. This is the realm of conscious thinking and knowing, of self-consciousness, which separates us from other creatures and even from our earlier ancestors—yet brings us closer to understanding and coordinating with each other. Then consider Timothy Leary's assertion that the computer was the impetus for the next level in the evolution of human consciousness—what might be called post-industrial or post-modern brain functioning. What of these notions? Could they tell us something about ourselves and our future as a species?

Remember that technology didn't fall from the sky. We humans invented it and continue to invent it as extensions of our own consciousness and senses. Do our inventions define the direction of brain and consciousness evolution? Do our children need to be comfortable and competent with technology, so they can further that evolution, in ways we may not yet be able to imagine? Should we worry that technology will replace natural sensing and natural development, or should we think of technology as just another way to sense and refine our sensing? Perhaps it could go either way, and it is up to us, in the here and now, to use our own sensing to guide future generations in ways that benefit our species and our planet the most.
IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

AFTERWORD

This book has sought to evoke an experience of an essential but often unused sense in the process of development: the sense of wholeness, of what is larger, of how people and events can harmonize – yes, dance – with the rhythm of life’s design.

This book has also sought to describe the skills that produce such harmony: patience, resilience, and integrity, to name a few. Through these, an atmosphere can be created for healthy development – and for healing – in ourselves and in our children.
PART THREE: THE NARRATIVE
This section contains a life story of a fictional group of people. As they move from stage to stage, the major developmental themes will be included. It is admittedly over-idealized, in order to emphasize ideal patterns of growth. And it is admittedly male-centric. The story is intended to describe what is possible, based on the premise of this book; it is not meant to be fine literature. It is simply another way to describe what appears in all the previous pages.

After four years of marriage, Harold and Paula Hamilton began to discuss the idea of starting a family. He had a steady job as a carpenter; she worked part-time as a dental office receptionist. They realized that she would have to quit her job, which would cut down on their income just as their expenses were sure to go up. However, they were willing to do some sacrificing and dip into their savings if necessary. Most of all, they had a stable marriage which had already withstood some strains. They loved each other, and they loved the idea of family.

One night the Hamiltons were visiting John and Ruth Deters, an older couple they had enjoyed and respected for several years. The Deters seemed to have insight into many things, even though their statements were usually couched in humor. Harold and Paula had doubts about the examples their own parents had provided, and since they had always admired the Deters and their family, they brought up the subject of having a child. They laid out their ideas and plans and asked the older couple if they thought anything was missing. "Indeed there is!" announced Ruth with a twinkle behind her intent gaze. "First of all, you're missing some people who have been through it all! And if you're willing, we'd love to be a part of this."

John picked up from there. "Before you say yes, you should know what Ruth means. First, you would get all the help you need from us. And we would be glad to answer questions about what we did with our three over the years. That's the easy part. Then there's the harder part. That's where we ask you questions, and you get to talk to each other about how you would answer."

Ruth chimed in. "Let me give you an example. You two have a great plan, and no doubt it would work. You would have a happy, healthy baby, because I know you two well enough that you would make sure of all that. But believe it or not, there's more to it than just happy baby and happy parents. Have you thought about what you will do when your little bundle of joy doesn't sleep regular hours and you feel your emotions fraying to the snapping point? Or when you find important papers chewed and torn up all over the floor? I'll tell you that John and I weren't prepared for those things with our first one, and we had to do a lot of quick attitude adjustments so we didn't warp her for life!" At that, Ruth rolled her eyes and laughed.

Now John spoke. "Here's another thing. You've told us how you both struggled to overcome problems from your pasts—Paula, from having very strict parents, and Harold, from having neglectful parents. Do you think that any of those old feelings could influence the way you feel about having a family—or your trust for each other as a parent? Can you be the best parents you possibly can be if you still have emotional issues about your own parents?"

Harold and Paula sat stunned. They had never heard such blunt talk from the Deters. And they knew it was all true and important.

Before either could reply, Ruth chimed in. "We could have saved a lot of time and heartache and energy if we had thought about those kinds of things before we had Chrissy, our first. So when we hear that you want to start a family, we just want to help smooth the way for you."

Finally, Paula spoke, her voice subdued. "Thanks—both of you. You're absolutely right. We've been thinking all bundle of joy and not thinking about the hard parts. We should probably re-think the whole thing!"

"Or maybe we can go ahead, but just add to the planning," ventured Harold, who was feeling solemn but hopeful.
“Maybe if we got a little help...from the two of you....”

By the time the evening was over, Harold and Paula had changed. Now they knew they had some very deliberate things to do and talk about. Besides being careful about diet and exercise, they would each do some “inner work” on their thinking and feeling habits. Paula would begin to take a few minutes a day to calm her mind, which had a tendency to “rev up” and try to accomplish 10 things at once. Harold would check his tendency to be impatient and bossy. They would maintain an even disposition toward each other and everyone else, not by repressing their feelings, but by giving each other quiet but honest feedback.

They would take time many evenings to talk about their own pasts and their feelings about children and family, making sure they understood each other, and working out areas of anxiety or doubt. They also agreed to have their parents over for a gracious evening once pregnancy was confirmed—partly for announcing the event and partly for smoothing old tensions.

They talked with the Deters about once a week. They would talk over issues that had come up during the week, and they would bring up new issues, such as how they could sense the right time to conceive a child, how to function as a team in times of stress, and whether to use a birthing center or a midwife service.

After about six months, Paula confirmed that she was pregnant. Now the couple began to feel the stress of their decision and the huge responsibility they had taken on. Still, they maintained their sense of humor and tried to stay relaxed. Their home became a safe refuge, and Paula gratefully quit her job during her fifth month.

Harold and Paula helped each other relax whenever they were together. Sometimes they listened to music—Paula’s favorite classical and folk, or Harold’s favorite classic rock and jazz. Sometimes they read aloud. They talked to each other and worked on the nursery. They traded ideas for their child’s name. They joked and hugged often. They attended natural childbirth classes. And they finished each night as the Deters had suggested, with a moment of quiet thankfulness.

Their obstetrician met with them regularly, and a few times the Deters came along. The doctor was impressed with the sense of teamwork of all these people, and he allowed them all to participate in the preparations and conversations.

Near daybreak on a memorable Monday, after six hours of labor, Paula gave birth to a son. Harold was with her as her coach; the Deters were in the next room, sitting quietly and patiently. The new parents had narrowed down the list of names to three, and now, looking at their son for the first time, they agreed that he should be named Philip.

The following week, the Deters and a handful of friends gathered to honor the baby and the new family. As a simple ritual, Ruth asked each guest to bestow a quality of fine character upon the child. That day, Philip received Patience, Trustworthiness, Courage, Humor, and Resilience.

The next 12 months were busy and magical—and difficult. The Hamiltons became very flexible and worked out routines that best suited the rhythms of all three members. This helped the parents stay sane and rested as much as possible as they accommodated their child.

Philip crawled and teethed, toddled and babbled, just as any other child. But on close inspection, one would notice some differences. Philip had an assurance about him that was almost uncanny. He met the world head-on, exploring
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with gusto and glee. He got a fair number of bumps and bruises from it, but that did not slow him down. His parents could not seem to keep up with child-proofing as he happily turned the house upside down.

They brought this up with the Deters. John and Ruth listened to stories by these parents who were struggling to maintain order out of chaos. Paula concluded with, “We don’t want to crush his little spirit by saying NO to him all the time!”

John laughed. “I doubt you two could ever crush his spirit. You’re too kind-hearted for that. But is it possible that you are doing his spirit no good by letting him run all over you?”

Ruth added, “We had to learn fast to keep up with our Chrissy! She was so adorable and so headstrong at the same time. Before we knew it, she had us wrapped around her little finger.”

Paula perked up. “What did you do?”

John explained, “Once we saw what was going on, we didn’t do anything right away. We knew we needed to be realistic about our little angel and start giving her what she needed, not just what she wanted. And what she needed was a couple of parents who were in control of the situation. And that had to start with parents who were in control of their own emotions and who were in agreement with each other.”

Harold was getting impatient. “So what did you do?”

John looked at him seriously, then shrugged and laughed. “I don’t think it would do any good to tell you what we did, because it wouldn’t apply to your situation. I will say that talking to a child that young about doing right or wrong turned out to be of no use. You two might want to think about what will work best for you to rein in Philip. But here’s something to think about: What kind of character do you want your child to have, say, at the age of five or eight or thirteen? And what would you have to start doing now if your child was going to have that kind of character? What does your child need from you right now so that he can become what you envision for his future?”

Harold and Paula looked a bit puzzled, so Ruth gave them a little hint. “What we discovered is that discipline is a wonderful form of love, if it’s done with love.”

The light went on in both Paula and Harold.

“And we also discovered,” Ruth continued, “that helping a child with self-discipline was one of the best kinds of love to give.”

The Hamiltons had some long talks about their son after that. They did some research, then initiated some agreed-upon plans. They gave Philip more opportunity to work alongside them, gave him simple chores and routines, and gave him firm “time outs” when his energy got him close to danger or destruction. Very soon, it all started to work. Philip learned to comply, and he enjoyed the more predictable pattern of life that included him in daily routines. He became a much calmer and happier child because of it.

Several months later, the Hamiltons asked the Deters what they thought about the idea of putting Philip in daycare or preschool. All John would say was, “It all depends...”

Ruth filled in the rest of the thought. “Right. It all depends on why you want Philip to be under someone else’s care. Is it so you can get some relief or go shopping or get a job? Is it to get him intellectually stimulated so he can get to Harvard by the age of 13? Or is it so he can start to let his world expand into other people and other settings? Be honest now!”
A long conversation ensued, and the Hamiltons revealed all their feelings about this idea. Yes, Paula wanted a break from having to watch Philip so carefully. And Harold wanted Paula to go back to work part-time to help pay off debts. But more importantly, Philip seemed to be bursting at the seams. It seemed that he needed more than what his parents could provide at home.

Finally, Paula announced, “I think we’ve got the picture now. Philip’s own body language has been telling us he’s been ready for a larger world. He definitely needs some outside contact, but now it will be for the right reasons. And no, we won’t look for a ‘superchild’ school. We’re going to look for a part-time ‘second home’ for Philip, someplace with TLC and discipline and real kid-centered energy.” Harold agreed wholeheartedly.

So the Hamiltons became fussy shoppers, and finally found a playschool that met their stringent requirements. Like home, the school provided an atmosphere of safety and love, and plenty of opportunities for touching, moving, exploring, singing, and creating. Philip learned to follow his interests through an activity, all the way to completion. He also learned to play well with other children, under the focused but gentle eye of the teacher.

Harold Hamilton was becoming a carpenter in demand. Not only was he given plenty of work, due to his professional skill and personal integrity, but he was becoming recognized by other carpenters as a spokesman for quality work and fair trade. Harold sensed he had the support to start his own business, and after discussing the idea with Paula and the Deters, he began. However, he did not follow a normal business plan. Instead, he was willing to try something John and Ruth had suggested.

Rather than trying to get a bank loan and workers, he just “romanced” the idea of a business for a while. Then he put out “feelers” in the trade community to see who thought it was a good idea and who might want to help in various ways. Within a month he had three promises for help with finances and equipment, and six promises from fellow carpenters to come work for him. With this information, he was able to secure a bank loan easily—a loan that was only half what he originally would have needed for start-up costs. And all because he was willing to grow his germ of an idea from a quiet place in himself.

When Philip reached school age, it was agreed that he was resourceful and resilient enough to go to public school and not be overwhelmed. The week before school began, the Hamiltons had a meeting with Philip’s teacher-to-be. After a few moments of awkwardness, Paula exclaimed, “Goodness, aren’t we stiff! Really, we didn’t come here to impress you or get you to give Philip more attention in the class. We just want to know each other right from the start. After all, you’re going to see Philip almost as much as we will for the next nine months. We want you to know we support you.” After that ice-breaker, they shared their visions of a productive classroom life with each other, and realized they had much in common.

This little ritual was repeated in the following years, and each teacher appreciated it.

So Philip attended the neighborhood school, and his parents became as active as possible in the parent–teacher organization. When it was discovered that he had difficulty in learning to read, the Hamiltons met with the teacher and came up with a plan to let Philip work more with visual and tactile material, rather than forcing reading materials on him. After a few months, Philip became naturally attracted to the reading process and caught up with the class by the end of the year. More importantly, he liked to read, especially “because it was my idea, right?”

Philip loved math and sports during his elementary years. He was always ready to help another child in the classroom, and he was a great team player in soccer and baseball (his favorites). He took risks and exhibited a love for doing daring things. He had several good friends, and he spent most afternoons with them in very active play. Every once in a while, his general robust manner would recede into shadow, and would become sullen and short-tempered. But his father took the matter squarely in hand, comforting his son when it was needed and being quite stern when he was not exhibiting self-control. Philip, although he wouldn’t say so, appreciated this. He was glad to have a father who could help him work through his bad moods. And it made him feel more confident about trying difficult things and mastering his own feelings.
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Philip was also growing in observation, because his parents encouraged him to look at details and differences, and be able to describe them. In baseball, he got good at being able to “second guess” pitchers so he could steal bases. In soccer, he would notice the opposing forward’s hips shift and know to which side of the field the ball would be passed. He could watch an incubator for half an hour to see a chick hatch bit by bit, while other children could only watch for a few minutes at a time.

His powers of observation, along with his sense of adventure, led to a new hobby. He would spend hours in the garage, piecing together cardboard tubes, empty food containers, and other throw-away items into “inventions”—then spend almost as long describing them to anyone who would listen. This hobby took on a new dimension after seeing a movie with a “mad professor” who used a complicated homemade contraption just to butter his toast. From then on, Philip’s inventions were kinetic, with marbles rolling down ramps and wheels spinning and pulleys and levers activated along the way. One invention took up the entire garage, and the family car sat outside until every friend and relative had witnessed its magical workings.

When he was 12, Philip helped his parents host a party in honor of John Deters’ retirement. About a dozen people attended, and each one gave a gift and a homemade card. Harold mounted the cards on a poster board, and the final product was a fitting tribute to a man who had made his career a shining example of integrity and helpfulness. Harold gave the toast, but Philip wanted to add one, too.

Addressing a gathering of adults for the first time, he looked around nervously, then focused quite seriously on John. “John, you taught my father a lot of things, so he could teach me. Thanks for that.” The two gazed at each other silently for a few seconds. In that moment, Philip felt himself leap into a new level of maturity. And he knew he had found a significant friend.

... probably close to daybreak, he thought. For some reason, he was wide awake. Crickets were chirping, and a few distant birds. There was the whir of an occasional car out on the highway, but he didn’t pay much attention to that. No, there was something else, and before he knew it, he had pulled his lanky adolescent body out of bed.

Quietly he made his way down the hall and out the back door. Walking to the end of the yard, he looked out at the silhouetted trees beyond. He looked ... and listened. And what had been a question, a confusion, a noise clamoring in him so long he thought it was part of him, began to subside. Now it was just him—just him and the wind and the moon and trees. And in that moment of quiet and peace, a new sound came to him—his sound, his significance.

Suddenly everything made sense, everything fit—he fit. He felt at home in the universe. He didn’t just think or hope or believe it. In this moment he knew. And that was enough. That was everything. He smiled, then turned back to the house.

... Philip entered puberty without any great disturbances or changes in his demeanor. Of course, his father had prepared him well, and he knew that both his parents were open, honest people who would answer his questions or set him off in the right direction for answering questions by himself. In fact, that was something he came to really appreciate about his parents: they almost never told him that things had to be a certain way or that he had to be anything other
than who he was. But they wouldn’t let him get away with what they called “fuzzy” thinking, either. They expected him to articulate what he meant without excuse or rationalization. And they expected him to really listen and research and not just pretend to know something. Although these expectations caused him some embarrassment at times, he was begrudgingly thankful for the training—especially when he could win an argument with them.

He spent more and more time with John Deters, and sometimes with Ruth. They did simple things together, like repair appliances or rake leaves or shop for little things. Sometimes they talked for hours. Sometimes a whole afternoon would go by in complete silence. Once Philip asked his parents if they were jealous of the Deters. “Of course not,” replied his mother. “John and Ruth are our dearest friends. We love them, and we trust them.” She paused, as if she were reading his mind. “And they don’t tell us a thing about what goes on between you.” Philip smiled with relief.

In the next few years, Philip saw the Deters and his parents less frequently. He got involved in the school soccer team and track team, and he had friends to be with when he wasn’t deluged with homework. He seemed to avoid his mother especially, and didn’t want her to come to his games or into his room. Sometimes he felt justified, thinking how fussy or intrusive she was; sometimes he felt guilty about it. He alternated between happy-assured and sullen-confused. He would talk to his friends about it, and they commiserated with each other as best they could.

Then one day John Deters happened to walk by the practice field, and Philip excused himself for a few minutes. He poured out his worries to the older man, who listened without any sign of judgment on his face. Then he told Philip how, when he was a teenager with divorced parents, one day he shoved his mother across the kitchen in a flash of temper. His mother didn’t get upset. She picked herself up and simply said, “I think it’s time for you to live with your father for a while.” Then he laughed at the memory. Philip stared at John blankly, wondering how this fine gentleman could have done such a thing, and how he could have grown up to be such a fine gentleman after all. Then a light went on in his head. He grinned, thanked John, and returned to practice. His sullenness started to melt, and so did his guilt.

Later, he wondered about that time with John. How was it that he could show up at just that moment of personal crisis, “just touching in” as he called it? And after it happened a few more times, Philip almost took it for granted that John might suddenly and randomly come on the scene, and calm the turbulence in his head, without ever talking about anything in particular. Even though he still didn’t make special efforts to visit the Deters, he knew he still had a friend—in fact, two friends.

By now Harold’s business was quite successful, running itself most of the time. Harold had discovered how to “work smart instead of hard,” and he had plenty of time for family matters and for exploring other avenues of activity. He turned down the idea of running for a town office, and he rejected the idea of going back to school to get a college degree. Instead, he and Paula spent more time helping out with community projects: a new playground to be constructed by the families themselves, fundraising for various civic organizations, and neighborhood and town social events, such as picnics and fairs.

The Hamiltons got used to seeing their plans go through many changes. Some seemed to go nowhere, and others were altered beyond recognition. But no matter what happened, they remembered tremendous things could start from a quiet inner place, then letting people and resources gather around it. It worked for their business, it worked for their marriage, and it was constantly working with their son. So they made sure to let it work with their committees and meetings as much as possible. They even created a motto for it: “Never grasp an idea so tightly that you can’t let it go.” So whether a plan was put in motion or altered or completely abandoned, it felt fine in the long run. Needless to say, the Deters were always very amused and pleased whenever they heard about the public adventures of their younger friends.
In the summer before his senior year of high school, Philip got to help his father make some major repairs to the Deters’ home. He had worked for his father occasionally during other summers, but this time his heart was really in it, and his father was paying him as much as any of the other workers—nothing. It was all being done out of love for the Deters, and this pleased Philip’s sense of justice. Back at home, he made peace with Paula, who turned out to be not such a smothering or demanding mother after all. The world seemed to be going well for him. He had friends, supportive grownups, sharp mental and verbal skills, and above all, confidence.

One afternoon, standing in a hot sun on an unfinished rooftop, Philip decided to try doing some things differently from normal procedure. Later, he calmly explained to his father why he had done things in an unorthodox manner. An argument began between them, and Philip thought it was because his father was trying to throw his weight around or cover his pride rather than learn something new from his son. Actually, his father was a bit of a construction engineer, and he knew why proper carpentry procedures would create a sound structure. So he demanded things to be done in a certain way. He respected his son, and told him so, but in the end he still made the boy re-do the work. Philip realized that this was the first time he had felt so defiant toward his father, and it felt good, even though he knew he was wrong — this time.

A few days later, Philip came up with a new way to divide up the work for the day. This time Harold stopped and looked at his son. "Okay, let’s try it your way. This can’t hurt the structure of the building. The worst it can do is gum up the flow of our work for a day.” But it didn’t gum up the works. At the end of the day, the workers said they enjoyed the rather unorthodox system. Harold agreed, and later he gave Philip some reading material on management skills and organizational development. The boy read it with passion and went to the library for more. Here was his new love.

Philip decided to attend college and perhaps pursue a career in organizational management. The family had enough money to pay for him to attend a local college and live at home. Philip had other ideas, and finally they all agreed that he would benefit more from going to an out-of-town state college with a department that matched his interest. On his own initiative, Philip secured loans and gained entrance to the school. Once there, he would find part-time work to pay a fair share of his expenses.

Harold and Paula were now part of a small group of friends who met at the Deters’ home once or twice a month. Their conversations were casual and heartfelt, touching on community issues, family matters, and ideas from books various ones were reading. John always had the perfect way to “wrap up” the discussion, and he had a knack for tying together threads of ideas that had come up during the evening. And then he would crack a joke and everyone would give it a rating.

Philip attended these sometimes. He had never been forced to do so, but he began to see the value in them. He even spoke up a few times, especially when the topic of young people came up. When he saw the look on people’s faces, he knew that he was an accepted part of this adult world, and what he had to say really mattered.

At graduation time, Philip was honored by this grouping at a banquet in his honor. He had never imagined that he was so included in so many people’s lives, and when he got up to speak, all he could say was, “Thanks. I hope to live up to what you see in me. It’s a lot, but I think I can do it.” They assured him he would, and then some.

During his college years, Philip turned down the opportunity to stand out at different times. He seemed to be driven toward a goal he could not determine, and many typical college activities became distractions to him. He dated a bit, studied a lot, and played intramural sports whenever he could. He wrote his parents and the Deters more than he visited, and they understood. Later, he would look back on these written exchanges as an essential part of his life direction. No one mentioned careers or jobs; no one gave direct advice. Yet they were full of assurance and good cheer, answering his questions and doubts with casual stories about someone’s past experience. The ease of communicating with older adults and the remembrance of all those years of being nurtured were beginning to converge into a desire to honor all
those who had prepared his way. He wanted to be of service—in his career and in his character. It was as if something inside was waking up to himself.

Harold and Paula were looking at how to best use their later years. All the excitement of forming committees and directing projects was passing away, and they realized it was getting to be time for others to take more direct responsibility for bettering the community. They began to share the Deters’ responsibility for hosting their gathering of friends, and while they did that, the Deters were becoming less active in the discussions and not always in attendance. All this seemed very natural, and everyone who attended accepted the way it was working.

One Thanksgiving, Philip returned home and joined his parents for lunch at the Deters’ home. After the meal, John got serious for a moment. “I was reading a book the other day, and it talked about people like us—people who hold a line in ourselves, committed to staying aligned with natural forces and cycles. And it talked about people doing that without creating a religion or organization around it—just living it and proving it every day.” And then he added with a twinkle in his eye, “Of course, if such people found each other and liked each other, I suppose it would be alright for them to get together, right?” He grinned at the company around the table. “Which reminds me: We should tell you what our kids are up to in far-off places these days...”

Philip stopped listening, giving thought to what John had said about people proving themselves. He wondered if he understood what it all meant. To him, it seemed to mean showing integrity, letting processes play out, even when it was uncomfortable. It would mean influencing others, not by mental cleverness or financial power, but by showing strong character all the time. It was inspiring, but also discomforting. How well did he do it? How could he ever improve? And why was John talking about this today?

Back at college, Philip seemed to have a knack for “sniffing out” courses that gave him broader perspective and extracurricular programs that gave him training in managing his thoughts and emotions around others. He went rock climbing with a group of students. He took an outdoor adventure course. He took a seminar in group dynamics in which the participants simulated a production team for a whole day. He gained skills in dealing with people and in being patient with his ideas, and he made special effort to apply what he learned in every situation.

By the time graduation came around, he had three job offers and two marriage proposals. He graciously put everything on hold while he made arrangements for his parents and the Deters to arrive for the festivities. After it was all over, he had a long talk with the four of them, outlining his ideas and asking for their input. Out of their discussion, it was decided that it was best for Philip to work in his father’s business for a limited time, then re-evaluate. And the marriage proposals were tenderly declined.

Philip was jokingly introduced as “the junior boss” on his first day of work. Then Harold got serious and made it clear to everyone that Philip was on his own, not his father’s heir apparent. The crew and staff welcomed him into the work community, complete with his own tiny office and an old computer.

Philip wanted to prove himself and his understanding of business management. But he wanted to prove his understanding of creative cycles even more. So he tried to listen more than he spoke, and he soon gained everyone’s respect. He learned quickly, “read” people accurately, and before long he was comfortable in making suggestions and testing results, just as he had learned in school—and at home. His father was proud, not because his son was a brilliant college-trained manager, but because his son was an energetic and humble young man.
Early on a Sunday morning, Harold received a call from Ruth. John had passed away during the night. She said it simply and quietly, and Harold was deeply touched by this woman who showed such strength. He told his family, and they shared several moments of quiet contemplation for the friend they had loved so much.

Harold presided over the memorial service, at Ruth’s request, and Philip was given a chance to speak. It seemed that half the town was there. After the service, Philip told his father he found himself saying things he didn’t know he knew. Harold told him the same thing had happened to him. He said it had to do with being quiet right down to the core, where real intelligence lies waiting.

The Hamiltons had several talks with Ruth over the next few days. Then they brought Philip into the discussion, along with the Deters’ grown children, who had flown in from various locations. There was the eldest, Christine, with her husband and two children; Mark, the middle child; and the youngest, Catherine. She was a few years older than Philip, but now as they met again as adults, a recognition and attraction instantly sparked between them.

The next time there was a gathering of friends, it was at the Deter home. Once everyone was settled, Harold spoke: “Over these last few days, some things have been becoming clearer to me and Paula. What John and Ruth have done in this house over the years is quite remarkable. They created a new kind of family, made up of very diverse people. And they brought all of us to a greater awareness of our strength, and how we can use that strength to make a difference in people’s lives. I think we can all agree that this doesn’t have to end with John’s passing. So Paula and I will be purchasing this house. We have asked Ruth to stay here with us, and she has accepted.”

“A lot of things are still uncertain. I may take an early retirement and turn over the business to someone else. That someone might be Philip, but then again it might not. Philip will have plenty on his mind, since he’s going to take over our house. I hear he wants to fix it up. Since I know some of his carpentry skills, I’m glad we’re moving out first!” Everyone laughed. Harold’s words were comforting and encouraging, and everyone could sense a significance in what was taking place. “Maybe there is work to be done, for all of us. I’m not John, and I’m not like him. If we are going to continue as friends, it can only happen because we all grow up and participate. No one here is a student, and no one is a guru, even if there are age differences. It’s up to all of us. It could be exciting to see where it goes. How about it? Ready to test our wings as grownups?”

A few of the guests spoke their willingness, while others nodded in agreement. Then Philip spoke up. “Up to now you’ve been a fine father to me, and I appreciate what you gave me for all those years. Now you’re asking me to grow up and join you in an adventure that we all create. I accept the challenge, Harold.”

Everyone understood Philip in that moment. He had accepted more than a challenge. He had accepted his own place in the adult world. Of course, he was still a bit brash at times, but he was maturing. Now he was ready to be a man, in the company of clear-headed and large-hearted friends. And if he allowed the creative cycle to play out, one particular woman might join him. He looked across the room at a face smiling back at him.

Then the group began to talk about all the kinds of things that normally came up in these gatherings: how to work alongside difficult people, how to help a child work through shyness, who might be able to help with some yard chores. When the talk died down, several people looked at Harold for a wrap-up. Instead, he just smiled and shrugged his shoulders, having no more to say. So they all rose and received each other with hugs and handshakes. Philip was right in the middle of it all, loving the new feelings in himself and toward all the others. He caught his father’s eye across the room. In silent agreement, they winked at each other, right in sync.
Links, References, and Ideas for Further Research


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For more on phi, the Golden Mean, and Fibonacci:

- GoldenNumber.net: A Web site "to help you appreciate the incredible beauty and design in the world around you and to excel in whatever you do by applying these same principles of design to your own creative works...."

For more on working toward psychological health:

- Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers on the origins of the human potential movement and transpersonal psychology.
- Daniel Goleman, Peter Salovey, and John Mayer on the origins of the emotional intelligence movement.
- Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan on moral development.
- Carl Jung on the collective unconscious.
- Bruno Bettelheim on fairytale symbolism.

For more on non-traditional theories of education:

- Maria Montessori and Montessori education.
- Rudolph Steiner and Waldorf education.
- Outdoor, experiential, and challenge education.
An online blog has been created for readers to connect and converse on the themes presented in this book.

Please visit phitalk.wordpress.com